

## LESSONS LEARNED IN ADAPTING AFRICAN PEACE OPERATIONS TO VIOLENT EXTREMIST THREATS

### Seniors Leaders' Roundtable Read-Ahead Document

January 22-24, 2025

New York, New York

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) and New York University's Center for International Cooperation (CIC) are pleased to welcome you to this senior leaders' roundtable. The objectives of the event are to:

- Convene senior peace operations leaders and experts to discuss experiences, lessons learned, and good practices in regional efforts to address violent extremism.
- Identify opportunities for the United Nations, African Union, and other multilateral actors to improve their responses to violent extremist (VE) groups.
- Catalyze the development of regional solution frameworks to address the VE threat.

The threat from VE groups has escalated significantly over the past decade. Peace operations have faced challenges in adapting to the VE threat, leading many African states to pursue alternative security solutions. This roundtable will compare peace operations along with other approaches to countering VE threats, aiming to develop actionable and implementable solutions. The event will develop solutions by fostering peer learning and debate among approximately 30 senior practitioners and experts from peace operations in Africa that have confronted violent extremism.

This read-ahead outlines the topics of discussion on which all participants will be asked to share their insights, guided by opening remarks from those with direct experience on the operation or topic. It offers a general introduction to the roundtable content, provides recommended readings, and poses guiding questions that all participants are asked to reflect upon in advance.

### Genesis and Justification

The roundtable is a follow-on to the [ACSS Force Commanders Roundtable](#), which took place in Washington, DC from January 9-11, 2024. Participants at that roundtable [discussed](#) the changing threat environment peace operations face and identified the need for multilateral actors such as the United Nations, the African Union, and Regional Economic Communities to adapt and evolve in response. The rise and spread of violent extremism were highlighted as manifestations of a changing threat environment that has vexed traditional approaches to peacekeeping.

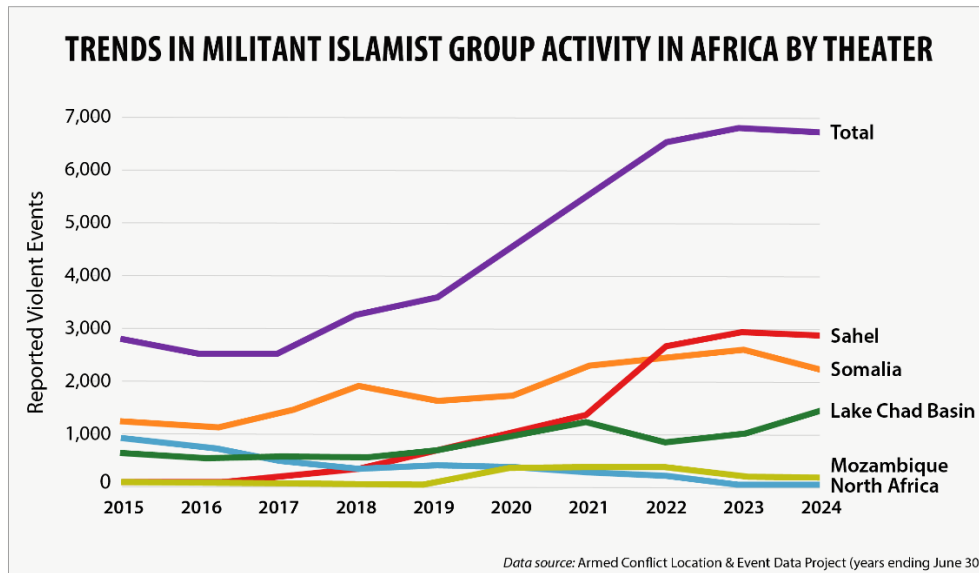
Violent extremists support or participate in politically or ideologically motivated violence.<sup>1</sup> As noted by the United Nations, contemporary notions of violent extremism have been strongly

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the term violent extremism itself is a contested concept, but support for politically and/or ideologically motivated violence is a common feature of most definitions. See, for example, Eleni Christodoulou and Yulia Nesterova, "Violent Extremism: Types, Implications, and Responses," In Leal Filho, W., Azul, A., Brandli, L., Özuyar, P., Wall, T. (eds) *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals* (Springer, 2020). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71066-2\\_60-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71066-2_60-1).

shaped by Islamist militant groups such as the Islamic State and Al Qaeda.<sup>2</sup> In Africa, the threat from Islamist militancy has expanded over the past decade, with double the number of events and approximately 20,000 casualties linked to such groups each year (See *Figure 1*).

*Figure 1. Trends in Militant Islamist Group Activity in Africa by Theater*



Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies

While the threat is not uniform, there are five major theaters in which Islamist militant groups have been active: Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in the Sahel, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad Basin, Al Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ) in Mozambique, and North Africa. In addition, VE insurgencies have been active in the Democratic Republic of Congo, via the Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and coastal West Africa, which faces an encroaching threat from the Sahel.<sup>3</sup> The demand by African states for external assistance in confronting VE threats has been and is likely to remain quite high.

Over the past two decades, ten peace operations in Africa have deployed to areas where VE groups are active. These include two UN peacekeeping missions, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); three successive African Union-led missions in Somalia; three ad-hoc regional security initiatives including coastal West Africa's Accra Initiative, the Lake Chad Basin's Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and the G5 Sahel Joint Force; and two REC-led missions: ECOWAS's African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) (See *Figure 2*).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, E4J University Module Series: Counter-Terrorism, July 2018. <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/radicalization-violent-extremism.html>

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Eizenga and Amandine Gnanguênon, "Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism," *Africa Security Brief No. 43*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, July 2024.

