



Winning Peace in Mozambique's Embattled North

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What's new? Since July 2021, Rwandan and southern African troops have deployed to Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, diminishing a nearly five-year-old Islamist insurgency. Insurgents continue to destabilise pockets of territory, however, and have spread into neighbouring Niassa province and Tanzania. They may call increasingly on East African Islamic State networks for support.

Why does it matter? The foreign troops working with Mozambique's army have reclaimed significant territory from insurgents, while donor money has brought Cabo Delgado's population some relief. Yet these remedies alone are unlikely to resolve a conflict born of local grievances. With those untreated, the insurgency will persist as a source of regional insecurity.

What should be done? Mozambique's African partners should press Maputo to open dialogue involving political elites to set conditions that might persuade insurgents to surrender. While donors scale up aid in the province, the African Union should facilitate regional cooperation to dismantle the insurgency's transnational networks and seek more funds to sustain military operations.

I. Overview

Troops from Rwanda and southern Africa have helped stem an insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province that had by early 2021 spiralled into a jihadist insurgency threatening regional security. The outside forces, working with Mozambique's army, have driven insurgents out of bases and taken control of key towns. While many insurgents have quit fighting, small groups are still mounting attacks in parts of the province, leaving hundreds of thousands of people displaced and unsafe. Insurgents have now also sallied into neighbouring Niassa province and Tanzania, amid fears that they will turn to Islamic State (ISIS) networks in East Africa for greater support. To avoid a protracted conflict and regional crisis, Mozambique's partners should press Maputo to open dialogue with political elites who have influence in Cabo Delgado about how to induce more insurgents to surrender. The African Union (AU) should facilitate better regional cooperation to block financial and material aid to the insurgency from nearby ISIS cells. The AU should also help identify more possible financing to support the deployments.

Since July 2021, more than 3,000 troops from Rwanda and Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states have flooded into Cabo Delgado, where the insurgency had been wreaking havoc, displacing 800,000 people in a conflict that has killed more than 3,700 people since 2017. In a short period, the soldiers have dismantled all the insurgents' major bases and seized important territory they once held. Rwandan forces, working under a bilateral agreement with Maputo, have secured the Afungi peninsula, where the French company Total has invested in a multi-billion-dollar gas project, and recaptured the strategic port of Mocímboa da Praia. The SADC, invoking a regional mutual defence pact, has deployed troops in central Cabo Delgado and toward the provincial capital Pemba, as well as in Nangade district near the border with Tanzania. These troops have dislodged insurgents from some of their strongholds but are stretched in terms of fully securing these areas.

But the insurgency is far from extinguished. Many fighters have simply blended into the civilian population, waiting for the right time to remobilise. Small groups continue to stage attacks in central, coastal and northern parts of the province. The insurgency could thus easily rebound if foreign forces suddenly draw down.

Donors have meanwhile bankrolled a surge in aid geared toward rebuilding infrastructure, restoring public services and helping some civilians resume their livelihoods amid the humanitarian crisis. The spending is unlikely, however, to quell the specific grievances of the young men who have joined al-Shabab, as the insurgency is known. What insurgents really want, according to sources who know them, is a meaningful role in the Cabo Delgado economy, so they can benefit from the opportunities created by major mining and gas projects and perhaps have a stake in the province's smuggling rackets, many of which are run by political elites. If the insurgents' motivations go unaddressed, the roots of the conflict will remain untreated.

Insurgents are finding ways to adapt to the Rwandan-SADC military pressure, pushing into next-door Niassa province and staging a few attacks in Tanzania. They are also trying to deploy more improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on the battlefield. Officials fear that al-Shabab fighters will seek money and training, including in bomb-making skills, from East African ISIS networks, such as that based in the northern tip of Puntland, Somalia, to keep their campaign going. Should it strengthen its ISIS ties, the insurgency could not only endure but also help turn Mozambique into a staging or training ground for fighters to menace areas of neighbouring countries, particularly Tanzania. If insurgents then establish a firmer foothold in Tanzania, they could also deepen their links to the Allied Democratic Forces, an ISIS affiliate in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which recruits Tanzanians into its ranks and has helped train Mozambican fighters in the past.

