



PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CABO DELGADO

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Strategy development and defining success: A blueprint for conflict resolution in Cabo Delgado

When governments decide to roll the dice in the most complex, destructive, and uncertain activity humans can engage in - war - the development of an overarching strategy to successfully end conflict (i.e., an exit strategy) should be a pre-requisite, not an afterthought.¹ An exit strategy, particularly in the military context, is a means of leaving a situation, either after *predetermined objectives or conditions have been achieved, or as a strategy to mitigate failure*. This brief aims to provide guidance to ensure that the former is the case in Cabo Delgado, not the latter. The past 70 years have provided too many tragic examples of situations where exit strategies have not been contemplated before military intervention begins - most notably Vietnam, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

This brief builds on the six previous publications in the *Conflict Resolution Series* and seeks to provide considerations for developing coherent strategy to resolve armed conflict. While reflecting on the many constraints and challenges, the brief also provides a conceptual blueprint for conflict resolution in Cabo Delgado, aimed at stimulating further debate.

Previous publications in this series have outlined that a coherent conflict resolution

strategy should not rely on military means alone. This approach continues to fail throughout the world, with intractable examples in Somalia, the DRC and the Sahel. Violent Extremist Organisations (VEO), as seen Cabo Delgado, soon learn to adapt to their new enemies and conditions, develop different and improved operating techniques, and receive increased external support for their cause. This is because the root causes of conflicts are not resolved through the use of force. Therefore, sustainable conflict resolution (which addresses entrenched grievances, socio-economic deprivation, and extreme ideology) needs to involve complementing initiatives in the humanitarian and development space, specialist approaches to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) and, critically, early-stage dialogue and negotiations to exploit military gains and other levers. In other words, a "Humanitarian, Development and Peace-building Nexus +".²

Fortunately, all the conflict resolution components and key resources listed above already exist in Cabo Delgado, but seemingly function independently, irregularly (or sometimes not at all) and without coherence. Therefore, it begs the question whether the Government of Mozambique and ruling elites have rigorously defined its high-level (na-

¹ Adam Wunische, The Lost Art of Exiting a War, Oct 19. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/the-lost-art-of-exiting-a-war/>.

² Humanitarian relief, development programmes and peacebuilding are not serial processes: they are all needed at the same time to coherently address people's vulnerabilities before, during and after crises. This means meeting immediate needs at the same time as ensuring longer-term investment to address the systemic causes of conflict and vulnerability.

tional / political) objectives and desired end state regarding the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado? Have they developed an overall strategy to achieve these, utilising the tools and resources related to economic and soft power identified above, as well as the force of military intervention?

Developing strategy is hard, but this does not negate its necessity. Furthermore, “without strategy guiding actions in conflict and war, military force is nothing more than violence for its own sake and a travesty solution.” Developing a coherent strategy is often a demanding and dynamic process because war - at whatever level - is complex, with unlimited variables that regularly change the nature and outcome of a situation, thus necessitating a varying set of skills and political posture. Therefore, recognizing the key restrictions, constraints and variables is critical from the outset of the process. A key factor that has recurring relevance in the Cabo Delgado context is time. Some of the main challenges related to time are listed below:

- Identifying the culminating point of military operations: This is the time at which forces achieve the maximum amount of military advantage before additional action will come at increasingly unacceptable costs for minimal gains. The timing of the culminating point also relates to how quickly an adversary can adapt, counter, and regain the initiative. Also, as the culminating point approaches, this is one of the times when negotiations may be more effective.
- With protracted deployment times, often because of a failure to recognize or take advantage of the culminating point, the cost to sustain multinational force operations increases. How long can the host nation and the troop contributing countries continue to absorb costs (human and financial), when many in the wider international community are sceptical about the chances of success?
- While long-term defence and security transformation is a must in Mozambique, even the time needed to train, pre-

pare, and mentor forces specifically to transition with multinational forces will still take years. Therefore, non-military means of resolving the conflict, while multinational forces remain in place is arguably a more viable approach.