Figure 2: African Peace Operations and VE Threats

Mission	Countries	Year(s)	Personnel	Institution	VE Groups Confronted
<b>AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)</b>	Somalia	2007-22	22,000	AU	Al-Shabaab
<b>AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)</b>	Somalia	2022-	19,000	AU	Al-Shabaab
<b>AU Stabilization and Support Mission in Somalia</b>	Somalia	2025-	12,000	AU	Al-Shabaab
<b>United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO)</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2010-Present	20,000	UN	Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)
<b>African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)</b>	Mali	2012-13	7,400	ECOWAS	Ansar Dine; Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA); Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)
<b>UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)</b>	Mali	2013-2023	15,000	UN	AQIM; Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)
<b>Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)</b>	Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria	2015-	10,000	AU	Boko Haram; Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)
<b>G5 Sahel Joint Force</b>	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger	2017-	5,600	AU	AQIM; JNIM; Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP)
<b>Accra Initiative</b>	Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, and Togo	2017-	10,000	Accra Initiative	JNIM; ISSP
<b>SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)</b>	Mozambique	2021-	2,000	SADC	Al Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ)

Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies

These operations have achieved mixed results. In contexts such as Somalia and the Lake Chad Basin, peace operations have at times helped prevent violent extremists from expanding further or precipitated territorial gains for the states they have supported. But in no theater have peace operations, either single-handedly or in partnership with other forces, dealt VE insurgencies a lasting defeat. In part, this may be explained by the resilience of VE groups themselves, which have survived and even thrived by exploiting political divisions, gaining support from disaffected communities, generating illicit revenue, and constantly identifying opportunities for expansion. Many violent extremist groups are now entering their second or third decades, despite pressure from multilateral security forces and governments.

It may also, however, be explained by the challenges multilateral actors have in adapting their doctrine to confront the threat. Outside of MINUSMA and MONUSCO, the United Nations has been hesitant to mandate missions in response to violent extremists because they challenge United Nations peacekeeping principles such as impartiality, non-use of force, and consent in pursuit of a peace agreement. The African Union and the RECs have proven more willing to engage in offensive 'peace enforcement' operations. However, they often lack the resources, logistics, sustainment, and civilian infrastructure to intervene effectively, a fact that led to the landmark December 2023 adoption of Security Council resolution 2719, which permits the use of

UN assessed resources for African peace operations. As a result, states across Africa are turning to alternative forms of security provision to address extremism within their territories, from mercenary groups to bilateral support. These forms of security provision may be more responsive to states' demands, but, given the continued spread of violent extremism, have arguably proved no more or less effective than peace operations.

Multilateral institutions are likely to continue to play an important role in addressing the rise and spread of violent extremism in Africa. Nevertheless, there have been few efforts to comprehensively compare the experiences of the diverse array of peace operations that have confronted VE threats. That is the main aim of this roundtable: to harness the hard-fought experience of those who have served in senior level positions within these peace operations, and to catalyze regional responses to violent extremism.

### **Program Overview and Academic Approach**

The roundtable will provide a forum for senior leaders and experts in the peace operations community to share lessons learned, discuss ongoing challenges, and identify opportunities to leverage and adapt Africa's regional security architecture in response to violent extremism. The program is organized both by region and by subject. It is designed to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on individual peace operations, consider commonalities and differences between them, and to reach comparative conclusions. All participants, whether they are assigned a speaking role or not, are expected to remain active and engaged throughout the program. It is organized in four components:

1. The first component, *Assessing Peace Operations Doctrine to Address Violent Extremism*, will begin with an overview of the doctrines of the leading entities responsible for peace operations, such as the United Nations and the African Union, and discuss the challenges they face in addressing the extremist threat (Session 1). It will then assess the experiences of the African Union missions in Somalia (Session 2) and MINUSMA and the G5 Sahel in the Sahel (Session 3). Each regionally focused session will begin with a brief overview of how the VE threat in each region began and evolved, followed by a review of each peace operation.
2. The second component, *Comparing Peace Operations with Other Models and Mechanisms*, will seek to compare traditional approaches to peacekeeping and peace enforcement to more recent ad-hoc collective security arrangements. It will begin with discussions of the Lake Chad Basin's Multinational Joint Task Force (Session 4) and efforts by the Accra Initiative and ECOWAS to address the VE threat in Coastal West Africa (Session 4). It will conclude with a roundtable discussion where participants will assess existing multilateral mechanisms and models to address violent extremism (Session 6).
3. The third component, *Comparing Peace Operations with Bilateral and National Responses*, will seek to compare multilateralism to bilateral cooperation and national responses. It will draw on the experiences of MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade in the DRC (Session 7) and the SADC Mission in Mozambique (Session 8). In each of these sessions, as well as the preceding session, participants will seek to draw out the comparative advantages and disadvantages of peace operations in comparison to other forms of security provision.

4. Finally, the roundtable will seek to catalyze action by finding consensus, documenting, and disseminating key findings from the roundtable. During the last session, scholars from ACSS and NYU will present draft findings and recommendations from the roundtable (Session 9), which will be turned into both an executive summary produced by ACSS, and a broader findings and lessons learned document co-produced by ACSS, NYU, and the United Nations.

The forum will be conducted in English. A strict policy of non-attribution applies to all the roundtable proceedings, other than what the subject matter experts agree to include in the document reflecting the roundtable's conclusions and practical take-aways. These rules are binding during and after the roundtable. This read-ahead is an educational document intended to provide an overview of key ideas, debates, and policy issues at hand. It does not reflect the views or official position of the Department of Defense or U.S. Government.

