



# Evolution of Violent Extremism in Northern Mozambique

Foreign military intervention opened opportunity for conflict resolution through implementation of alternative actions

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# Abstract

This policy paper presents and analyses the evolution of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, showing the various stages it has gone through over the past five years leading up to the current situation. It is argued that the attacks in Cabo Delgado escalated when violent extremist groups allied with the Islamic State and started to conduct high-intensity attacks in the district headquarters towns, reaching a stalemate with the occupation of the town of Mocimboa da Praia for about a year. From Mocimboa da Praia, a bold attack was planned and executed, and temporary occupation was taken of the headquarters town of Palma, the heart of the natural gas exploration projects in the Rovuma Basin. The deployment of troops from Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community Mission to Mozambique (SAMIM) that followed the attack in Palma has led to the weakening of violent extremist groups. This has been manifested through a reduction in the occurrence and intensity of attacks, providing the government of Mozambique opportunity to begin implementing alternative conflict-resolution and peace-building actions. However, so far, the government is insisting on enacting a predominantly military response, which is prompting the attackers to adapt to the presence of foreign troops, split into small groups and disperse to more districts in Cabo Delgado and Nampula, which could lead to a low-intensity and long-lasting conflict.

**Keywords:** violent extremism; northern Mozambique; conflict; dialogue



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# Introduction

Already having passed its fifth anniversary (October 2022), the violent conflict in Cabo Delgado has passed through several stages. It is now reaching de-escalation, which opens a window of opportunity for resolution, but this opportunity may be missed if the correct action is not taken. The conflict, which has already caused more than 4,000 deaths and almost a million internally displaced persons (IDPs), is experiencing a new territorial expansion to the south of Cabo Delgado province and the first confirmed attacks in two districts of Nampula province (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022).

This policy paper addresses and seeks to situate the current violent conflict in Cabo Delgado, using the dynamic model of stages in the evolution of a violent conflict, which comprises (1) latent conflict, (2) conflict emergence, (3) conflict escalation, (4) painful equilibrium, (5) conflict de-escalation/negotiation, (6) dispute resolution/dispute settlement, and (7) peacebuilding and reconciliation. Finally, scenarios of the course of the conflict are outlined (Brahm, 2003).

The policy paper is the result of documentary and field research carried out in Cabo Delgado in August and September 2022. Given the military nature of the subject matter, anonymous interviews were used.

The policy paper is divided into two sections: the first presenting the various stages of the conflict in northern Mozambique and analysing how the decisions made by the parties at each stage influenced the evolution of the conflict. The second section presents and discusses the current stage of the conflict and outlines scenarios for its evolution. The policy paper concludes with recommendations to the government of Mozambique, Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the international community engaged in countering violent extremism in northern Mozambique.

## Causes and emergence of the conflict, a tragedy foretold

Several studies have sought to understand and discuss the causes of attacks by violent extremist groups in Cabo Delgado, and the most pertinent ones can be summarised as follows:

- radicalisation of youth by Islamist groups and/or expansion of global jihadism to Cabo Delgado (see Bonate, 2022; Morier-Genoud, 2020);
- discovery and poor governance of natural resources, especially rubies from Montepuez and natural gas from the Rovuma Basin (see Ewi et al., 2022: 19; Ngoenha et al., 2020: 44); and
- poverty, unemployment, socioeconomic exclusion of local youth (see Faria, 2021: 5–6; Habibe et al., 2020).

The official stance of the government of Mozambique is, however, that the violent conflict in Cabo Delgado is an external aggression by terrorist organisations (Republic of Mozambique, 2020).

The causes of conflict occur before it emerges, that is, during latent conflict (Brahm, 2003). “It exists whenever individuals, groups, organizations, or nations have differences that bother one or the other, but those differences are not great enough to cause one side to act to alter the situation” (Brahm, 2003). Understanding these stages and the causes of conflict is important, above all, to prevent it from moving from the latent to the emergent state. Furthermore, understanding the causes of conflict helps

us to understand the dynamics that are associated with conflict and seek the most appropriate ways of resolving it (Gleditsch, 2007: 27).

In the case of the Cabo Delgado conflict, the government's initial understanding (that these were acts of banditry, only later evolving into the perception that we are facing external aggression by terrorist groups) will significantly determine or influence how the government will seek to resolve the conflict. Under this understanding, the government will favour police operations and/or military anti-terrorist actions.

Its approach to resolving the conflict would be very different if it recognised that poverty and unemployment, which massively affects local youth in a context of abundant natural resources, are at the root of the violent conflict in Cabo Delgado. With this outlook, the government could combine military counter-terrorism actions with economic and social policies and measures to promote job creation for youth in the regions most affected by the attacks, while seeking dialogue with the various local authorities to improve the governance of natural resources in ways that would benefit local communities the most.

This is not to reject the government's understanding that the conflict in Cabo Delgado is the result of external terrorist aggression altogether. In fact, the support that the Islamic State (IS), an international terrorist organisation, provides to extremist groups operating in Cabo Delgado is evident. However, whether IS's support for local extremist groups is the prime cause of the conflict is the matter of speculation. Recent studies show that IS support for violent extremism in Cabo Delgado has manifested itself through propaganda that passes in the official IS media, as well as through training, including the use of brutal methods typical of IS (such as the beheading of victims) (Bonate, 2022: 539).