Mozambique and its regional partners should start thinking about how they might obtain peace through means other than military operations and development money, as these measures, on their own, are unlikely to stop conflict dead in its tracks. The authorities should work harder to set incentives for insurgents who might be persuaded to surrender or leave sleeper cells. Mozambique's regional partners, who also have an interest in seeing an end to the conflict, should push Maputo to open dialogue with local and national political elites, who in turn will have to make decisions about how to offer insurgents a viable future amid the resource boom under way in Cabo Delgado. The authorities will still have to win the public's confidence by extending further development assistance, but dialogue with insurgents could help create a safer envi-

ronment where such spending can yield even greater benefits. Meanwhile, the authorities should vigorously prosecute the high-level al-Shabab members whom they have arrested.

In cooperation with regional governments, Maputo will also need to step up efforts to block foreign financial and material support to al-Shabab, in particular from ISIS, which is now taking root in East Africa. The SADC is now setting up a regional counter-terrorism centre in Tanzania, where military, law enforcement, intelligence and judicial officials from member states can share information. To be maximally effective, it will require input from the member states of the two East African regional blocs, the East African Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, given the spread of al-Shabab's networks in that region. To facilitate all this cooperation, the AU should look to ease communication and cooperation between member states of all these regions. Ideally, it should develop a common assessment of what ISIS is doing on the continent's eastern side. Armed with this information, authorities will be better able to close the net around those helping al-Shabab from abroad.

While the above measures are under way, Mozambique will still need outside help to hold the territory that has been taken back from the insurgents. As the Mozambican army will likely require several years of upgrading before it can fully secure Cabo Delgado and other parts of the country's north, Rwandan and SADC troops may need to stay on the ground for some time to come. Both Rwanda and the southern African states may require additional financial resources to keep their forces in Mozambique, with the SADC troops in particular struggling to stamp out insurgent activity in the province's centre. While the European Union (EU), via its Peace Facility, can provide some of the troop contributors with limited support in the short term, the AU could also help identify alternative funding sources for the SADC mission.

II. International Intervention in Cabo Delgado

For more than seven months, Rwandan and southern African forces have been in Cabo Delgado to battle homegrown insurgents backed by jihadists from up and down the Swahili coast.¹ In early July 2021, a thousand troops from the Rwandan Defence Forces and Rwandan National Police working under a bilateral arrangement with Maputo arrived in the Afungi peninsula, site of the major liquefied gas project run by Total.² The Rwandan soldiers swiftly captured strategic road junctions in the area and then in early August took the port city of Mocímboa da Praia, the birthplace of the insurrection, from which al-Shabab had driven state authorities a year earlier.³ Around this time, the SADC sent hundreds of troops as well, under the terms of a re-

¹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°303, *Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado*, 11 June 2021, for details on how the conflict evolved to the point when international troops began readying for deployment.

² See "Rwanda deploys 1,000 soldiers to Mozambique's Cabo Delgado", Al Jazeera, 11 July 2021. Of the initial Rwandan contingent, some 700 were soldiers and 300 were police.

³ See "Rwandan forces recapture Mozambique's Mocímboa da Praia", *Africa Times*, 8 August 2021. Summary of Rwandan operations derived from database of attacks maintained by diplomat in Maputo. Insurgents are known to locals as al-Shabab, a generic Arabic term meaning "youth"; they should not be confused with the al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

gional defence pact, to occupy Macomia district to the south of Afungi and Nangade district on the Tanzanian border, as well as areas near the provincial capital Pemba.⁴

The separate forces, each operating in cooperation with the Mozambican army, would over the coming months run into insurgents, driving them from their bases and scattering them into smaller groups. In doing so, they captured insurgents, seized weapons and confiscated laptops whose files they mined for intelligence.⁵ They also killed a few mid-level insurgent leaders.⁶ Rwandan forces now occupy the coast from Palma city past Mocímboa da Praia, as well as areas to the west near the important towns of Muidumbe and Mueda. By December 2021, their ranks had swollen to 2,500 troops in total.⁷ The SADC contingent, known as the Southern African Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), has deployed in two sets, with mainly Botswanan and South African troops fighting insurgents in Macomia and tasked with protecting roads to the north west toward Mueda, to the south east of Pemba.⁸ Tanzanian troops under SAMIM's banner have occupied areas stretching west from Palma through Nangade district.⁹ SAMIM's forces numbered 1,077 by the end of November 2021.¹⁰

The combined operations have broken the insurgency's cohesion, dispersing its fighters from their bastions, but not stamped it out entirely. Al-Shabab's numbers have dwindled from an estimated 3,000 or so to as low as 300, but mainly because many foreign jihadists have fled the country while Mozambican insurgents have melted into the civilian population rather than surrender or be killed.¹¹ Indeed, by the end of 2021, officials reported that military operations had claimed the lives of 200 insurgents.¹² SAMIM sources say some of the group's core leaders remain holed up

⁴ Mozambique signed a "status of force agreement" allowing the SADC troops to deploy. As Maputo consented to the mission, it does not require UN or AU approval. See "SADC Executive Secretary presents instruments of authority for Standby Force Deployment Mission on Mozambique", press release, SADC, 17 July 2021.