### **Session 1: UN and African-led Peace Operation Doctrine to Address Violent Extremist Insurgencies**

#### Session Objectives:

- Discuss the similarities and differences between the doctrines of UN and African-led PSOs that have confronted VE insurgencies.
- Discuss the successes and challenges PSOs sponsored by the UN and African institutions have had in addressing VE threats.

#### Background:

Traditional UN peacekeeping principles emphasize the consent of parties to a conflict, impartiality, and the non-use of force.<sup>4</sup> Typically, UN peacekeeping operations deploy to support peace agreements or political settlements. This doctrine has proven highly effective in ending, preventing the recurrence of, and reducing civilian suffering during armed conflict.<sup>5</sup>

The threat from VE groups challenges every aspect of this doctrine. VE groups pursue maximalist goals related to state capture and rarely seek political settlements. Many governments refrain from negotiations with them. No VE insurgency in Africa has ended with a political settlement. When states do seek support against such insurgencies, they typically express a preference for partial, offensive operations.

As a result, the United Nations has been reluctant to use peacekeeping as a tool to combat violent extremism. Only two UN peacekeeping missions, MINUSMA and MONUSCO, have been deployed to areas with active VE threats. Both were robust peacekeeping missions with mandates to assist government forces in stabilization efforts. MINUSMA, which was deployed in support of a peace agreement in northern Mali, was tasked with addressing the VE threat indirectly, through responding to VE attacks on its forces and by supporting the government of Mali's stabilization efforts. MONUSCO, whose Force Intervention Brigade undertook offensive

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<sup>4</sup> See United Nations, "Principles of Peacekeeping," <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>

<sup>5</sup> See Barbara Walter and Lise Morje Howard, and V. Page Fortna, "The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace," *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(4), 2021: 1705–22. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342000023X>.

operations against the ADF, is the only UN peacekeeping mission mandated to take offensive operations against a VE insurgency.

A majority of peace operations against VE insurgencies have been African-led. These include peace enforcement operations in Somalia led by the African Union, the SADC Intervention in Mozambique (SAMIM), and African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which transitioned into MINUSMA. In these missions, troop-contributing countries were tasked with undertaking offensive operations with the aim of diminishing the threat and taking territory. They also include ad-hoc security initiatives including the MNJTF, the G5 Sahel, and the Accra Initiative, which each have sought to diminish the VE threat by enabling states where violent extremists are active to share intelligence and conduct cross-border operations.<sup>6</sup> Because African states struggle to generate and sustain expeditionary forces, these efforts have often been heavily supported by bilateral partners, the UN, or other members of the international community. The UN, for example, through its logistical support office, has long helped finance and sustain the AU mission in Somalia.

The persistence of the threat raises important questions about the degree to which existing doctrine espoused by multilateral bodies is suited to confronting VE groups. Any revised doctrine must consider the comparative advantages and disadvantages not only of international and regional peace operations - but also other efforts to assist state forces in addressing the VE threat.

#### Discussion Questions:

- Should UN peacekeeping doctrine be adapted to better enable peacekeeping operations to assist states in addressing VE threats. If so, how?
- How might African peace operations doctrine be adapted to better enable African-led PSOs to address threats from VE groups?
- What, if any, role should peace operations play in addressing the threat from VE groups? What roles are better suited to national or bilateral actors?

#### Recommended Readings:

Africa Center for Strategic Studies. "Africa's Evolving Militant Islamist Threat," *Infographic*, August 2023. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mig-2024-africa-constantly-evolving-militant-islamist-threat/>

Eugene Chen, "A New Vision for Peace Operations," Center on International Cooperation (CIC), New York University, October 2024. <https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/a-new-vision-for-peace-operations/>

Nate D. F. Allen, "African-Led Peace Operations: A Crucial Tool for Peace and Security," *Spotlight*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, August 2023. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-led-peace-operations-a-crucial-tool-for-peace-and-security/>

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<sup>6</sup> These three initiatives, and particularly the Accra Initiative, only loosely qualify as peace operations, which can be understood as "the expeditionary use of uniformed personnel to secure international peace and security." Because these initiatives typically allow for the expeditionary use of personnel only in the context of joint operations or when undertaking border operations, they are often not included under the most restrictive definitions. See Paul D. Williams, "Peace Operations," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2017. <https://oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-37>.

## Session 2: Regional Geopolitics and AU Peace Enforcement Operations in Somalia

### Session Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the growth and evolution of the VE threat in Somalia.
- Analyze the efforts of the multiple peace enforcement operations undertaken by the AU to address the threat by Al-Shabaab, focusing specifically on the challenges troop-contributing countries and the international community have faced in mobilizing and sustaining support for the peace operations.
- Provide recommendations from the experiences of AMISOM and the ATMIS to inform future peace operations to address violent extremism in Somalia and elsewhere.

### Background:

The VE threat in Somalia has evolved significantly since the early 1990s, primarily driven by the rise of al-Shabaab. The collapse of the central government, and intense competition among armed factions during the civil war, led to the emergence of the group. In the early 2000s, al-Shabaab formed as a radical faction within the Islamic Courts Union, which briefly controlled parts of Somalia. Over time, it became more organized, aligning itself with al-Qaeda in 2012 and intensifying its insurgency against the Somali government. Despite significant military pressure and the loss of key territories, al-Shabaab has maintained a stronghold in rural areas and continues to carry out frequent attacks. The group's resilience is bolstered by its ability to exploit clan rivalries, local grievances, and economic instability.