However, IS support for the violent extremists in Cabo Delgado is documented as coming about two years after the attacks began, that is, in mid-2019, when the extremists in Cabo Delgado took a public oath of allegiance (*bayat*) to the caliph and began raising the flag and adopting other symbols of IS (Israel, 2020).

After being admitted into the international terrorist organisation, violent extremists in Cabo Delgado were incorporated into the IS Central Africa Province (IS-CAP) division, along with groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Warner et al., 2022). They were later elevated to provincial status in Mozambique (*Wilayat Mozambique*), with the first reference to this status recorded in March 2022 (Doctor, 2022: 16).

The incorporation of Cabo Delgado's violent extremists into IS could underpin the government's view that the Cabo Delgado attacks are an "external terrorist aggression", but, by this logic, this aggression could only have begun in the second half of 2019, when Cabo Delgado's extremists were effectively admitted and incorporated into the IS group.<sup>1</sup> Before that, the conflict had already been spreading for about two years, since October 2017. Therefore, it is important to find the causes that led to the emergence of the conflict before the violent extremists from Cabo Delgado were admitted to IS. These causes are important because they fall within the phase of latent conflict and, if they had been properly addressed, the emergence of the conflict could have been avoided.

Islamic radicalisation, which is pointed out as one of the causes of the conflict, happened in two ways. First, with the introduction of the jihadist ideology in Cabo Delgado, by young people who were trained abroad, especially at the University of Medina, and brought from there Islamist positions and expressed their dissatisfaction with the socio-political and economic context of northern Mozambique. Then, they continuously trained in their madrassas other young people in Islamist moulds. (Bonate, 2022: 538)

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<sup>1</sup> There is reference that the group's approach to IS happened in early 2018, but the admission did not happen until mid-2019.

However, the introduction of jihadist ideology in Cabo Delgado is said to have started as early as the 1980s, gaining more emphasis in the late 1990s, when foreign-trained youth founded a movement in northern Mozambique called *Ahl al-Sunna* or *Ansar al-Sunna*. Many refer to the group that attacks in Cabo Delgado as *Ansar Al-Sunna Wa Jamma* (Doctor, 2022). However, there is no evidence that *Ahl al-Sunna* is behind these attacks, although it is founded on dissatisfaction with the local reality (Bonate, 2022: 538).

The second form of radicalisation in Cabo Delgado is through the importation of radical Islamist ideas from Tanzania by Mozambican Muslims. They tried to replicate the practices in their homelands, with the first demonstration occurring in 2007 in the District of Balama. This movement, known as *Al-Shabaab* (the youth), grew for about ten years, until in 2016 they “shifted from Islamist sectarianism to armed jihadism” (Morier-Genoud, 2020: 10).

While Islamic radicalisation may be one of the causes of the attacks in Cabo Delgado – whether through the introduction of jihadist ideology by young Mozambicans returning from training in Islamic schools abroad and becoming unhappy with the local reality, or through the importation of jihadist ideology from Tanzania – it would not be the immediate cause. In fact, this process would have taken decades to form and manifest, without leading to violence. Thus, it would be important to find the immediate causes that were instrumental in the emergence of the violent conflict in 2017.

Relevant to this are the discovery of natural resources and their subsequent poor governance. The natural gas discovered in the Rovuma Basin in 2010/2011 has led to major social transformations for local populations. Without proper public consultation and compensation, the Maputo government grabbed thousands of hectares of land from local communities in Palma to allocate to the multinational companies, under concession for gas exploration in the Rovuma Basin, but also to allocate to elites to invest in real estate with the expectation of profiting from the gas industry (*Jornal a Verdade*, 2015).

In addition to forcing the removal of thousands of hectares of land from the people of Palma, the government has shut off access to the sea to Palma’s fishing communities to allow multinational companies to conduct research for gas exploration, without any compensation to anglers for restricting their access to the sea (Mimbire & Nhamirre, 2015). Both the land and the sea are fundamental sources of access to means of livelihoods for the communities. They have suddenly been prevented from benefiting from these natural resources, which has generated feelings of relative deprivation and frustration from community members.

In the same period, a similar situation existed in the Montepuez District, where ruby deposits were discovered in 2009. In 2011, about 36,000 hectares of land were granted to Montepuez Ruby Mining, a company with British capital, allied with influential Frelimo veterans of the national liberation struggle. The exploitation of rubies led to the grabbing of land that was used by local communities for agriculture and, given the occurrence of artisanal mining within the concession area, the artisanal miners were the victims of violence and even killing (*Jornal a Verdade*, 2016).

Some of the artisanal miners expelled from Montepuez ended up joining the violent extremist groups that carry out attacks in Cabo Delgado (Chichava, 2020). Poverty, unemployment and socioeconomic exclusion in accessing jobs in the extractive industry – which require skilled labour – have also played a role in mobilising youth to join violent extremist groups.