⁵ Crisis Group review of incident database built by a diplomat in Maputo. See also SAMIM press releases, September-December 2021.

⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Rwandan military officials, Kigali, October 2021; Pemba, December 2021; SAMIM officials, Pemba, December 2021. The top leaders of al-Shabab, notably Bonomar Mashud (aka Ibn Omar) and Abu Yasir Hassan (aka Abu Qassim), are apparently still at large.

⁷ Crisis Group interviews, private security sources and humanitarian workers, Maputo and Pemba, November-December 2021; Rwandan officials, Pemba December 2021.

⁸ Crisis Group interviews, regional security analysts, Johannesburg and Maputo, November 2021.

⁹ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and military sources, Maputo, November 2021.

¹⁰ As of late November 2021, SAMIM consisted of 351 troops from South Africa, 302 from Botswana, 290 from Tanzania, 122 from Lesotho, eight from Angola, two from Malawi, and one from each of the DRC and Zimbabwe. See "Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Committee of the Organ Troika Plus the Personnel Contributing Countries and the Republic of Mozambique, Draft Annotated Agenda", SADC, 25 November 2021.

¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, regional security sources, Nairobi, November 2021; Maputo, December 2021. The sources, who work extensively in Mozambique, estimated that the insurgency's fighting force had shrunk to 1,000. SAMIM, however, assessed the insurgency's size at 300. "Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Committee of the Organ Troika Plus the Personnel Contributing Countries and the Republic of Mozambique, Draft Annotated Agenda", op. cit.

¹² Rwanda's high commissioner to Mozambique stated that Rwandan forces had killed just over 100 "terrorists". "Will foreign intervention save Cabo Delgado?", webinar, Institute for Security Studies, 8 November 2021. SAMIM said it had killed 23 insurgents since the start of operations. See "Samim kills twenty-three terrorists", press release, SAMIM, 22 December 2021. One military source involved in counter-insurgency operations said the total number of insurgents killed was no more than 200.

in Quirimbas national park, straddling the Macomia and Quissanga coastal districts, where insurgents have staged several attacks on security personnel and civilians since September.¹³ Insurgents have also mounted regular raids in Nangade and northern Mueda districts – and, since January, about a dozen attacks in Meluco district as well.¹⁴

Even as central and provincial authorities have started pushing the narrative that security has returned to Cabo Delgado, and that the state is restoring services to areas once dominated by insurgents, civil servants and aid workers still assess the situation as fragile.¹⁵ Even with Mocímboa da Praia back in government hands, Maputo designates the city as a military zone, mostly off limits to civilians, worrying that insurgents could infiltrate masses of residents coming back home.¹⁶ Officials in other areas also voice fears they could come under attack.¹⁷

The displacement problem remains severe. Though some civilians have returned to Palma and other locations, almost 750,000 people from Cabo Delgado remain uprooted from their homes, the majority packed into camps largely in the province's south.¹⁸ While authorities have ordered many civilians to go to newly constructed settlements also in the south, many still need to risk returning to their places of origin.¹⁹ Some of them come under insurgent attack or suffer abuse at the military's hands.²⁰ Mozambican troops in particular often shake down civilians for cash at checkpoints.²¹ Hundreds of women and girls once held captive by the insurgents, and now released, are also struggling to win acceptance back into their communities, many having sur-