Among the main responses to Al-Shabaab has been a series of African Union-led peace operations. The first, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was authorized by the AU Peace and Security Council in January 2007 and by the UN Security Council in February of the same year. Initially deployed to replace Ethiopian forces in Somalia, AMISOM aimed to support the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia in stabilizing the country and reduce the threat posed by al-Shabaab and other armed groups. Its mandate was revised in 2017 to focus on transferring security responsibilities to the Somali security forces, assisting in the political process, and promoting peacebuilding efforts. AMISOM succeeded in pushing al-Shabaab out of urban centers. However, challenges in consolidating gains, a fragile Somali government, and divisions between troop-contributing countries and international donors have complicated its mission. By 2021, the Farmajo administration repeatedly called for AMISOM's withdrawal, and the UN and AU offered contrasting recommendations regarding the role the Somali army should hold in the future operation.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, UNSCR 2628 authorized the reconfiguration of AMISOM into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), with its mandate expiring in 2024.

ATMIS has been replaced by the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), which commenced on January 1, 2025. AUSSOM inherits a challenging legacy. The new mission must continue, with fewer resources, to address an asymmetric threat, while at the same time continuing to transfer security responsibilities to the Somali Security Forces. AUSSOM has emerged as the first likely use case for UN Security Council Resolution 2719, with the Security

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<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group, "Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia," *Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°176*, Nairobi/Brussels, November 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/b176-reforming-the-au-mission%20%282%29.pdf>

Council endorsing AUSSOM and calling for the “hybrid implementation” of the 2719 framework beginning on July 1, 2025.<sup>8</sup> While this represents potentially significant progress in advancing the broader AU-UN partnership, the backers of AUSSOM continue to remain divided over how the mission is to be financed.

#### Discussion Questions:

- How can AUSSOM differentiate itself from previous peace operations in Somalia?
- What strategies and mechanisms can AUSSOM employ to overcome the organizational, logistical, and funding challenges faced by previous peace operations?
- How will geopolitical tensions affect the implementation of AUSSOM’s mandate, and how can related fallout be minimized?

#### Recommended Readings:

Paul D. Williams, “The Somali National Army Versus Al-Shabaab: A Net Assessment,” *CTC Sentinel*, 17(4), 2024. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-somali-national-army-versus-al-shabaab-a-net-assessment/>

Meressa K. Dessu, Dewit Yohannes, Tsion Belay Alene, “New AU Mission For Somali: Old Problems, Fresh Solution?” Institute for Security Studies, August 2024. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/new-au-mission-for-somalia-old-problems-fresh-solutions>.

Security Council Report, “Somalia: Vote on a Draft Resolution,” December 26, 2024. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2024/12/somalia-vote-on-a-draft-resolution-2.php>.

### **Session 3: Lessons Learned: Parallel Peace Operations in the Sahel**

#### Session Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the growth and evolution of the VE threat in the Sahel.
- Discuss the challenges the UN’s Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the G5 Sahel Joint Force faced in coordinating their activities with one another, with their respective host countries, and with French forces in response to the VE threat.
- Provide recommendations from the experiences of MINUSMA and the G5 Sahel Joint Force to inform future potential peace operations to address violent extremism.

#### Background:

The Sahel region’s destabilization has multiple origins – from weak state institutions to the 2011 collapse of Libya, which flooded the region with weapons and militants. The subsequent 2012 Mali crisis, triggered by a Tuareg rebellion, was hijacked by Al-Qaeda-linked terrorist groups. By 2018, these groups had coalesced into the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama’at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), with leaders representing Tuareg, Fulani, Peul, and Arab jihadists from the Sahel and Maghreb. Violent incidents linked to

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations, “Adopting Resolution 2767 (2024), Security Council Endorses New African Union Support Mission in Somalia,” Press Release, December 2, 2024. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15955.doc.htm>



militant Islamist activity surged nearly sevenfold from 2017 to 2020 in the Sahel.<sup>9</sup> The threat continued to transform following the succession of coups in the region, which empowered military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. This led to these countries' withdrawal from established UN and regional stabilization efforts and pivot to alternate security providers.

The multilateral response began with the ECOWAS African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which first deployed in 2012 to conduct counter-terrorism operations in coordination with French forces. In 2013, AFISMA was replaced by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which was authorized to stabilize Mali and assist in the implementation of the 2015 Algiers Agreement. Another initiative, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, was authorized by the African Union Peace and Security Council in 2017, facilitating Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad to conduct joint patrols in border areas. Although MINUSMA was not a combat mission, it supported broader counterterrorism efforts in Mali, including the G5-Sahel, through operational support, coordination, and information sharing.

In February 2022, France announced that it was ending its decade-long operations after a breakdown in relations with the Malian junta. In May 2022, Mali decided to withdraw from the G5 Sahel Joint Force and Burkina Faso and Niger followed suit. At the request of the Malian government, the Security Council terminated MINUSMA's mandate in June 2023 and peacekeeping forces withdrew by the end of the year on an accelerated timeline. Since then, large parts of Mali's territory have come under the de facto control of Islamist militant groups, and there have been multiple attacks in the Greater Bamako area. Much of these attacks are carried out by the Macina Liberation Front, one of JNIM's most active components, reflecting the deterioration of security under junta rule and signaling the potential for similar consequences in neighboring countries.<sup>10</sup>

The declining popularity of the French, MINUSMA, and G5 Sahel Joint Force in Mali reflect the critical need for political consensus to ensure effective peacekeeping. It also highlights the shifting geopolitical realities at play. Moreover, the loss of government consent for MINUSMA underscores the gap between the principles of UN peacekeeping operations and the realities of asymmetric threat environments.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. How did MINUSMA coordinate its activities with other parallel forces, and how did this impact perceptions of the mission?
2. What, if any, aspects of MINUSMA or the G5-Sahel's mandate or concept of operations might have been revised to better enable them to support the government of Mali in confronting extremist threats?
3. Considering the continued deterioration of security in the Sahel, what are the pathways for reengagement in the region? Should that take the form of another peace operation?