- The loss or delay of major economic opportunities and investments, specifically LNG development, increases with time (especially in a volatile and uncertain energy pricing world). Setting the conditions for the rapid resumption of LNG development must be a key strategic objective, given its national economic significance. With the right approach, LNG development could resume in the 2-3 months. Furthermore, the quid pro quo for guaranteeing the conditions for LNG resumption should be pledges of significant community reconstruction funding from the operators and contractors.
- Development initiatives involving infrastructure, human capital development, and relocation/resettlement often take years to be implemented successfully. However, targeted development initiatives can bring sustainable ‘quick wins’ that will contribute to conflict resolution and improve stability, as can programmes that improve community resilience to countering and preventing violent extremism.
- Most important of all, the absence of a timely and coherent resolution strategy will prolong humanitarian suffering, hamper the development of livelihood opportunities, and therefore increase disaffection and frustration among local populations - which are the main drivers of conflict and lead to the hosting of violent extremists.

Considering these factors (among others) what are the main constituents of coherent strategy? The following conceptual blueprint provides some ideas for debate, within a standard strategic framework of ends, ways and means. The ends are the national / po-

litical objectives and desired end state; the ways are the 'how' or concept used to achieve the ends, and the means are the resources required to enable the ways. As already identified, the key components of the latter are already available.

High-level objectives and desired end state:

In the Cabo Delgado context, the following are examples of high-level objectives and desired end state:

- Objective 1. Secure vital strategic economic interests.
- Objective 2. Provide secure and prosperous environments for the return and/or resettlement of displaced people, and those that have remained in the conflict-affected districts.
- Objective 3. Enhance security, stability, and resilience in areas on the periphery of the conflict-affected districts and avert the spread of violent extremism.

End State: A secure and prosperous province for its inhabitants; resumption of the development of vital strategic economic interests, as a means of supporting further provincial growth, stability and improved public governance; the drivers of violent extremism addressed and its spread averted.

Ways: An example concept to achieve the ends

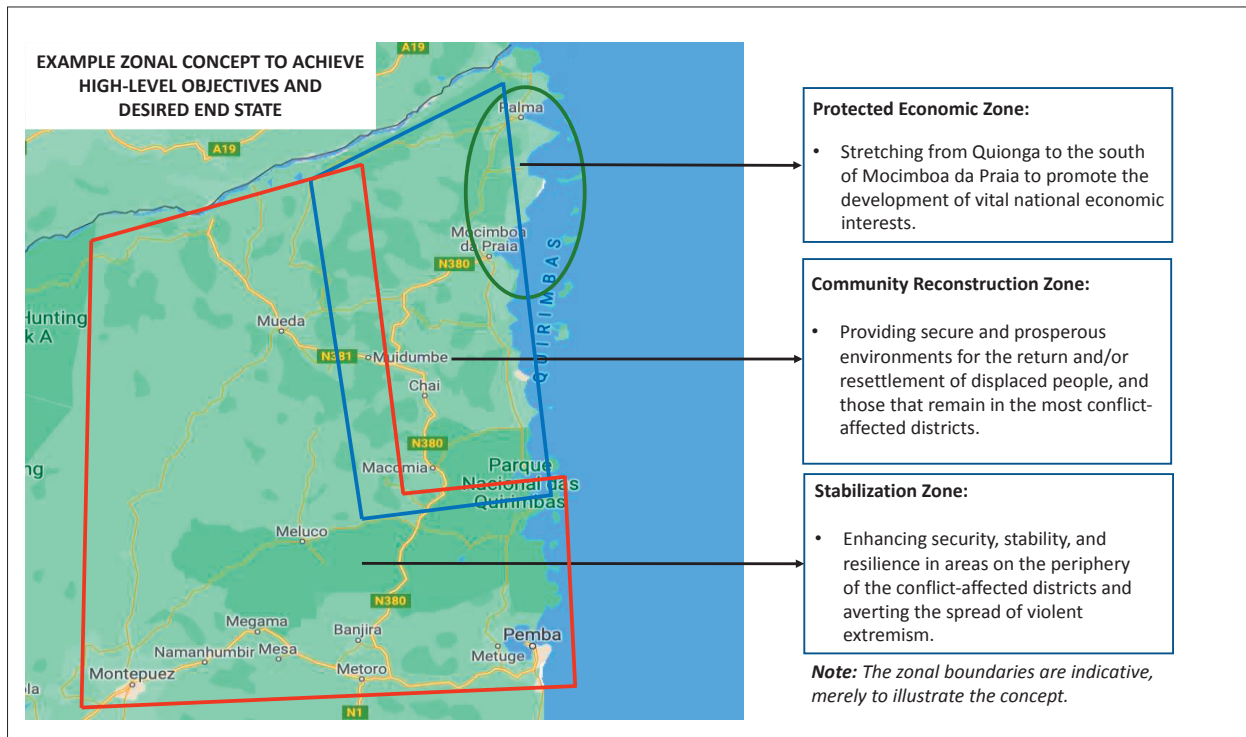
There are many ways to conceptualise the