A key element in turning privation into organised violence is mobilisation, defined as the process by which a community becomes politicised on behalf of its collective interests and aspirations. Mobilisation requires an awareness, usually fostered by local leadership, that political action is necessary to promote or defend the vital collective interests of the community. This awareness results in the recruitment of individuals into the movement or into organisations that purport to speak for the movement (Esman, 1994).

The mobilisation of a community to claim their vital interests must be based on a common element, which can be ethnicity, tribe or religion. Moreover, in the case of Cabo Delgado, if Islam were used to mobilise the youth into organised political violence, the discovery and poor governance of natural resources in Cabo Delgado is the factor behind this mobilisation and therefore the immediate cause of the conflict.

According to Ngoenha et al. (2020), the war in Cabo Delgado can only be explained by the discovery of natural resources, since religious, ethnic, political and social factors have always existed. However, they previously had no space for expression and only now have found room for expression amid the transformations generated by the discovery of resources in the province.

Ultimately, while factors contributing to the emergence of violent conflict were all in place, the emergence of conflict was only possible due to the prevalence of both weak intelligence services and political leadership, which allowed poor unemployed frustrated youth to be mobilised to initiate attacks. The intelligence services, which have the role of providing the government with the most current and relevant information necessary for decision-making, should have foreseen more accurately the tragedy that was in store for Cabo Delgado. In turn, the political leadership should have taken the necessary decisions, whether social, political, economic or security related, to prevent the conflict from evolving from the latent to the emergent stage.

## **Predominantly military response and conflict escalation**

For about two years after the first attack, the government referred to the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado as “criminal actions perpetrated by faceless evil-doers” (VOA, 2019). Based on this categorisation, the government defined the initial defence strategy of the armed conflict, entrusting the police to lead the response to attacks by deploying units to the villages targeted by the attacks to protect the population. Later, military contingents were deployed to support the police.

The government made no known effort to understand the causes of the conflict so that it could employ appropriate responses to the emergence of the attacks. On the contrary, barriers were created to journalistic investigations and independent research into the attacks, arresting and confiscating equipment of journalists and researchers who travelled to Cabo Delgado province to try to understand the nature of the attacks (Issufo, 2018).

The government’s response to the emergence of the attacks allowed them to spread rapidly. Police and military units deployed to contain the attacks had little grasp of the terrain and local sociocultural context and were repeatedly accused of violating the human rights of local populations, which may have contributed to the extremists mobilising more local support against the government and other symbols of the state (Pirio et al., 2021).

## **Entry of new external actors and escalation of conflict**

Conflict escalation refers to an increase in the intensity of a conflict and the severity of the tactics used by the parties. It is galvanised by changes within each of the parties, new patterns of interaction between the parties and the involvement of new actors (Kriesberg, 1998, as cited in Maiese, 2003). In the Cabo Delgado conflict, escalation was seen with the admission of local violent extremist groups to IS and the Mozambican government’s hiring of foreign private military companies/contractors (PMCs) in the second half of 2019.



There was also a change in operational tactics on both sides. Between March and April 2020 and after being admitted to IS, violent extremist groups began to attack district headquarters villages, overrun and expel governmental forces, and temporarily occupy the attacked villages. Mocimboa da Praia was the first district headquarters village to be attacked and temporarily occupied in March 2020, followed by Quissanga and Namacande (Muidumbe). The attackers destroyed local governmental palaces, district police commands, courts, and other infrastructure symbolic of state power.

In Quissanga, the attackers showed their faces for the first time in a video recorded and disseminated through social networks, in which an apparent leader of the group appears standing in the palace of the district government. This apparent leader raised a black and white flag with writing in Arabic, symbolic of IS, and stated, in Portuguese, the purpose of the attacks and that their fight was not for wealth. They added that the Frelimo flag was to be replaced with this flag, and the law of Allah was to be applied in the country (Pinto, 2020).

For its part, the government, through the National Council for Defence and Security (CNDS)<sup>2</sup> met in April of the same year (2020) and raised the category of the armed conflict from actions of evil-doers to external aggression perpetrated by terrorists. It substantiated the new categorisation of the conflict by pointing out that responsibility for the attacks had been claimed by IS, a terrorist organisation (Republic of Mozambique, 2020).

The new categorisation of the conflict was accompanied by a change in the government's approach to its response. Soon after this, the government turned to private military companies to help contain the attacks and protect economic projects and sites of strategic importance.

Rubin et al. (1994: 48, cited in Maiese, 2003) listed five changes that occur as a conflict is seen to escalate:

- first, the parties move from light tactics to heavy tactics;
- second, the conflict grows in size/intensity;
- third, the issues of dispute move from specific to general;
- fourth, the number of actors involved in the conflict grows from one to many, as more actors are drawn into the conflict; and
- fifth, the goal of the parties changes from "doing well" to winning and ultimately to harming the other.