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Eizenga and Wendy Williams, "The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel," *Africa Security Brief No. 38*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, December 1, 2020.

<https://africacenter.org/publication/puzzle-jnim-militant-islamist-groups-sahel/>

<sup>10</sup> Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Militant Islamist Groups Advancing in Mali," *Infographic*, September 24, 2024. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/militant-islamist-groups-advancing-mali/>

### Recommended Readings:

Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "A Review of Major Regional Security Efforts in the Sahel," *Infographic*, March 4, 2019. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/review-regional-security-efforts-sahel/>

Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Militant Islamist Groups Advancing in Mali," *Infographic*, September 24, 2024. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/militant-islamist-groups-advancing-mali/>

Dennis Gyllensporre and Hakan Edstrom (eds), *Military Diplomacy: Reflections by Former United Nations Force Commanders* (Santerus: Academic Press, 2025).

International Peace Institute, *Emerging Lessons from MINUSMA's Experience in Mali*, July 2024, <https://www.ipinst.org/2024/07/emerging-lessons-from-minusmas-experience-in-mali>

## **Session 4: Civil-Military Cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin**

### Session Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the growth and evolution of the VE threat in the Lake Chad Basin.
- Discuss successes and challenges the Multinational Joint Task Force has had in addressing the VE threat in the Lake Chad Basin region, focusing on the integration of MNJTF operations with efforts to stabilize the region and provide humanitarian and development assistance.
- Provide recommendations from the experience of the MNJTF to inform future potential peace operations to address violent extremism.

### Background:

Boko Haram was founded in 2002 in northeastern Nigeria with the stated goal of Islamizing the country. After a crackdown by the state in 2009 killed its founder, Mohammed Yusuf, the group morphed into a violent insurgency. The group pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2010, and then declared loyalty to ISIS in 2015. Its brutality made international headlines in 2014 when nearly 300 schoolgirls were kidnapped from Chibok. Boko Haram has since fragmented into multiple factions, with the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) becoming the most dominant among them. Though it controls a smaller swath of territory than at its peak, ISWAP and other jihadist groups remain active throughout the Lake Chad Basin, affecting regions in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Its expansion is driven by socio-cultural ties in these areas, as well as poor governance, inadequate social services, and environmental degradation that threaten local livelihoods.

As Boko Haram's control of territory expanded, regional security concerns prompted countries to enhance military cooperation, leading to the reactivation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2012 and an expanded mandate for counter-terrorism operations. Established in 1994 as a Nigerian force against cross-border crime, units from Chad and Niger joined in 1988 making

it one of the longest standing ad-hoc security initiatives on the continent.<sup>11</sup> After Boko Haram overran MNTJF headquarters in 2015, the African Union reauthorized the MNJTF under the Lake Chad Basin Commission and developed a new Concept of Operations. The MNJTF is designed to execute its mandate through military counterterrorism operations, as well as by serving as a platform for coordinating responses to the drivers of violent extremism.<sup>12</sup> The latter is implemented through its Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery, and Resilience of the Lake Chad Region, which enables tasks ranging from expanding humanitarian access and refugee resettlement to supporting cross-border trade.

Criticisms of the MNJTF include inadequate coordination among the various national contingents, lack of sustainable funding, and insufficient engagement with local communities. However, the MNJTF has made efforts to address these issues. Over time, operational planning has become more integrated and joint, largely due to the leadership of its Force Commanders.<sup>13</sup> It is widely viewed as the model for other ad hoc security initiatives in the region. Various mechanisms have been implemented to strengthen coordination with local security actors and communities, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force in northeastern Nigeria, the Civil-Military Cooperation Cell, and the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

All the same, while successful operations have been conducted against Boko Haram and its affiliates, the jihadist insurgency remains entrenched. Although attacks have decreased from their peak, they have been on the rise again over the past two years (Africa Center 2024). This could in part be due to the reduced involvement of Chad and Niger following their respective coups. Broader commitment to sharing plans and intelligence, deployment of troops for longer operations, improvement of troops' human rights compliance, as well as greater financial buy-in from member states and initiative in collaborating with the African Union (AU) and donors to address funding issues could strengthen the MNTJF.<sup>14</sup>

#### Discussion Questions:

- What are the major challenges the MNJTF has faced, and how might it be improved?
- What lessons learned about civil-military cooperation can we extract from efforts to counter extremist violence in the Lake Chad Basin?
- Should the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) be considered a model for other ad hoc security initiatives? If so, what lessons ought to be applied?

#### Recommended Readings:

Africa's Constantly Evolving Militant Islamist Threat, *Infographic*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies (see in particular the "Lake Chad Basin" section), August 2024.

