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An integrated response for lasting peace in Cabo Delgado: Pursuing an African way of ending violent conflict

Background

After decades of internal war, destabilising political turmoil, and failed peace-making efforts, very little changed for many people of Cabo Delgado. The spoils of independence were claimed by political and business elites in Maputo, and a culture of liberation and democratization is gradually eroded by a culture of criminality. Governance neglect of the Northern provinces and rural areas in general by successive governments in Maputo and age-old tensions between Christian and Muslim fundamentalists are two main causes of the conflict. The ruling elite and foreign companies profiting from gas exploration and other economic exploits with very little tangible benefit for the people of Cabo Delgado, triggered renewed violent conflict in the province.

Since October 2017, violence in the Cabo Delgado province necessitated military and policing operations. By February 2021, [more than 500 000 people have been displaced](#) and moved to safer areas in the Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa provinces. Currently, the Mozambican government is in desperate need of assistance to end the violence. Simultaneously, various external actors are still seeking ways to end the violence with African actors expecting the Mozambican government to stabilize Cabo Delgado so that business activities can continue, while several foreign actors are ready to become involved.

Discussion

The Mozambican government, known for their mismanagement of financial resources that adds to the [fragility of the state](#), do not fully reveal their strategy or plans to their [regional partners](#). However, indications are that they prefer a military solution and are busy with 'shopping' everywhere to enhance their very limited military capabilities. On the 'shopping list' is South African mercenaries to fly helicopters supplied by the Paramount Group in South Africa, and for the governments of South

Africa, France, the United States (US) and Portugal to provide military support, [including naval patrols](#). After private military contractors, who aimed at protecting foreign assets and not citizens, failed to permanently secure the oil installations, let alone containing the insurgency, the government is now following a limited offensive strategy focussing on the area around Nangade north-east of Palma in an effort to secure a radius of 200 km around oil installations. However, the insurgents still render road travel on main routes unsafe and enjoy the freedom of action to [raid locations close to oil installations and in the border area with Tanzania](#).

The insurgents are linked to an [Islamist sect](#), with some observers believing that there is a relationship with the Islamic State movement and even the Allied Democratic Force (ADF) rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Furthermore, indications are that the business interests of powerful Mozambican Muslim business people of Indian and Pakistani descent coincide with the [religion and business interests of the Islamist insurgents](#). Locally referred to as *monhés*, these Indian and Pakistani business people enjoy the protection of some members of the FRELIMO party who ignores the illicit trade of heroin, timber, ivory, and drugs, as well as human trafficking via the coast of [Cabo Delgado and Nampula](#), benefitting directly from it. Although religious fundamentalism is a contributing factor, the frustration of especially the youth about the conditions that leaves them without opportunities to find employment, causes them to sympathise or join armed groups.

Neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe, who risk being directly affected by events in Northern Mozambique, remain closely involved but limit their involvement mainly due to a preference for a multilateral African response. Tanzania has deployed troops to their mutual border and shares intelligence while attempting to disrupt the insurgent [supply lines and smuggling routes](#) to and from East Africa. The Zimbabwean government is ready to assist Mozambique but prefers to do it within the ambit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) citing the [Mutual Defence Pact](#) that provides for military assistance among countries. The [South African government](#) maintains a similar stance: Intelligence gathering will continue but military support will be in response to a request from Mozambique.

In November 2020, SADC¹ expressed its solidarity and commitment to supporting Mozambique in addressing the terrorism and violent attacks and condemned all acts of terrorism and armed attacks. SADC affirmed the multilateral approach as a comprehensive regional response. However, during the SADC meeting of December 2020, President Nyusi rejected any coordinated regional effort including President Emmerson Mnangagwa's suggestion that the SADC should send troops. President Nyusi also hinted that Tanzania is responsible for sponsoring the insurgency, despite Mozambique and Tanzania signing a [memorandum of agreement](#) in November 2020 to do joint policing in the border areas of Cabo Delgado. The African Union, who only in February 2020 acknowledged that there is a crisis, confirmed its willingness to support Mozambique, but based on the principle of subsidiarity, prefer that the SADC deal with the situation.

The delayed and limited response by African organisations opens an opportunity for foreign role players to enter the fray. The European Union countries, especially the former colonial power Portugal is collaborating with the Mozambican government [to strategize and train local forces](#), provide humanitarian aid and initiate development projects in the area. Spain also expressed an interest in [military cooperation with Mozambique](#) on antiterrorism. The USA is committed to 'contain, degrade and defeat the growing movement' beyond just a military solution to meet humanitarian needs by getting the security situation under control and restore the safety and well-being of all people. China,

¹ The Southern African Development Community (SADC) comprises 16 African countries of which six border Mozambique – Eswatini, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

one of Mozambique's main and mutually beneficial economic partners, declared their opposition to acts of terrorism and will [provide the necessary support and assistance](#) to anti-terrorism and relief operations when required. The expectation is that [Russia will still be providing advisors and equipment](#) to the Mozambican armed forces after the withdrawal of the Wagner private military group in 2020. In December 2020, the UN and its partners launched the [Humanitarian Response Plan \(HRP\)](#) totalling US\$ 254 million to provide assistance and protection during 2021. In this regard, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has been continuously working with partners and the government to identify and implement projects to address the most pressing humanitarian needs.

Conclusion

The Mozambican government accepted responsibility for the Cabo Delgado crisis and is playing the leading role to stabilize the region so that business ventures, especially gas exploration, can continue. However, to secure Cabo Delgado they need the integrated support of African allies, countries outside Africa, humanitarian agencies and broader participation of civil society (especially the youth). Conflict resolution the African way does not mean that African governments need to solve all problems on their own.

It is foreseen that the Mozambican government will continue to focus on the military solution to protect sources of elite revenue such as oil installations and illicit business networks ('the crime pipeline'). In this regard, the Mozambican government will continue to seek military support from outside Africa where financial wealth is situated, including allowing private security companies to secure oil assets. While the Mozambican government continues to see the 'insurgency' as a national issue, and international supporters are convinced that their involvement is part of 'the war on terror', the Mozambican government will probably prefer support from nations who are willing and able to protect their own economic interests in Africa. As what is becoming a regular way or African way of conflict resolution, SADC partners will remain available in the spirit of mutual support and respect for the sovereignty of Mozambique, assist with capacity building when invited, but with a reluctance for direct intervention that cannot be maintained.

It is therefore recommended that all stakeholders focus their efforts on development programmes in Cabo Delgado, keeping in mind that capacity building to enhance the hard power instruments of the incumbent Mozambican government may eventually be used against the frustrated and downtrodden citizens of Cabo Delgado. Military assistance of any kind should be aimed at strengthening the role of security forces as protectors of all citizens in a democratic Mozambique and not the interests of politico-business elites.

Further Reading

Haysom, Simone (2020). Drug trafficking. From the maskani to the mayor: The political economy of heroin markets in East and Southern Africa. International Development Working Paper Series No.18-190. EnactAfrica. Research Paper 13, February 2020.

Matsinhe, David M and Valoi Estácio (2019). The genesis of insurgency in northern Mozambique. Pretoria. Institute of Security Studies. Southern Africa Report 27, October, 2019.

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