These changes are found in the Cabo Delgado conflict, precisely in this period when, with support from the Islamic State, violent extremists attacked and occupied district headquarters villages with the aim of destroying all symbols of the state. The government hired private military companies and indiscriminately bombed places identified as occupied by extremists. It began to disseminate information of bombings in the press, including photographs, videos and details of types of weaponry used for combat. For example, one press release from the Ministry of National Defence stated that in keeping with the operational plan in the northern part of the country, the Defence and Security Forces launched (another) artillery strike on Tuesday, 22 October 2019, against a place of refuge of the rebels, in the region of Miangalewa, in Muidumbe District, in Cabo Delgado Province, using a mixed battery of 122.4 millimetre B11-P cannons and 120 mm mortars (*Jornal Zambeze*, 2019).

The government of Mozambique has never confirmed the presence of private military companies in Cabo Delgado; however, from several credible sources it is possible to confirm the presence, at different times, of at least three private military compa-

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<sup>2</sup> CNDS is a state body for specific consultation on matters relating to national sovereignty, territorial integrity, the defence of democratically established power, and the security of the President of the Republic in matters of defence and security. Cf. Number 1 of Article 264 of the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique

nies. As shown in Table 1, two of the three private military companies in Cabo Delgado conducted combat operations, while one was dedicated to training and advising the Armed Defence Forces of Mozambique (FADM).

**Table 1.** Private Military Companies present in Cabo Delgado

Company	Origin	Arrival	Withdrawal	Main activities	Obs
Wagner Group	Russia	September 2019	November 2019	conduct combat operations on land	PMC active or military provider
Dyck Advisory Group (DAG)	South Africa	April 2020	April 2021	conduct combat air operations, logistical support to the gsf, advice	PMC active or military provider
Paramount & Burnham	South Africa & Dubai	February 2021	Still present	advising, training and supplying military equipment	PMC passive, military consultant

Source: Compiled by CDD

The first foreign PMC to arrive in Cabo Delgado to combat extremist violence was the Wagner Group from Russia. It arrived in Mozambique in September 2019, with military equipment and about 200 men (Simonson, 2021). For about two months, Wagner operatives engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Cabo Delgado. In November of the same year, the company withdrew, under allegations of disagreements with the FADM and casualties of about ten men in its contingent (Hill, 2021).

After Wagner Group withdrew in September 2020, Mozambique turned to another private military company, Dyck Advisory Group (DAG), based in South Africa. Up to that point, DAG was a private security company but accepted the active PMC assignment, the director being a counterinsurgency specialist from then-Rhodesia. It arrived in Pemba with four civilian helicopters with guns attached and manned by a few dozen men. The DAG engaged in air combat, providing cover for the Mozambique Defence and Security Forces (McKenzie, 2021).

In February 2021, Mozambique contracted a third private military company, a consortium formed by the Paramount Group, based in South Africa, and Burnham Global, based in Dubai. The consortium provides military training and advisory services to the Defence and Security Forces (Burnham Global, 2021). Unlike the first two, the Paramount-Burnham consortium's role has been more military consultant, as opposed to active PMC.

Like the government's police and military response, the presence of PMCs in Cabo Delgado was not enough to stop or contain the attacks by violent extremist groups. During the presence of the PMCs, the conflict continued to escalate, with the extremists carrying out their largest attacks on district headquarters villages that they temporarily occupied. In the case of Mocimboa da Praia, the occupation lasted a year, even with DAG presence in Cabo Delgado.

From March 2020 to March 2021, violent extremists attacked and occupied five villages in five districts, starting with Mocimboa da Praia in March 2020 and ending with Palma in March 2021. In total, they attacked Mocimboa da Praia three times (23 March, 27 June and 11 August 2020), resulting in seven attacks in total. In the last attack on Mocimboa da Praia, they occupied the village for a year (until August 2021), and only the arrival of Rwandan troops in 2021 could drive them out of the village. Although the presence of the DAG gave some air supremacy to the Defence and Security Forces, this was not enough to contain the expansion of the attacks.

## **Stalemate and the request for help from the foreign community**

The last major attack on a district headquarters town by violent extremists was on 24 March 2021, in Palma. The attack took place seven months after the extremists occupied the strategic town of Mocimboa da Praia (11 August 2020), about 80 km south of Palma. Studies following the Palma attack indicate that more than 200 militants were involved in the attack, which was possible because of the occupation of Mocimboa da Praia (Lister, 2021: 20).

The period from the assault and occupation of Mocimboa da Praia to the beginning of the intervention of Rwandan and SAMIM forces in Cabo Delgado (July 2021), passing through the battle of Palma, can be considered the impasse, also known as the hurting stalemate of the conflict.

According to Rubin et al. (1994: 152–155, as cited in Maiese, 2003), once conflicts reach escalation, they usually reach a stalemate, a situation in which neither side can win but neither wishes to back down or accept defeat. Deadlocks arise for a variety of reasons, including failed tactics, exhaustion of available resources to fuel the conflict, reduced support for the conflict by group members or allies, or costs that become too high to sustain.

In the case of the conflict in Cabo Delgado, there was a notable stalemate cost to the governmental troops in the period from the occupation of Mocimboa da Praia to the arrival of troops from Rwanda and SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). Indeed, the use of failed tactics was notable, such as the hiring of PMCs that did not stop the advance of violent extremist groups, as well as the depletion of available resources to fuel the conflict. All of these led the government to request support from the European Union in training, logistics for the forces to combat terrorism, equipment for medical care in combat zones and technical training of personnel (CDD, 2020).