ways to achieve the ends. Often, they are articulated as a series of phases, focused on operational level objectives, seeking to collectively achieve the high-level requirements; and/or, through with a specific geographic focus with localised coordination of combined military, humanitarian, development, and resilience initiatives. Whatever the articulation, concepts must closely consider the specific context, environment, and desired end state.

In the Cabo Delgado context, it is possible to articulate a more flexible approach to achieving the end state through a concept of zones guided and/or supported through multistakeholder dialogue (which also helps support gaps in public governance). The example below considers three complementing and overlapping zones, reinforced through dialogue and negotiations.

- A Protected Economic Zone to enable the realisation of High-level Objective 2 (securing vital national / strategic economic interests).
- A Community Reconstruction Zone to partially enable the realisation of High-level Objective 1 (providing secure and prosperous environments for the return and/or resettlement of displaced people, and those that have remained in the most conflict-affected districts) while supporting High-level Objective 2.
- A Stabilisation Zone to enable the realisation of High-level Objectives 1 (as above) and 3 (enhancing security, stability, and resilience in areas on the periphery of the conflict-affected districts and avert the spread of violent extremism).

In geographic terms a zonal concept can be illustrated as follows:



Operationalising a zonal concept should be the responsibility of a multi-agency working group, with representatives from across the spectrum of capabilities and resources required, combined with multistakeholder dialogue and consultations. Key stages in the detailed planning process should be to appropriately package the resources (be they military, development, humanitarian, P/CVE etc.) and apply them to the specific zones, along with the assignment of operational missions and tasks to ensure that the high-level objectives are achieved. At all times, dialogue and negotiations facilitators support the process.

The Protected Economic Zone could be put in place immediately, by Rwandan Defence Forces, and LNG development could resume within 2-3 months. This is providing there are guarantees that the transition to Mozambican forces will only take place gradually, and only when they are ready for the task. Equally, with the right level of investment (through major contributions from LNG operators and contractors), the Community Reconstruction Zone could be initiated within the same ti-

meframe. The multistakeholder dialogue required to support these approaches could be initiated immediately. The full implementation of the Stabilisation Zone is likely to take longer, as larger scale development, resilience and P/CVE efforts are unlikely to be initiated until next year.

Ultimately, any resolution strategy should aim to prevent the inducement of intractable conflict, or a frozen conflict that prevents the high-level objectives being achieved and thwarts the development of a genuine peace-making process. If these conditions are permitted to prevail, it is highly likely the threat from violent extremism will increase, that conflict will continue, and include direct transnational terrorist support. The window to develop a coherent strategy is still open, and the major resources required already exist, but time is not on the side of peace, the government and its allies. Contrastingly, it is important to acknowledge that temporal empowerment (i.e., gaining strength from time) is a major strategic approach of the VEO, and their potential transnational supporters.



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