<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mig-2024-africa-constantly-evolving-militant-islamist-threat/>

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<sup>11</sup> Chika Charles Aniekwe and Katharine Brooks, "Multinational Joint Task Force: Lessons for Comprehensive Regional Approaches to Cross-Border Conflict in Africa," *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 26(4), 2023: 330-349. [https://brill.com/view/journals/joup/26/4/article-p330\\_005.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/joup/26/4/article-p330_005.xml)

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Eizenga and Amandine Gnanouénon, 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Chika Charles Aniekwe and Katharine Brooks, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> International Crisis Group, "What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram?" *Crisis Group Africa Briefing Report N°291*, Nairobi/Brussels, July 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/291-what-role-multinational-joint-task-force-fighting-boko-haram>

Cynthia Happi, “Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin Region: Evolution and Impact of Boko Haram,” *Institute for Peace & Security Studies*, 1(1), July 2020. <https://ipss-addis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Policy-Brief-Violent-Extremism-in-the-Lake-Chad-Basin-Region-Evolution-and-Impact-of-Boko-Haram-2772020.pdf>

Chika Charles Aniekwe and Katharine Brooks, “Multinational Joint Task Force: Lessons for Comprehensive Regional Approaches to Cross-Border Conflict in Africa,” *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 26(4), 2023: 330-349. [https://brill.com/view/journals/joup/26/4/article-p330\\_005.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/joup/26/4/article-p330_005.xml)

## **Session 5: Regional Military and Intelligence Coordination in Coastal West Africa**

### Session Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the growth and evolution of the VE threat to Coastal West Africa.
- Provide a brief overview of the efforts by regional actors including ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative to coordinate a response to the growing threat.
- Provide recommendations from the experiences of ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative to inform future peace operations to address violent extremism.

### Background:

The VE threat from the Sahel is spilling over into coastal West Africa, with Benin and Togo the most affected, and Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania also experiencing security challenges.<sup>15</sup> Insecurity is pronounced in border regions and jointly protected areas such as the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) complex of parks, where violent extremism and organized crime intersect in areas with limited governance. The threat is primarily associated with the al-Qaeda affiliated JNIM and ISGS, though different splinter groups and coalitions have emerged, each with their own localized characteristics.

Two regional entities, ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative, have taken measures to counter the growing threat of violent extremism in coastal West Africa. In 2019, ECOWAS released the Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism in the ECOWAS Region (2020-2024), but implementation has been limited to a few training and education exercises.<sup>16</sup> Although there have been calls to reactivate the ECOWAS Standby Force, challenges related to political will, funding, and mobilization have hindered progress.

The Accra Initiative was established in 2017 following a large-scale terrorist attack in Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire. The initiative's founding members include Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo. Mali and Niger joined in 2020 and Nigeria has maintained observer status since 2022. Following similar regional initiatives like the Lake Chad Basin's MNJTF, the Accra Initiative's focus on cross-border joint security operations, intelligence sharing, and training has been met with some success, particularly with respect to intelligence sharing.

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Eizenga and Amandine Gnanguênon, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Sampson Kwarkye, “Can ECOWAS Revive its Counter-Terrorism Efforts?” *Institute for Security Studies*, November 2024. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-ecowas-revive-its-counter-terrorism-efforts>.

Regional efforts to counter violent extremism in coastal West Africa reveal several important lessons. One of the main takeaways is the difficulty in aligning national priorities with regional strategies, as countries typically manage their armed forces independently, with separate tactical commands and funding sources. Member states often opt to allocate more resources to national security initiatives at the expense of regional ones.<sup>17</sup> This has prevented regional initiatives from achieving their full potential, reducing the overall effectiveness of CVE efforts.

#### Discussion Questions:

- Both ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative have insisted to varying degrees to focus on mobilizing the internal resources of states in the region rather than relying on significant external funding. What are the benefits and drawbacks of this approach?
- How can regional organizations like ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative align and deepen efforts to share intelligence, conduct joint operations, and adopt common cross-border pre-deployment training and standards?
- How can states better align national efforts to address violent extremism with regional ones?

#### Recommended Readings:

ECOWAS Commission, "Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism in the ECOWAS Region," 2019. <https://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Priority-action-plan-to-eradicate-terrorism-in-the-ECOWAS-region-2020-2024.pdf>

Daniel Eizenga and Amandine Gnanguênon, "Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism," *Africa Security Brief No. 43*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, July 2024. <https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/>

Sampson Kwarkye, "Can ECOWAS Revive its Counter-Terrorism Efforts?" Institute for Security Studies, November 2024. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-ecowas-revive-its-counter-terrorism-efforts>.

### **Session 6: Roundtable: Assessing Multilateral Mechanisms and Models to Address Violent Extremism**

#### Session Objectives:

- Assess peace operations in comparison to other forms of regional and multilateral mechanisms sponsored by the AU and the UN to address the spread of violent extremism.
- Discuss how, if, and under what circumstances, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2719 might be deployed to address a VE insurgency.
- Discuss how to incorporate lessons learned throughout the roundtable up until that point into a potential mission authorized under UNSCR 2719.

#### Background:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The decline of major multidimensional peacekeeping missions, an evolving threat environment, and the continued evolution of Africa's peace and security architecture are leading the UN, the AU, and other regional bodies to consider new approaches to peacekeeping. One potential future for UN peacekeeping could involve a more focused, modular approach to undertaking the numerous tasks peacekeepers have been mandated to perform over the years. A number of these tasks, including preventive deployments, support for enhancing security sector governance, border management, and support for regional organizations, are relevant to addressing threats from VE groups.<sup>18</sup>

The AU, RECs, and other coalitions of states have undertaken a significant number of operations against violent extremists in recent years. But more could be done to enable better coordination among regional actors and to address what remain significant capability and financing gaps. Given these gaps, African-led peace operations are unlikely to replace multidimensional peacekeeping missions any time soon, and instead, any new missions are likely to be smaller, focused, and more modular in approach. As evidenced by the authorization of new tools such as UN Security Council Resolution 2719, which provides a framework for UN assessed contributions to support African-led peace operations, there is potentially great value in enhancing cooperation between multilateral actors responsible for Africa's peace and security.