Crisis Group interview, December 2021. President Felipe Nyusi has also cited the figure of 200. See "Mozambique tells AR: Cabo Delgado war is about greed of insurgents – with no mention of greed of Frelimo", *All Africa*, 20 December 2020.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, senior SAMIM official, Pemba, December 2021; civilians who fled violence in Macomia and Quissanga from September onward, December 2021. See also "New attacks leave more than 15 dead in Quissanga", *Voice of America*, 24 September 2021; "Cabo Ligado Weekly: 13 December 2021-9 January 2022", ACLED, 13 January 2022; "Mozambique insurgents dare SADC forces to follow them into the bush", *News 24*, 15 January 2022.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers, Pemba, December 2021. "Cabo Ligado Weekly: 15-21 November 2021", ACLED, 23 November 2021; "Allied forces failing to contain insurgent attacks in northern Cabo Delgado", *Zitamar News*, 11 January 2022; "Cabo Ligado Weekly: 10-16 January 2022", ACLED, 19 January 2022. See also "Mozambique: Terrorists attack five Cabo Delgado villages", *Club of Mozambique*, 31 January 2022. Regarding Meluco: Crisis Group interviews, security analysts, humanitarian workers and diplomats, January 2022.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, former civil servant who fled Mocímboa da Praia district, senior adviser to Cabo Delgado's governor and senior humanitarian officials, Pemba, December 2021; internally displaced people in various camps near Pemba, December 2021.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, port operator for Mocímboa da Praia and diplomat, Maputo, November 2021; Mozambican and Rwandan military officials, Maputo and Pemba, November and December 2021.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, civil servants from Mocímboa da Praia, Pemba, December 2021; former civilian administrators from Macomia district, IDP camp near Pemba, December 2021.

¹⁸ "Northern Mozambique Crisis – Baseline Assessment Round 14", International Organization for Migration, November 2021, puts the figure at 735,334 displaced. Since then, more people have fled their homes in Cabo Delgado's Mueda and Meluco districts as well as in Niassa province.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, displaced civilians in camps near Pemba, December 2021.

²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, senior humanitarian officials, Pemba, December 2021; displaced persons in camps near Pemba, December 2021.

²¹ Humanitarian workers say these shakedowns are frequent. Crisis Group interviews, Pemba, December 2021.

vived rape and sexual abuse by al-Shabab elements in 2020, as the group mimicked the ISIS practice of taking so-called sex slaves as spoils of war.²²

The Mozambican government has approved the disbursement of hundreds of millions in donor money for programs such as seed distribution to farmers and reconstruction of infrastructure in Cabo Delgado.²³ These efforts, coordinated from the government's side via its Northern Integrated Development Agency, are assisting civilians trying to rebuild livelihoods amid an active conflict, though how much they will keep the insurgency from rebounding is unclear (see below).²⁴

Mozambique's partners are thus preparing for a lengthy military campaign, spurred on by the realisation that they will need to wait for a major upgrade of the country's security forces before they can withdraw. Officials in Maputo believe the military will require several years of investment before it can manage without external assistance.²⁵ In order to fully secure the province, they say, they will need more infantry on top of the 2,000 rapid-reaction forces now being trained by the EU to beat the insurgents.²⁶ SAMIM officials thus say they are focused on strengthening the mission following its January mandate extension, amid concerns that it lacks sufficient resources.²⁷ Commanders are keen to secure outside funding for more men and materiel, particularly after a November insurgent attack exposed their vulnerability to guerrilla tactics.²⁸ Maputo has meanwhile also extended its military cooperation agreement with Kigali, where authorities are understood to be seeking financial assistance for the Rwandan deployment.²⁹

²² "Mozambique: Hundreds of Women, Girls Abducted", Human Rights Watch, 7 December 2021. Crisis Group interview, woman who formerly was an al-Shabab captive, Pemba, December 2021.

²³ The money, raised partly by the World Bank, will cover spending on essential public services such as administration buildings, health and education facilities, electricity, water and sanitation, and local peacebuilding initiatives. Crisis Group interview, World Bank official, Maputo, November 2021.

²⁴ See Crisis Group Report, *Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado*, op. cit., for more details on the Agency's role in mitigating the conflict.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Major General Cristovão Artur Chume, Mozambican defence minister, December 2021. The minister stated that the armed forces require extensive reform, from updating doctrine to upgrading operational capabilities to be fit for purpose in Mozambique. "If we look at the big picture, we may require five years to get things in order", he said.

²⁶ See "Mozambique: EU sets up a military training mission to help address the crisis in Cabo Delgado", press release, Council of the EU, 12 July 2021. Crisis Group interview, Major General Chume, op. cit. "Besides the quick reaction forces we need many more infantry units to hold the ground", the defence minister said. See "The international programs training Mozambique's armed forces", *Zitamar News*, 19 November 2021, for details on various training schemes in Mozambique.

²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, SAMIM officials, Pemba, December 2021. See "'Wars can't be fought on the cheap': Experts and special forces call for more infantry and equipment in Mozambique", *Daily Maverick*, 11 January 2022.

²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, SAMIM leaders, Pemba, December 2021. SAMIM said some of its soldiers were killed in a raid on an insurgent base. See "Samim kills twenty-three terrorists", op. cit.

