



# PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CABO DELGADO

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION SERIES (NUMBER 4)

## **Risks and opportunities: the use of combined operations against violent extremism in Cabo Delgado**

Combined military operations are operations conducted by forces of two or more nations acting together for the accomplishment of a common strategy.<sup>1</sup> In the Mozambique context, combined operations include the activities of Rwandan military and security forces and Mozambican Armed Defence Forces (FADM) in Cabo Delgado, and potentially future operations that also include Southern African Development Community (SADC) forces - thus creating a complex multinational security landscape.



<sup>1</sup> Unlike joint operations that defines the collaborations between land, sea and air forces of a single nation, or multi-agency operations that defines collaborations between military, police and intelligence services.



**G**lobal experience indicates that military operations alone will not resolve a violent extremist conflict, particularly when the conflict is driven by socio-economic deprivation, ethnic marginalisation and intra-religious frustrations - and influenced by illicit trade and organised crime - as is the case in Cabo Delgado. Moreover, reliance on military approaches alone is more likely to exacerbate the conflict than resolve it. However, combined military operations can play an important role in setting the conditions for conflict resolution, particularly if they are carefully designed and executed in line with a coherent strategy that includes resolution dialogue, development, and preventing and countering violent extremist (P/CVE) initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

This briefing note aims to identify some key considerations for conducting combined operations, in the context of Cabo Delgado, to inform planning processes and ensure military forces contribute to conflict resolution rather than exacerbating violent extremism.

Clear articulation and understanding of the mission, intent and objectives at all levels:

This is critical in any context, but vital when cultural, linguistic, political and military differences are in play between forces that have never trained or worked together before. At

the strategic level, and prior to any military action by foreign forces, the threat of combined operations should be leveraged to encourage the violent extremists to seek a negotiated solution or opt for offers of amnesty. This can be achieved through effective communications and military posturing to demonstrate combined capability and credibility, which aims to persuade the violent extremists to seek peaceful resolution or face the consequences. This is aligned to the SADC regulation of exhausting all other attempts to resolve conflict prior to the use of military intervention.

Also, at the strategic level, it is key to define what a combined operation seeks to achieve and why, which should include a clear definition of the conditions of success. This will not only guide operational planning, but inform the exit strategy for foreign forces to ensure that perpetual intervention and reliance on external actors is avoided. Since communication of the details of the strategic intent is highly unlikely to compromise military operations, it should be made public to foster support from the population for combined military approaches.

At the operational level there should be consideration of the types of operation the

<sup>2</sup> See CDD Conflict Resolution Series (Numbers 2 and 3)



respective forces will conduct.<sup>3</sup> Fundamentally, this will define whether forces operate in a defensive / protective role or offensively. In the defensive / protective role, strategically important locations, such as the Afungi LNG site and neighbouring Palma town, could be secured. This would allow LNG development to continue and therefore provide a much-needed source of revenue to the local community. Managed correctly, revenues from LNG development could then be used to alleviate socio-economic depravity and the lack of employment opportunities, which have contributed to the onset of violent extremism. Furthermore, providing foreign forces with key areas to secure and protect frees-up Mozambican forces to conduct offensive operations elsewhere. In turn, this will exert further pressure on the violent extremists and help set the conditions for a peaceful resolution through other means.

In the Cabo Delgado context, offensive operations by foreign forces carry more risk.

Most of the risk is identified in the section relating to International Humanitarian Law below. In addition, successful offensive operations by foreign forces will still require Mozambican forces to conduct a 'relief in place' in order to resume responsibility for recaptured areas. If the conflict is not resolved when this happens, it is likely that Mozambican forces will, once again, be vulnerable to violent extremist action, as they were when they lost the territory in the first place.

Foreign forces will be under Mozambican command, as confirmed by President Nyusi on 7 July 2021. However, this command status still permits foreign contingents to be deployed independently to areas where they will have tactical freedom. Therefore, regardless of whether operations are offensive or defensive, specific restrictions, constraints and coordination measures need to be identified from the outset, with the ultimate responsibility resting with Mozambican authorities.

<sup>3</sup> Foreign troops can be deployed in a variety of scenarios, either to conduct offensive operations against VE, as was the case with the French-led mission in the Sahel, or in a defensive capacity, protecting infrastructures, government officials and populations from the threat of VE, as was the case with the SANDF deployment in CAR in 2013.

## **Ensuring the strict application of International Humanitarian Law (IHL):**

IHL (also known as the Law of Armed Conflict) is a set of rules that seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict on non-combatants. IHL also seeks to restrict the means and methods of warfare as to lessen the impact it has on societies, both combatants and non-combatants.

In the context of the conflict in CD, IHL will serve to protect Mozambicans from human rights abuses. Foreign forces, as uniformed servicemen, are bound to respect IHL. Sanctions through international bodies can be imposed against individuals, organisations, and even states if these laws are breached. Moreover, strict adherence to IHL by foreign forces, on top of being a legal requirement, will also be key to winning the support of the local population. Local people need to know they can trust foreign forces to act ethically and in line with legal requirements to protect life and property.

Clear mechanisms must be available to the local population to report abuses, and transparency must be integral to this system. Without a clear and transparent commitment to upholding IHL, foreign forces will most likely further exacerbate tensions and add grievances to an already marginalised population. As a minimum, foreign forces must be briefed

by their officers to ensure they are fully aware of rules of engagement and the need to protect non-combatants. Any abuses of civilians must be swiftly handled as to prevent an appearance of impunity for foreign forces. Furthermore, Mozambican officials must be involved in these processes. As foreign forces are in Mozambique, they need to be bound by Mozambican law, upheld by Mozambican officials. For example, decisions regarding the potential risk of collateral damage, particularly in the case of offensive operations, must be made by Mozambican officials in order to give credibility and legitimacy to the process.

In conclusion, combined operations in Cabo Delgado will draw significant international attention and - in the worst case - may actually attract a response and direct support for the violent extremists from external terrorist groups. This is not to say that combined operations will be unsuccessful. On the contrary, there is a clear opportunity to use a combined military approach effectively, in order to help set the conditions for conflict resolution. However, it is important to recognise that for every military action there will be a reaction, and the nation needs to prepare itself for all eventualities as a result of military escalation.



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