The trend towards smaller, modular peace operations provides an opportunity for innovation. The main goal of violent extremists lies in supplanting and replacing state authority. These insurgencies will end on favorable terms if African states can demonstrate they are more capable of governance and security provision to citizens than violent extremists, or, in some cases, through negotiated settlements at the local or national level. If there is one lesson to be drawn from two decades of external intervention against VE groups, it is that external actors have limited will and ability to fight VE insurgencies indefinitely in the absence of state leadership. A turn towards more limited, modular peace operations may provide opportunities for multilateral actors to more firmly put African states at the forefront of efforts to confront violent extremism, while enhancing coordination and alignment between them.

#### Discussion Questions:

- What potential new peacekeeping models show the most promise in assisting African states in addressing VE threats? How might they be implemented?
- What reforms to the African Peace and Security Architecture may be needed to enable African governments to more effectively coordinate and align their efforts to address violent extremism?
- How can new tools such as UN Security Council Resolution 2719 be leveraged to address VE threats? What might an African-led peace operation deployed under resolution 2719 against violent extremist threats look like, and how can multilateral actors help ensure its effectiveness?
- How might multilateral actors better coordinate and align their efforts to address violent extremism?

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<sup>18</sup> See El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams, Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*. Independent Study Commissioned by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, October 2024. [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the\\_future\\_of\\_peacekeeping\\_new\\_models\\_and\\_related\\_capabilities\\_-\\_nov1.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the_future_of_peacekeeping_new_models_and_related_capabilities_-_nov1.pdf)

### Recommended Readings:

El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams, Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*. Independent Study Commissioned by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, October 2024. [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the\\_future\\_of\\_peacekeeping\\_new\\_models\\_and\\_related\\_capabilities\\_-\\_nov1.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the_future_of_peacekeeping_new_models_and_related_capabilities_-_nov1.pdf)

Bitania Tadesse, "The Role of African Multilateralism in the New Agenda for Peace," International Peace Institute Global Observatory, September 2023. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/09/the-role-of-african-multilateralism-in-the-new-agenda-for-peace/>

Nate D. F. Allen and Nicole Mazurova, "African Union and United Nations Partnership Key to the Future of Peace Operations in Africa," *Spotlight*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, April 2024. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-union-united-nations-peace-operations/>

## **Session 7: Comparing UN and DRC-led Efforts to Confront the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the DRC**

### Session Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the growth and evolution of the violent extremist threat in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Discuss successes, challenges and lessons learned from UN's Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to address the threat from the Allied Democratic Force in the DRC.
- Compare and contrast FIB operations with efforts by the DRC and the Ugandan military to contain the ADF.
- Provide recommendations from the experience of the FIB to inform future peace operations.

### Background:

The conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is deeply rooted in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where Hutu extremists and other displaced peoples fled into Zaire, now DRC. Over time, various armed groups, with different ethnic and regional affiliations, have vied for control of territories, often fueled by regional powers like Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. The competition for influence, along with the exploitation of mineral resources, has exacerbated instability, leading to years of conflict and failed peace initiatives.

Among these armed groups is the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which was founded in 1995 in Uganda. Though not directly formed in response to the genocide, the broader regional instability in the DRC influenced the context in which the ADF evolved and operated. The group is designated by the United States and Uganda as a terrorist group and it has been accused of maintaining links with international Islamist extremist organizations, including al-Shabaab, ISIL, and Boko Haram. While its original political goals involved overthrowing the Ugandan government and establishing a state governed by its interpretation of Islamic law, the ADF now appears to be more focused on destabilizing the region and exploiting the chaotic environment for financial gain. The ADF has been countered through the combined efforts of the United

Nations' Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), and the Uganda People's Defense Forces.

The FIB was established by the UN Security Council in 2013 as the first UN combat force authorized to conduct targeted offensive operations against armed groups in eastern DRC. It operates as a special unit within the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and largely consists of Malawian, Tanzanian, and South African troops. While the FIB achieved success in defeating March 23 Movement rebels, its efforts against the ADF were less effective. After incurring significant peacekeeper casualties – notably during the ADF assault on a MONUSCO base in the North Kivu province in 2017 – the FIB has shifted to a more supportive role, focusing on joint planning, strategizing, patrols, and intelligence sharing with the FARDC. Since 2021, with the support of MONUSCO the FARDC has succeeded in weakening the ADF and pushing it out of its stronghold in Beni. However, the group has remained resilient, pushing its operations farther south and east and causing around 1,000 civilian casualties in 2023, according to UN reports.

As in other theaters, the experience of the FIB raises important questions about the suitability of peace operations as an offensive tool, and how to align peace operations with government-sponsored and other externally-sponsored military and non-military efforts to address extremism. In the DRC, at least, peace operations were at their most effective in a more support-oriented role.

#### Discussion Questions:

- What challenges did the FIB, FARDC, and other regional forces face in efforts to counter the ADF?
- What are the risks and benefits of assigning a UN peacekeeping mission a combat role, as seen with the FIB? Is this an effective model for future operations, or should the responsibility for warfighting be delegated to other stakeholders?
- If future peace operations are to be tasked with taking on more offensive roles or supporting government-led offensives, what kinds of changes in doctrine and tactics are needed?