While the request for help from the European Union was expressed about 40 days after the occupation of Mocimboa da Praia, the government took longer to request the deployment of military forces in Cabo Delgado. It did so after the attack on Palma, allowing the deployment of troops from Rwanda and the SADC regional block.

## **Foreign military intervention weakened violent extremists, but did not end the conflict**

The military intervention by Rwandan and SADC forces, which consisted of deploying thousands of soldiers and military equipment to fight violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, contributed to changing the balance of forces, increasing the power of governmental forces and weakening the violent extremists. The arrival of foreign troops saw the conflict beginning to de-escalate, but the threat has not yet been eliminated, and the conflict is not over.

It is estimated that approximately 4,000 military and police personnel from five African countries (Rwanda, South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania and Lesotho) have been deployed in five districts of Cabo Delgado (Palma, Mocimboa da Praia, Nangade, Mueda and Macomia). These, adding to the governmental forces, reach about 5,000 military personnel in Cabo Delgado fighting a group now estimated at fewer than 1,000 combatants.

The districts of Palma and Mocimboa da Praia are those that have received the most military personnel, with about 2,000 troops of the Rwandan Defence Forces and the Rwandan National Police, plus a few hundred from the Mozambican Defence and Security Forces. The main objective of the forces deployed in these two districts is to

protect the gas exploration, liquefaction and logistics projects in the Rovuma Basin, although they may also conduct special operations in other districts to help open and clear roads to and from other strategic access sites to Mocimboa da Praia.<sup>3</sup> Rwandan forces, deployed in Palma and Mocimboa da Praia Districts, quickly helped to reclaim this city from occupation by extremist groups and strengthened governmental control in Palma District (Nhamirre, 2021).

SADC planned to deploy some 2,900 personnel to Cabo Delgado, but at the beginning of the mandate, less than half of this number (about 1,400 personnel) were deployed. Officially eight out of the 16 SADC member states are listed as personal contributing countries to SAMIM, namely, Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe (SADC, 2021), but not all have combat forces on the ground. Only four of these states have combat forces on the ground, namely, South Africa (command), Botswana, Lesotho and Tanzania. The others have sent logistical, training and other specialists in an advisory capacity.<sup>4</sup>

Of the four states with troops on the ground, the largest contingent is from South Africa, ranging from 900 to 1,000, personnel depending on surrender periods, followed by Botswana and Tanzania, with about 300 personnel each. Lesotho has deployed approximately 100 personnel. By August/September 2022, the number of SAMIM personnel in Cabo Delgado was around 1,600 units. In particular, South Africa had contributed only about 700 personnel; over time there was an increase, reaching the current numbers of approximately 900 to 1,000 troops,<sup>5</sup> deployed to Pemba, Macomia, including the distinguished Combat Group Alpha based in Macomia (*defenceWeb*, 2022), of which about 100 are cooks, clerks, sappers, *tiffies* (mechanics) and doctors and are not in the field of combat.<sup>6</sup>

SAMIM forces have been deployed as a regional response to support the Republic of Mozambique in combating terrorism and acts of violent extremism and are stationed in the districts of Nangade (Tanzania and Lesotho), Mueda (Botswana) and Macomia (South Africa). Moreover, South Africa conducts naval patrol operations in the Indian Ocean in conjunction with the Mozambique Defence and Security Forces.

SAMIM helped destroy key insurgent bases, reopen some roadways and rescue civilian populations who were in the captivity of extremist groups, and with these results enabled the transition from the Scenario 6 mission (rapid deployment capability) to Scenario 5 (multidimensional force). Multidimensional force includes the SADC Peace-Building Support Programme, which “is aimed at enhancing social protection mechanisms, law and order, humanitarian assistance” and “capacity building of police and correctional services”, as well as “skills development programmes for youth and women for their social development” (SADC, 2022, paras. 1–2).

As a result of the foreign military intervention, in the last quarter of 2021, the intensity of the conflict began to decrease and has dropped to 2017 levels (Lusa, 2022), which reflects the reduction in the number of attacks and deaths caused by attacks by violent extremists. Chart 1 reflects the general trend, according to Brahm’s (2003) stages of conflict, with approximate dates of the Cabo Delgado conflict overlaid.

<sup>3</sup> Interview granted by a member of FADM stationed in Cabo Delgado.