²⁹ See "Rwanda, Mozambique extend defence pact to fight terror", *The East African*, 11 January 2022. Crisis Group telephone interview with European diplomat, Maputo, January 2022.

III. Insurgents Adapt, Pose New Threats

Despite being under military pressure, the insurgency is surviving. Many al-Shabab fighters have simply resumed living among the civilian population, including in internally displaced persons camps where they are biding their time, while also recruiting more youth.³⁰ Mozambican and foreign forces deployed in Cabo Delgado have noticed more and more IEDs planted along the roads they patrol.³¹ These devices are rudimentary, often relying on the victim rather than a remote system to trigger detonation, but their increasing use suggests that the insurgents are deliberately moving toward more asymmetric warfare. Security sources believe it is only a matter of time before insurgents are able to acquire more sophisticated roadside bombs, including from ISIS, which has forged links to al-Shabab via its faction in Puntland.³²

The foreign fighters who came into Cabo Delgado also pose a continuing threat. Large numbers of Tanzanians and Kenyans seem to be leaving al-Shabab as the military campaign proceeds. They could, however, simply join ISIS, which Western diplomats and security officials fear will conduct more operations like the suicide bombings in the Ugandan capital Kampala in November.³³ Regional security officials say these fighters are receiving training from ISIS, absorbing new knowledge including in bombmaking techniques that they can use on the battlefield and elsewhere in Mozambique if and when they are able to return.³⁴

Meanwhile, evidence is mounting that al-Shabab is opening a new front west of Cabo Delgado in Niassa province, which is known for its mountainous wilderness, gold mines and hunting reserves. In August 2021, security in Niassa's central Mavago district began to deteriorate, marked by an ambush on a police vehicle.³⁵ In late November, insurgents then attacked Nualala, a village in Mecula district, raiding a health

³⁰ Relatives and other associates of insurgents reported that the insurgents who are hiding out in displacement camps say they are still committed to jihad, to the extent of indoctrinating youth and preparing them to join al-Shabab as fighters. Crisis Group interviews, Pemba, December 2021.

³¹ Crisis Group interviews, Rwandan and SAMIM officials, Pemba, December 2021.

³² Crisis Group interviews, private security source and diplomats working on security matters, Nairobi, November 2021; Rwandan, SAMIM and Mozambican government officials, Pemba, December 2021. See Crisis Group Report, *Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado*, op. cit., for details of links between the Puntland ISIS faction and al-Shabab. Crisis Group has reviewed documentation taken from al-Shabab laptops of communication dated April 2020 between al-Shabab leader Abu Yasir Hassan and ISIS in Puntland. The latter faction is well known for trafficking explosives, detonators and weapons. See "The Islamic State in East Africa", European Institute of Peace, September 2018. Rwandan military officers, meanwhile, say Somalis are involved in disseminating knowledge of bombmaking techniques in Cabo Delgado. Crisis Group interviews, Pemba, December 2021. For a summary of al-Shabab attacks claimed by ISIS since July 2021, see "Cabo Ligado Weekly: 8-14 November 2021", ACLED, 16 November 2021.

³³ Security sources say as many as 600 Tanzanians and 200 Kenyans were part of the foreign fighter contingent of al-Shabab in Cabo Delgado. See Dino Mahtani, "The Kampala Attacks and Their Regional Implications", Crisis Group Commentary, 19 November 2021. Crisis Group interviews, regional diplomats, Nairobi, November 2021.

³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, private security source and diplomats working on transnational jihadism in East Africa, Nairobi, November 2021.

³⁵ "Homens armados emboscaram e alvejaram oficiais da Polícia no Niassa", *Carta de Moçambique*, 23 August 2021.

centre and attacking police units.³⁶ More attacks took place in Mecula in the ensuing days, forcing up to 4,000 people to flee.³⁷ Officials fear that insurgents may even try to destabilise the far south west of Niassa, an area bordering Malawi, where tensions between Christians and Muslims could help Mozambican insurgents recruit more fighters to draw into Niassa.³⁸ Since the start of 2022, however, security sources and humanitarian workers report that insurgents may be slipping back to Cabo Delgado.³⁹

