



# PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CABO DELGADO

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION SERIES (NUMBER 6)

## Seizing the moment: Next steps to resolve conflict in Cabo Delgado

This briefing provides considerations for the future actions to resolve conflict in Cabo Delgado in the context of ongoing military operations by multinational forces, potential violent extremist responses, and opportunities for dialogue and a negotiated solution. It builds on the five previous briefings in the *Conflict Resolution Series* and seeks to shape both Government of Mozambique and regional thinking, in preparation for the SADC Summit on 17-18 August 2021.



In summary, this brief encourages the Government of Mozambique to:

- Negotiate early, using military capability as leverage, in-line with the recommendations presented in *Negotiating with Violent Extremists in Cabo Delgado* (Conflict Resolution Series: Number 5).
- Be prepared to compromise to alleviate

conflict drivers.

- Build confidence with communities through the delivery of immediate humanitarian assistance and development initiatives, publicly and privately funded.

The potential consequences of failing to seize the opportunity to negotiate early are substantial and outlined below.

## Trajectory of armed conflict

What are the violent extremists (VE) likely to do in response to multinational force operations? In the short-term, as military operations intensify, VE are likely to have sustainability challenges as their movement will be restricted to remote rural areas to conceal base locations from forces that are unfamiliar with the difficult terrain. However, these restrictions may also trigger shifts in VE focus - geographical, methodological, and targeting. A geographical switch may result in VE operations going beyond recent boundaries to include districts historically less affected by the conflict, such as Meluco, Montepuez, Ancuabe, Metuge and Pemba. This is increasingly likely when the constraints imposed by local elite influencers are less effective, and in areas where foreign forces are unlikely to have a significant presence. A shift in operational methods could include small group attacks to generate fear and disruption in major towns, or even a technological escala-

tion to the use of simple improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on routes used by military forces and the private sector, and in areas where there are large concentrations of civilians. Foreign personnel and assets have not been the direct target of VE, despite some serious collateral effects. The internationalising of the conflict, however, may trigger a gloves-off approach from VE, increasing the threat of extreme violence to everyone in Cabo Delgado. This is an escalation that has been seen in multiple violent extremist conflicts worldwide. Lastly, while the threat to other SADC countries from violent extremism is currently minimal, sympathetic groups with similar grievances and/or transnational terrorists may target troop contributing countries as a response to operations in Mozambique. Similar circumstances took place in the early days of the multinational operations in Somalia, with retaliatory terrorist attacks in Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia.

## Government dilemmas

As foreign forces embed themselves in Cabo Delgado, the Government faces dilemmas over the duration of the respective missions. While the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) mission is funded, and likely focused on setting conditions for the resumption of LNG development, SADC desperately needs immediate international funding to increase and sustain their deployment. Any further funding however should be predicated on defining success for the SADC deployment to prevent self-perpetuating intervention in

Mozambique. This is important to prevent the interests of troop contributing countries going beyond stabilisation of Cabo Delgado and expanding to financial gain and projection of influence. However, without wholesale transformation of the FADM to dramatically improve their capabilities (which is likely to take years) Mozambican forces cannot, on their own, provide the security and protection required in Cabo Delgado. Therefore, dialogue and negotiations - at the earliest opportunity - must be the priority.

## Ending conflict through dialogue and negotiations

Based on the factors identified in previous paragraphs, it is not surprising there is growing momentum to encourage the Government of Mozambique to seek dialogue and a negotiated approach. The 6 August 2021 US Department of State designation, and recent credible reports from national research organisations,<sup>1</sup> identified VE leaders and key personnel within the armed group. Interestingly, the US sought to identify Bono-made Machude Omar (AKA Ibn Omar) as the group's 'external affairs' representative, which could be construed as a move towards encouraging the opening of channels for negotiations, as well as indicating that the group has transnational connections. Despite these recent exposes, the violent extremist group and its cells have never been truly faceless, as CDD has attested to in previous publications and events. There have always been channels, interlocutors, and influencers to engage in dialogue and negotiations. Notably, it was the Head of PRM, General Bernadino Rafael, that first declared Ibn Omar as a key leader of the violent extremists as early as 2018.

History tells us from Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Sahel that "chopping off the head of the snake" is no guarantee of conflict resolution. In this context, is it vital to open the door to negotiations, rather than closing it in search of an unrealistic military victory through killing or incapacitating violent extremist leaders. This is particularly true when the killing / incapacitating approach is more likely to shift the conflict dynamics, trigger long-term resurgence, and ultimately cause foreign forces to be embedded in Mozambique with perpetuity.

Furthermore, it is important that SADC member countries formally agree to pursue dialogue and negotiations as the preferred method of conflict resolution. Tanzania has already advocated for this approach and is well-placed given the proximity to the problem and local influences. This is also the time for the SADC Mediation Reference Group to step forward and influence the trajectory of peace-making in Cabo Delgado, while drawing on the deep understanding of the conflict, and expertise, of independent organisations.

## Components of conflict resolution.

The following list is a reminder of the key components of successful conflict resolution in Cabo Delgado:

- Short-term military objectives to minimise attacks on communities and set conditions for a resumption of LNG development.
- A negotiated settlement with VE to end conflict, leveraged through credible military deterrence and inspired by the enticements identified in Conflict Resolution Series (Number 5), with the safe release of non-combatants held captive as the first priority of dialogue and negotiations.
- A gradual return of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) to their home areas, through investment in development and the reconstruction of basic trading networks, with the international private sector playing a pivotal role in funding these approaches. A potential de-population strategy must be avoided - an approach which is seemingly being advocated by ADIN - to prevent elites seeking undisrupted exploitation of mineral resources in Cabo Delgado.
- Longer term Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) initiatives to strengthen community resilience and avert further radicalisation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Observatorio do Meio Rural (OMR) report, Destaque Rural No.13 (10 August 2021) is the most recent example.

This is certainly not the time for complacency or premature victory celebrations, as the violent extremist organisation in Cabo Delgado is far from defeated. While it is possible to suppress violent extremism in the short-term, resolution is unrealistic through military means alone, as there is a need to address underlying drivers. This can only be achieved through dialogue, negotiations, and compromise, otherwise there will be a resurgence of violent extremism, possibly with greater in-

tensity and external support. While the scale and context of the situation in Afghanistan is vastly different, it demonstrates that 20 years of multinational military operations, in the absence of timely negotiations, has only resulted in further empowering the Taliban.

Based on this assessment, we urge the Government of Mozambique and SADC to seize the moment to resolve conflict through the application of the components identified in this brief.

## Upcoming Event:

*CDD Webinar (27 August 2021): Reflecting on Military Operations in Cabo Delgado and Examining Future Courses of Action*



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