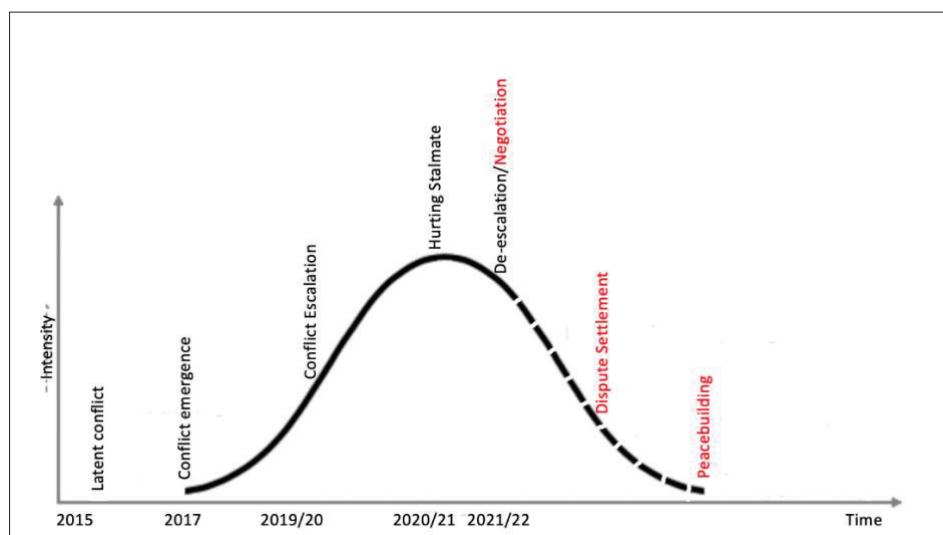
<sup>4</sup> Interview granted by a security consultant in September 2022, in Pemba City

<sup>5</sup> Interview granted by security consultants in September 2022, in Pemba.

<sup>6</sup> Interview granted by a member of the Defence and Security Forces of Mozambique in September 2022, in the city of Pemba.



**Chart 1.** Stages of evolution of the Cabo Delgado conflict



**Source:** Adapted from Brahm's (2003) model of conflict stages.

However, the reduction in the number of attacks alone does not mean the end of violent conflict. Non-military actions must accompany the reduction of attacks for the conflict to end. Kriesberg (2003) explains the conditions necessary for de-escalation of a conflict:

Conflict de-escalation and transformation are often also associated with reduced grievances, at least for members of one side. This change occurs as relations between the adversaries change, in the course of the struggle. Thus, some rights that one party sought may be at least partially won, and that party's goals are then accordingly softened.

It is important that in the conflict de-escalation stage, the causes of the conflict are addressed, even if only partially. Therefore, in the Cabo Delgado conflict, if the causes of the conflict are the radicalisation of local youth in a context of poverty, social and economic inequalities, poor governance of natural resources, then it is necessary to begin to resolve these problems so that the de-escalation of the conflict becomes effective and peace building takes place.

The resolution of the causes of the Cabo Delgado conflict can be done through the effective implementation of initiatives such as the Integrated Development Agency of the North (ADIN) (*Jornal Notícias*, 2021) and the abandoned Strategy for Resilience and Development of the North (ERDIN) (Nhamirre, 2022), which aim for inclusive development of the local communities of northern Mozambique. However, neither of these projects has been implemented, and the government continues to give priority to military actions.

## **Although weakened, violent extremists show resilience**

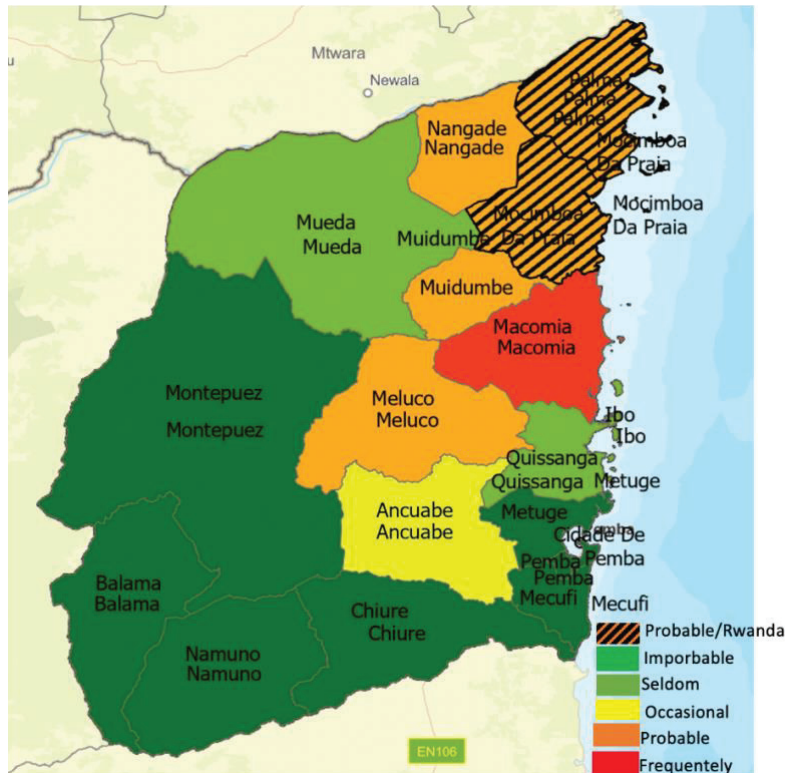
The violent extremist groups are weaker than they were in the period before the arrival of foreign troops, but they are not defeated. They still have the military might to carry out attacks throughout the province of Cabo Delgado. Even if they are not of great magnitude, such as the assault and occupation of villages and district headquarters, they are enough to threaten the security of the population and the Defence and Security Forces deployed on the ground.