A detailed plan, found on an insurgent laptop captured in Cabo Delgado and seen by Crisis Group, explains why insurgents might see expansion into Niassa as profitable. They could take advantage of food and water supplies in the Niassa hunting reserves to build a new power centre in the north. It would also be easier for recruits to cross from Tanzania into Mozambique in Niassa, as the Rovuma river, which separates the two countries, is a mere trickle this far west. Conversely, and for the same reason, insurgents could mount more attacks in south-western Tanzania from Niassa.⁴⁰ While the plan is ambitious, officials still fear that insurgents could thus stretch security forces far beyond Cabo Delgado, much as Frelimo guerrillas did to Portuguese forces in Mozambique's independence war.⁴¹

Tanzania is another concern. Insurgents seem to be upping their attacks on villages and security posts in the Mtwara region of southern Tanzania from across the border in Cabo Delgado. Security sources believe these attacks indicate that the insurgents – who are on the back foot in Cabo Delgado – will turn their attention northward.⁴² Indeed, in September 2021, a group of insurgents raided Mahurunga, a village of several thousand people, for food, abducting men and women from the area to carry the provisions back to the Mozambican side. In early December 2021, a group of al-Shabab insurgents struck the village of Mnongodi, killing a handful of Tanzanian soldiers and police, before crossing back to Cabo Delgado.⁴³ Locals now report that insurgents are gathering around Kibiti, a former stronghold of Islamist militants in

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers and conservationists in Mecula district, December 2021. See “Cabo Ligado Weekly: 22-28 November 2021”, ACLED, 30 November 2021.

³⁷ See “Protection, Monitoring and Response, Mecula District, Niassa”, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 20 December 2021. See also “Thousands flee as Mozambique jihadists shift attacks”, EWN, 31 December 2021.

³⁸ See “Malawi Muslim leaders urge calm after church burning”, *Club of Mozambique*, 4 November 2021. Some observers are concerned about the spread of Salafist ideology in Malawi. Crisis Group interview, Maputo-based diplomat responsible for covering Malawi, November 2021.

³⁹ Crisis Group telephone interviews, humanitarian worker and security sources in Pemba, January 2022.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group review of insurgent document, drafted in 2021, and retrieved from laptop captured from an insurgent base by international forces. The plan mentioned that the insurgency could use Niassa as a launchpad for attacks on other regions.

⁴¹ A senior Frelimo official referenced the manner in which Frelimo guerrillas stretched Portuguese forces after 1970 by opening new fronts, drawing colonial troops outside Cabo Delgado and eventually allowing the pro-independence fighters to return to the province. Crisis Group interview, Pemba, December 2021.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and private security sources, October-December 2021.

⁴³ Research obtained through confidential source from Tanzania, December 2021. Crisis Group interview, Tanzania-based private security source, January 2022.

southern Tanzania, where security forces cracked down in 2017, prompting many Tanzanian fighters to flee into Cabo Delgado.⁴⁴

Security and intelligence sources in East Africa fear that, as southern Tanzania faces more instability, it could act as a gateway for jihadists joining the fight not just in northern Mozambique, but also in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.⁴⁵ There, an ISIS-affiliated group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), has been recruiting more Tanzanian militants, some of whom may have also fought in Cabo Delgado. Mozambican fighters have in the past gone through Tanzania on their way to the eastern DRC to receive training in ADF camps.⁴⁶

IV. After Dominating the Battlefield, Winning Peace

Maputo and its partners are undoubtedly making progress toward bringing stability back to Cabo Delgado. The international military deployments have played a significant role in stemming the insurgency. Humanitarian assistance and development aid have also brought some measure of relief to the province's beleaguered civilians, though hundreds of thousands of people remain displaced.

Both military and civilian officials, however, acknowledge that some form of political engagement is required to end the conflict. "We need more than just weapons to end this conflict, something more than military operations", says Mozambique's defence minister.⁴⁷ The angry young men who comprise al-Shabab joined up because they resent security force abuses and believe elites connected to Frelimo monopolise the economy, including illicit business, in Cabo Delgado.⁴⁸ Government officials and others who know insurgents say they will not lay down their arms unless they get a fairer share of the province's resources.⁴⁹ "Aid money can help mitigate civilian suffering, but what the youth who are fighting really want is a sense of social justice and a permanent stake in the future of Cabo Delgado", says a government adviser.⁵⁰ Mozambican security officials are in communication with some insurgents, but these conversations largely concern tactical matters.⁵¹

It is likely that insurgents will find ways to keep their fight going, given that they have options ranging from falling back on ISIS support to moving into new territory. While President Felipe Nyusi has urged al-Shabab to surrender, officials say insurgents are not doing so in large numbers, choosing instead to melt back into the civilian

