



# VPSHR

VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLES  
SECURITY  
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## IN CABO DELGADO BULLETIN

RESOLUTION DIALOGUE

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## Observations relating to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Technical Assessment Mission's report (Intelligence Analysis)



Credits: Rádio Moçambique

**O**n 27 April 2021, the report of the SADC Technical Assessment Mission was leaked to the public. The Mission had been deployed to Mozambique 15-22 April to conduct an assessment and provide recommendations on the conflict in Cabo Delgado on behalf of the Double Troika plus Angola. The leaked report, signed by the Mission's chairperson

Botswanan Brigadier Michael Mukokomani, recommended both support to Mozambique's Defence and Security Forces (FDS) and the deployment of a 3,000-strong SADC force to Cabo Delgado. However, several of its claims, particularly in sections 2.10 – 2.13 (Intelligence Analysis), are highly questionable and merit further scrutiny:

## 2.10 Intelligence Analysis

**Claim:** *“The attacks target both local and foreign owned businesses.”*

Observations: Though local businesses have been a frequent target over the course of the conflict, damage to foreign-owned businesses has been mostly of a collateral nature, with very limited specific targeting. Despite damage to some foreign businesses, the initial attack in Palma on 24 March 2021 followed the established Violent Extreme

mist (VE) modus operandi of priority targeting of FDS and government facilities, with damage to foreign business only occurring in subsequent looting of the town. Additionally, much of the reported looting of foreign businesses is likely to have been conducted after the withdrawal of large VE concentrations from the town in the first week of April.

**Claim:** *“The possibilities of renewed attacks are high after Ramadan however this does not rule out the likelihood of attacks during the fasting period.”*

Observations: Over the previous three years of the conflict, there has been little clear correlation of attacks to the Ramadan / Eid al Fitr period (and this year was no different). Though attacks have frequently increased in the period of March-June, this is likely due to environmental conditions related to the transition from rainy to dry season. The historic record of attacks shows little difference – either of a decrease or increase – in operational cadence

during Ramadan compared to the periods immediately before or after. Conversely, Salafi-Jihadi groups elsewhere in the world frequently escalate attacks significantly during the Ramadan / Eid periods. The report’s correlation of Ramadan with VE activity likely stems from an incorrect view that seeks to exaggerate external Salafi-Jihadi / Islamic State (IS) influence in order to obfuscate local socio-economic grievances in motivating conflict.

## 2.11 Intelligence Analysis

**Claim:** *“There are indications that terrorists receive external support from individuals in various countries. It is however not conclusive that they only get support from the above-mentioned countries. The main suppliers of the terrorists are unconfirmed, but it is suspected that they are supplied by the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP).”*

Observations: There is no clear evidence that VE receive significant external support outside of bordering regions in Tanzania, where local communities share significant historic, cultural and social links with those in Cabo Delgado. Though there have been reports of individuals among VE from outside the region, these are likely irregular cases and there is no evidence that this represents a significant flow of fighters or equipment. The VE arsenal is entirely com-

posed of locally available equipment, with most of it being looted from captured FDS bases. VE have demonstrated no advanced capabilities, which would normally accompany outside support from IS, such as the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Again, this claim likely stems from a view to exaggerate external influence rather than acknowledging the overwhelming conflict driver, which is intrinsically linked to local grievances.

**Claim:** *"It is assessed that the terrorists selected Cabo Delgado as a main Headquarters because it is strategically located since it has easy access to the sea and FADM does not have adequate naval assets to patrol the maritime domain in the AOO, porous borders, and commonality in Kiswahili language, Islamic religion and easy movement of foreign fighters into the region and beyond as well affording them easy access for resupplies."*

Observations: Though there is limited propaganda coordination between VE and IS, there is nothing to indicate that VE receives operational guidance from IS. Though IS takes credit for VE operations, direct links are highly limited, especially those which would facilitate IS establishing a "headquarters" in Cabo Delgado. Though the

littoral zone and porous borders are important for VE, this is almost certainly due to illicit trade flows rather than receiving material support from foreign militant groups. The conflict emerged in Cabo Delgado due to a decades-long evolution in local dynamics rather than IS 'choosing' the province to conduct operations.

## 2.12 Terrorists Centres of Gravity (COG)

**Claim:** *"Strategic COG: External Support"*

Observations: As previously discussed, significant external support is limited to that from historically linked communities in nearby areas of Tanzania. In reality, the strategic COG for VE

is support from disenfranchised local communities (including the ability to finance activities through illicit trade and proficiency in exploiting the geographical and human terrain).