The fieldwork for this policy brief was carried out in August and September 2022 in Cabo Delgado. It was found that serious risks of attacks by violent extremist groups

prevailed in ten of Cabo Delgado’s 17 districts, as assessed by members of the military forces deployed on the ground who were interviewed.<sup>7</sup>

In five districts of Cabo Delgado (Palma, Mocimboa da Praia, Nangade, Muidumbe and Meluco), the occurrence of attacks was considered probable. In Macomia district (where the South African National Defence Forces, which command SAMIM, are based), the occurrence of attacks was described as frequent, while in Mueda, Quissanga and Ibo (island near the coast) Districts, the occurrence of attacks was described as occasional. In Ancuabe District, the occurrence of attacks was described as seldom (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Occurrence of violent extremist attacks in Cabo Delgado (August and September 2022)



**Source:** Interviews with military personnel in Cabo Delgado

In the same period (August and September 2022), violent extremist leaders were active and operating in at least three districts of Cabo Delgado, namely, Abu Faisal, Dade, Ulanga and Issa Wachio (in Nangade District); Ibin Omar (Muidumbe); and Sheikh Hassan, Sheikh Ibrahim and Zuberi (Macomia). In the Nkoe region, located on the west side of National Road N380 in the north–south direction, in Macomia district, the largest number of leaders of the violent extremists were concentrated. These included Farido Machude, Quadrado Mahamud, Ntatcha Ali Shara, Abu Yunnus, Ali Omar, Dardai, Mustafa, Jualbibibi, Kibo and Abu Jariri.<sup>8</sup> However, their bases were subsequently attacked and occupied by government forces, though days later, there was a major counterattack that led to the death of 16 military personnel of FADM, as claimed by IS (Baptista, 2022).

In the same period, there were bases of the violent extremists active in the districts of Palma (Pundanhar area), Macomia, Muidumbe, Nangande and Ancuabe (in this dis-

<sup>7</sup> Interviews granted by members of the military in Pemba, Cabo Delgado, in August and September 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Interview granted by SAMIM members in Pemba, Cabo Delgado in August 2022.

trict the bases are described as transit for recruitment operations and attacks in the southern region of Cabo Delgado and Nampula).<sup>9</sup>

Before the intervention of foreign troops, violent extremist bases were fixed and inhabited by hundreds and sometimes thousands of people, including captured civilians and women forced to live as the extremists' wives. Currently, they have changed their mode of operation to temporary bases of occupation (lasting for weeks or months) inhabited almost exclusively by fighters.<sup>10</sup>

Civilians on the bases were either voluntarily released by the extremists or rescued in attacks conducted by governmental forces and allies. Meanwhile, new recruits captured or enticed to join the group are continuously and permanently trained in the bases of the extremist groups. The best-known bases during the period when the fieldwork was conducted are:

- Sheik Hassane's base, led by Sheik Hassane (religious leader) and by Ibin Omar (military leader), and including other leaders of the group such as Abu Aroni, Quadrado, Zuberi Ribati, Namatil and Dardai Jongo;
- Sheik Muhamudu's base, led by Sheik Muhamudu (religious leader) and by Fari-do (military leader), and including Machude, Ngovu and Natacha (man); and
- Sheik Ibrahim's base, led by Sheik Ibrahim (religious leader) and Bonje (military leader), and including Juma, Issa wa Niassa, Falume, Mzee Ntivili, Juali Bibi and Ribati Kibo.

In structural terms, the bases of the violent extremist groups are located on terrain that allows them good aerial observation (to see approaching fighter planes of governmental forces) and trenches. Training camps for recruits and classes are held in *madrasas* for the indoctrination process.

**Macomia District:** at the time of the fieldwork, it was assessed that violent extremists had found a safe haven in the forests of Nkoe, Litandacua and New Zambezia, with the capacity to continue their dispersed deployment, particularly in the villages that are west of the N380.

**Nangade District:** Violent extremist actions were concentrated in the region, particularly in the villages of Ntamba, Namuembe and Nambedo.

**Mocimboa da Praia District:** Violent extremists operated between the villages of Mitope and Chitolo.

**Mueda District:** There were no bases of the violent extremists, but the situation was unpredictable, and there were cases of the group's conducting reconnaissance missions.

**Muidumbe District:** It is believed that a base is harbouring Ibin Omar, from where actions were planned and executed in this district and in Mueda District.

**Palma District:** The activities of violent extremist groups were concentrated in the region of Pundanhar and Nhica do Ruvuma, near the Rovuma River.

**Ancuabe District:** There was a transition base for attack and recruitment operations in the south of Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces.

With regard to operations, it has been determined that violent extremists conduct reconnaissance and combat operations in groups of three to 20 members to avoid being detected. Regarding logistics, in addition to stealing from populations, violent extremist groups conduct fishing and extract drinking water from Lake Chai and the Messalo River and receive funding from supporters within and outside of Mozambique, transferred

<sup>9</sup> Interview granted by members of the Defence and Security Forces in Pemba, Cabo Delgado in September 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Interview granted by FDS member in Pemba, September 2022.

through Hawala (not legalised in Mozambique), MPesa and e-Mola (registered in Mozambique and supervised by the Central Bank) mobile money systems.

## Scenarios of conflict evolution

Having seen the history and the current stage of the Cabo Delgado conflict, two scenarios of its evolution are drawn.