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Tanzania-based private security sources, January 2022. See Crisis Group Report, *Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado*, op. cit., for more background on the 2017 crackdowns in Kibiti and how they blew wind into the insurgency's sails in Cabo Delgado.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, East African intelligence officers, October 2021.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, former ADF combatant, Kampala, October 2021. See also Mahtani, "The Kampala Attacks and Their Regional Implications", op. cit.; and Crisis Group Report, *Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, Major General Chume, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, relatives and former captives of al-Shabab, Pemba, December 2021.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, senior Cabo Delgado provincial government adviser on religious matters and former schoolteachers, Pemba, December 2022.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Cabo Delgado provincial government adviser, Pemba, December 2021.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior Frelimo figure, Pemba, December 2022; security sources familiar with negotiations, Maputo, December 2022.

population.⁵² Diplomats voice concerns about the safety of those who do turn themselves in, fearing that some could be disappearing in state custody. They warn that few will surrender if they fear ill treatment at the authorities' hands.⁵³ Continued insecurity, meanwhile, could lead authorities to prolong the military deployments in the north, which could provoke more discontent given the frequent extortion by soldiers at checkpoints.⁵⁴

To maximise their military advantage, Mozambique's African partners should push Maputo to open a dialogue involving political elites that bear influence on Cabo Delgado. Any talks could be geared toward striking a bargain over a viable future for ex-insurgents, which could in turn persuade more of them to surrender. Authorities and elites in Maputo and Cabo Delgado may thus have to decide what material promises they can make to fighters, including how they might participate in the gas and mining industries that are the basis of the province's wealth. The authorities could also consider vetting former fighters and involving some of them in planning of security arrangements for the province once the military campaign is over. They might also think about developing an amnesty policy for low-level insurgents and setting up demobilisation camps where those who qualify could safely turn themselves in.⁵⁵

Dialogue, while potentially useful, will not in itself be enough. Undoubtedly, many in government as well as many civilians who have borne the brunt of al-Shabab violence will find such engagement unpalatable. The authorities will thus have to keep working to deliver benefits to the population, particularly to victims of conflict, for example by scaling up humanitarian and development assistance. This task will be easier if the conflict can be scaled down through dialogue with insurgents. But the authorities will also need to think about what they can do not just to kill insurgents but also to apprehend and punish those whom they identify as the worst perpetrators of violence against civilians. Hence, even if dialogue achieves the surrender and rehabilitation of lower-ranking al-Shabab fighters, the public will have some sense that justice is being served for the atrocities they have endured. As it stands, the authorities need to do more on this front: they are capturing many insurgents but prosecuting few.⁵⁶

Regional collaboration is also crucial. The Mozambican government and its partners must step up their efforts – both individual and cooperative – to dismantle the financial, recruitment, training and IED proliferation cells linked to ISIS in East Africa. Research by Crisis Group shows that suspected jihadist and criminal networks operating in South Africa are channelling significant funds into the region. Criminal investigators there have started to identify suspects, including people from East Africa

⁵² See "Mozambique President Calls on Insurgents to Surrender After Key Militant Killed", Organization for World Peace, 3 November 2021. Crisis Group interviews, Cabo Delgado provincial government adviser and senior Frelimo figure, Pemba, December 2021.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and humanitarian agency officials, Maputo and Pemba, November-December 2021.

⁵⁴ The public is deeply frustrated with this harassment. Associates of al-Shabab fighters report that the insurgents try to whip up anger at the army, speaking of the checkpoints with particular vitriol. Crisis Group interviews, Pemba, December 2021.

⁵⁵ President Nyusi has made commitments to offer surrendering al-Shabab insurgents some form of amnesty. See "Mozambique's president says Palma rid of terrorists", Anadolu Agency, 8 April 2021.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Major General Chume, op. cit. "The number of people being tried for their role in the insurgency is now lower than in 2019", he said.

and the Horn, who have sent money to individuals with ties to ISIS in Kenya. Financial investigators in a few countries have gathered evidence that recipients have passed the money on to others, including militants involved in the Kampala attacks, but also people in the DRC, Tanzania and Mozambique.⁵⁷ Somali and intelligence sources in the region report that the ISIS-linked faction in Puntland have been training Mozambican commanders.⁵⁸

States on the eastern side of the continent need to work together better to mitigate the ISIS threat, as collaboration to date has been poor.⁵⁹ While the SADC is setting up a counter-terrorism centre in Tanzania to facilitate cooperation on, among other things, dismantling ISIS networks in member state jurisdictions, this organ will need information about related ISIS cells from the authorities in non-SADC states such as Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Somalia, among others. The African Union should accordingly look to ease communication between SADC member states' law enforcement and judicial bodies and their counterparts in other regions, such as the Horn and East Africa, which face the same transnational threat. Ideally, it would develop, in consultation with the SADC, Intergovernmental Authority on Development and East African Community, a shared transnational threat assessment, which they can then all use to develop appropriate, collective tactical responses.