#### Recommended Readings:

Alexis Arieff, "The Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamic State Affiliate in the Democratic Republic of Congo," Congressional Research Service, September 2022.

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12206/2>

Balingene Kahombo, Joseph Cihunda Hengelela, Jean-Rene Mabwilo, "Planned Withdrawal of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of Congo: Challenges and Prospects," African Security Sector Network, July 2024. <https://justfuturealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Planned-withdrawal-of-MONUSCO-from-the-Democratic-Republic-of-Congo.pdf>

Peter Fabricius, "Asking the Right Questions about the Force Intervention Brigade," Institute for Security Studies, August 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/asking-the-right-questions-about-the-force-intervention-brigade>



Florence Maurice, "Uganda's DRC Mission Under Scrutiny Amid Claims About Double-Dealing," *Radio France International*, December 2024. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20241206-uganda-congo-mission-faces-scrutiny-amid-claims-of-regional-double-dealing>

## **Session 8: Comparing Rwandan and SAMIM Efforts to Address Extremism in Mozambique**

### Session Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the evolution of the VE threat in northern Mozambique.
- Discuss successes, challenges and lessons learned the from SAMIM
- Compare and contrast SAMIM's operations in Mozambique with those of the Rwandan Defense Forces
- Provide recommendations from SAMIM to inform future peace operations.

### Background:

Cabo Delgado has become a hotspot for increasing terrorist activity. Since 2017, Al Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ), a terrorist group with ties to the Islamic State in Central Africa, has been targeting civilians, government entities, and energy firm contractors. During the peak of the conflict in 2021 and 2022, more than a million people were displaced, and thousands lost their lives. ASJW exploits local grievances related to the perceived neglect of the region by the central government in Maputo, compounded by the growing presence of foreign investors in Cabo Delgado whose ventures demand the resettlement of thousands of locals.<sup>19</sup> Despite being rich in natural resources, from rubies to natural gas, Cabo Delgado remains one of the poorest regions in Mozambique. This inequality has fostered resentment and among the group's objectives is to disrupt and seize control of valuable economic assets, such as the natural gas fields off the coast of the province.

The Nyusi administration was initially opaque about what was happening, and its response relied on Mozambican forces, which struggled due to inadequate training, equipment, and coordination. Evidence surfaced of violence against civilians by state security forces, primarily civil society groups and journalists. In late 2019, the government turned to private military contractors, including the Dyck Advisory Group and Wagner Group, for security provision but they were unsuccessful in containing the threat. In July 2021, Mozambique requested assistance from Rwanda, which responded by deploying a highly trained force to the province. Concurrently, the African Union (AU) and regional actors pressured Mozambique to allow the deployment of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission to support operations against terrorism and extremist violence.

In early April 2024, it was announced that the RDF presence - funded through partnership with the European Union - would be expanded while the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) was set to withdraw. SAMIM's exit in June 2024 left behind a mixed record. While the mission was able to stabilize the province enough to facilitate humanitarian aid and development projects, as well as enable the return of over 500,000 internally

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<sup>19</sup> Gregory Pirio, Robert Pittelli, and Yussuf Adam, "The Many Drivers Enabling Violent Extremism in Northern Mozambique," *Spotlight*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, May 2019. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-many-drivers-enabling-violent-extremism-in-northern-mozambique/>

displaced persons, there was a resurgence of attacks and displacement in late 2023.<sup>20</sup> One of the greatest challenges was insufficient coordination between its forces, the RDF, and the host nation's security forces, though it appeared that the Mozambican government prioritized its engagement with Rwanda, assigning the RDF to more strategic areas.<sup>21</sup>

SAMIM's withdrawal prompts reflections on the issue of host nation consent and the complexities of conducting an ad-hoc mission in situations where support from the host government is limited. It raises critical questions about how to navigate political reluctance and lack of cooperation, especially when the host nation is perceived as unable to independently resolve the threat and the risk of regional spillover is high.

#### Roundtable Dialogue Questions:

- Why was the Mozambican government reluctant about SAMIM, and should the mission have been deployed without the host nation's enthusiastic consent?
- What lessons about coordination can be drawn from the inadequate coordination mechanisms between SAMIM, the RDF and the Mozambican security forces?
- Will the RDF's continued presence undermine Mozambique's ability to assume control over its security, why or why not?

#### Recommended Readings:

Gregory Pirio, Robert Pittelli, and Yussuf Adam, "The Many Drivers Enabling Violent Extremism in Northern Mozambique," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Spotlight*, May 2019. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-many-drivers-enabling-violent-extremism-in-northern-mozambique/>

Liesl Louw-Vaudran, "Coordination: Key to the Success of African Solutions for Mozambique," *Policy Brief*, Institute of Security Studies, April 2022. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/pb-172-2.pdf>

Thomas Mandrup, "Lessons from the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)," ACCORD, April 2024. <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/lessons-from-the-sadc-mission-in-mozambique-samim/>.

Chikondi Chidzanja, "SAMIM Criticism Misses Larger Point," ACCORD, July 2024. <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/samim-criticism-misses-larger-point/>

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Mandrup, "Lessons from the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)," ACCORD, April 2024. <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/lessons-from-the-sadc-mission-in-mozambique-samim/>.

<sup>21</sup> Chikondi Chidzanja, "SAMIM Criticism Misses Larger Point," ACCORD, July 2024. <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/samim-criticism-misses-larger-point/>