**Claim:** *"Operational COG: Freedom of movement through maritime, land borders and airspace in the Area of Operation"*

Observations: Freedom of movement within Cabo Delgado is much more operationally important than freedom of movement outside the active conflict zone. Though the ability to infiltrate the Tanzanian border (as well as control certain landing zones

and the immediate littoral area) are significant operational factors for VE, this is highly likely due to conflict financing through illicit trade flows. There is no evidence that VE have exploited movements in 'airspace' in any way.

**Claim:** *"Tactical COG: Local terrorist leadership. Identifying and arresting of local leadership"*

Observations: Though leadership cadres were very important in the early and pre-conflict stages, recent evidence indicates that some VE cell/group-level leadership is composed of relatively young and recent recruits, which could likely be easily replaced. Higher-level leadership is more significant in providing overall 'operational' influence and direction - to satisfy a multitude of in-

terests - as well as organising financial support and coordinating a larger network in areas outside the immediate conflict zone. For example, informants, criminal interlocutors and recruiters. The most significant tactical factor in VE success has been their combat proficiency and morale relative to that of the Mozambique Armed Defence Forces (FADM).

**Claim:** *“Critical Capabilities: Instilling fear and propaganda amongst the local population (use of social media and other platforms).”*

Observations: While fear and propaganda are important factors, the overwhelming majority has been conducted at a direct local level (such as word of mouth, SMS, other person-to-person messaging, and use of terror tactics in attacks), rather than through use of social media and other platforms. VE propaganda that has been published on social media has been extremely unsophis-

ticated and infrequent, mostly in the form of crude mobile phone videos and uncaptioned photographs spread through unofficial channels. Insinuations of significant VE exploitation of social media sets a dangerous precedent for the already poor state of freedom of expression in Mozambique, which is further threatened by the new media law under consideration by the government.

**Claim:** *“Critical Requirements: sustainment (funding, looting, food, clothing, weapons, recruitment, support base) and maritime freedom of movement.”*

Observations: Though sustainment is clearly a critical requirement for VE, maritime movements have been limited to the littoral zone out to approximately 15-20km offshore. Littoral activity at sea has been restricted to coastal transit and ex-

ploitation of illicit trade flows, using basic non-motorised vessels. Additionally, existing government restrictions on civilian maritime activities has negatively impacted local livelihoods and the humanitarian situation.

## 2.13 Terrorists Courses of Action

**Claim:** *“Strategic: Requirement of strategic and operational intelligence to identify and stop external support in all domains (Land, Air, Maritime and Cyber). Once these are identified, conduct terror activities in the identified countries that are seen to be supporting Mozambique.”*

Observations: The conflict in Cabo Delgado is based on local community dynamics and long-standing grievances. There is no evidence that VE have any interest outside of the immediate region and any expansion will almost certainly be restricted to nearby and related communities living under similar conditions. In the limi-

ted public propaganda distributed by the group, they have consistently emphasised that their struggle is against representations of the Mozambican government alone. There is no clear evidence to suggest a concrete evolution to a classic Salafi-Jihadi model, which might seek to threaten the wider region.

**Claim:** *“Operational: Aggressive and continuous radicalization, recruitment, causing fear and panic within the local population in order to expand the caliphate in Cabo Delgado and to the SADC Region.”*

Observations: Radicalisation, recruitment and coercion of local populations are important operational factors. However, the report neglects to mention that the degradation of the government's ability to exert influence – through destruction of public infrastructure, removal of FDS, civil servants and collaborators – is an equally important operational aim. Though VE have voiced their ambition to establish some form of local autonomy or control, underpinned by stricter Islam, there has been no realistic

rhetoric from VE of establishing or expanding a “caliphate” in line with Salafi-Jihadi principles. An expansion beyond Cabo Delgado (never mind the wider SADC region) is unrealistic and demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of the current situation. VE have limited local objectives, as previously discussed, and therefore any terror threat to other SADC countries – aside from southern Tanzania – is likely to come from homegrown extremism rather than originating from Cabo Delgado.

**Claim:** *“Tactical: Gather intelligence to profile all local leadership in order to conduct targeted terror operations.”*

Observations: Being rooted in local communities, VE have an extremely advanced knowledge of local leadership profiles throughout the conflict zone, and have targeted such individuals from the inception of the conflict. Much more important for VE is their

ability to gather intelligence on FDS strengths, positions and movements through their extensive networks of informants - including some reportedly within the FDS - as well as dominating important areas and routes to maintain an influence over illicit trade.



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