Meanwhile, international military pressure on the insurgency will continue to be required. The SADC and the Rwandan authorities are now soliciting financial support to maintain their operations. While the EU has signalled that it would be willing to chip in to support SAMIM via its new funding mechanism, the European Peace Facility, Brussels is unlikely to want to foot the entire bill, as it has been doing for the AU's mission in Somalia, now in its fourteenth year. Some European officials are also more in favour of supporting SAMIM, which has a regional mandate, than the Rwandan deployment, which they see as a bilateral matter for Maputo to manage privately.⁶⁰ As such, the AU should step forward to at least help the SADC raise funds

⁵⁷ Information shared with Crisis Group by independent financial investigators, a South African law enforcement source and private security sources in South Africa with access to relevant biometric and financial data. Crisis Group interviews, Kenyan intelligence officers, Ugandan and Congolese military intelligence officials, Nairobi and Kampala, November 2021.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group telephone interviews, Somali intelligence officers including those based in Puntland, November 2021. Crisis Group interviews, intelligence sources from another Horn of Africa country who have independently followed the matter, June 2021.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group has confirmed, for example, that Kenyan investigators have information relating to the transfer of suspected ISIS funds from Kenya to Mozambique sometime in 2021. As late as December, they still had not shared this information with Mozambican authorities. Crisis Group interviews, Kenyan intelligence officials, Nairobi, November 2021; Mozambican interior ministry official and presidential adviser, Maputo, December 2021. Cooperation between Rwandan and Ugandan authorities, both of whom deal with domestic ISIS-related plots, has been poor over the last few years due to political tensions between them. Crisis Group interviews, Rwandan and Ugandan officials, October-November 2021. See also Mahtani, "The Kampala Attacks and Their Regional Implications", op. cit. For more on past tensions, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°159, *Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes*, 23 January 2020. There are signs that Kigali and Kampala are now beginning to thaw relations. See "Rwanda to re-open border with Uganda as relations thaw", Reuters, 28 January 2021. Mozambican officials also complain that their Tanzanian counterparts do not share as much information as they should about militants' cross-border activities. Crisis Group interviews, Mozambican interior ministry official, March and December 2021.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, EU official, January 2022.

from other sources for SAMIM, which is facing resource and capacity issues. On their own, beefed-up deployments will still likely not be enough to vanquish the insurgency, but they will be able to keep denying the insurgents the space they would need to rebound in Cabo Delgado.

V. Conclusion

The conflict in northern Mozambique, now approaching its fifth year, is among the gravest threats to peace and stability on the continent. Mozambique and its neighbours in southern Africa as well as the Rwandan military have had a significant impact in stemming an insurgency that ISIS has claimed as its own. Yet military operations by themselves are unlikely to eradicate a rebellion that has grown out of grievances felt deeply by large sections of Cabo Delgado's youth. Al-Shabab elements are likely to embrace ISIS and seek its support to keep mounting disruptive attacks in their home province and possibly elsewhere in the country's north. Humanitarian and development aid money has started to cool tensions on the ground. It may dissuade some young men from taking up arms, but not enough of them. Without government efforts to address the insurgency's political roots, especially through dialogue, the civilian population of Cabo Delgado will probably have to live through a prolonged period of conflict.

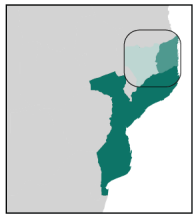
Maputo/Nairobi/Brussels, 10 February 2022

Appendix A: Map of Mozambique



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations or International Crisis Group. Based on UN Map No. 3706 Rev. 7 (July 2020)

Appendix B: Map of Niassa and Cabo Delgado Provinces



MOZAMBIQUE



Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. Ero first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director and Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UN Mission in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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International Crisis Group

Headquarters

Avenue Louise 235, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38

brussels@crisisgroup.org

New York Office

newyork@crisisgroup.org

Washington Office

washington@crisisgroup.org

London Office

london@crisisgroup.org

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