**Scenario 1, more likely:** The government will continue to insist on employing predominantly military means to counter violent extremism and this will prolong the conflict (for at least the next five to ten years) as extremists show resilience to operations from government and allied forces. The government will continue to receive military support from partners in training and equipment, but it will not be enough to stop the continuing attacks. In turn, violent extremists will be able to increase their fighting capability by adopting new skills, including the manufacture and use of bombs known as improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that can be used for more lethal ambush attacks on highways and booby-trap attacks on urban centres and foreign economic interests. Attacks will be more concentrated in central and southern Cabo Delgado and the district of Nangande and northern Palma, while the area of the Rovuma Basin natural gas exploration and liquefaction projects will remain relatively secure. Similarly, at sea, there will be relative security, as violent extremists have not shown the ability to project forces at sea beyond islands located a few kilometres off the coast of Macomia and Mocimboa de Praia.

**Scenario 2, less likely:** The government will recognise the internal causes of the conflict (radicalisation of local communities in a context of poverty, inequality, social and economic exclusion of populations in resource-rich areas) and, in parallel with military actions, will design strategies and plans, and implement measures to address these causes. This will contribute to the prevention of radicalisation of local communities that are used as raw material for violent extremism and therefore lead to the weakening of extremist groups owing to a lack of local support. In turn, extremist groups will gradually lose strength on account of lack of support and reduce their combat capability to low threat levels. To reach this situation would require about three to five years of consistent work in preventing radicalisation in communities.

## Conclusion

Violent extremism in Cabo Delgado is based on internal causes such as the radicalisation of local communities, especially among the youth, in a context of extreme poverty, inequality, social and economic exclusion, and discovery and mismanagement of natural resources, which has taken away access to means of livelihood (land for farming and sea for fishing) from local communities.

The intelligence services and political leadership failed to assess the seriousness of the threat of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado and therefore took no measures to prevent the conflict from emerging. Once the attacks began, the government's response was predominantly military, which failed to address the causes of the conflict. Instead, owing to certain excesses in the actions of governmental forces deployed to Cabo Delgado to contain the attacks, extremist groups enjoyed some local support, which facilitated the recruitment of more young people.

The entrance of international actors into the conflict on both sides – IS on the part of the violent extremist groups and private military companies in support of the government – served to escalate the conflict, which lasted until the stalemate of the occupation of Mocimboa da Praia for about a year. The attack on the village of Palma, in the heart of the gas exploitation projects, was the most daring action by the violent extremist groups and served as a reason for the government to accept the intervention of foreign military troops.

With the military intervention of Rwandan and SADC forces, the extremist groups have been weakened but not defeated, which creates opportunity for implementing actions to address the internal causes of the conflict.

In the meantime, the most likely scenario is that the government will continue to focus on military actions to counter violent extremism, and this will lead to the prolonging of the conflict and even the attacks by violent extremist groups becoming more sophisticated. Indeed, the extremists may develop skills in the manufacture and use of IEDs, ushering in a new phase of conflict in which urban centres and foreign economic interests may be directly targeted through booby-trap attacks.



# Recommendations

## To the government of Mozambique

Continue military operations to contain the expansion of attacks while introducing measures for the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and de-radicalise youth in liberated areas and districts prone to the expansion of violent extremist attacks.

PVE measures should include listening to communities about their concerns/complaints and providing immediate responses.

Involve religious and traditional leaders in finding solutions to local concerns. Create employment opportunities for women and youth in areas affected by violent extremist attacks, beginning with vocational training and employment of women and youth in the reconstruction of Cabo Delgado.

Decriminalise artisanal mining and create conditions so that so-called illegal miners have the opportunity to work legally in the local mining industry, especially for Montepuez Rubies.

Propose to parliament the approval of an amnesty law for young Mozambicans recruited and radicalised by violent extremists and subsequently implement a plan of amnesty for, de-radicalisation and reintegration of such young people.

Initiate a coming-together of parties, aimed at facilitating dialogue with local leaders of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado for the resolution of disputes, involving local religious leaderships.

## To SADC

Reinforce the military personnel deployed to Cabo Delgado in order to increase the territorial coverage of operations to combat violent extremism.

Persuade the Mozambican government to combine military operations with alternative peace-seeking actions, including the resolution of local grievances and dialogue initiatives with local insurgent leaderships.

Mobilise more support for the implementation of the SADC Peace-Building Support Programme.

## To international partners

Provide logistical and training support to Mozambique's defence and security forces to counter violent extremism while respecting human rights and international humanitarian law for combatants and civilians in conflict zones.

Encourage the Mozambican government to initiate dialogue with local leaders of violent extremism.

Support PVE programmes in northern Mozambique and monitor their implementation.





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# Dialogue for Conflict Resolution in Cabo Delgado

**A**s a result of research on the nature of the conflict and its root causes, as well as issues and options regarding its resolution, CDD builds on the recognition that application of force in itself will not end the conflict. A comprehensive approach to conflict resolution is therefore required. To this end, dialogue that recognizes the essential value of local knowledge and communities' insights, as well as their aspirations, is vital.



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