



POLICY BRIEF

Will foreign intervention end terrorism in Cabo Delgado?

Borges Nhamirre

Mozambique has accepted foreign assistance to deal with the terror threat in Cabo Delgado. Countries from Africa, Europe and North America are directly involved in combating the insurgency, either through military missions or training Mozambican military forces. This policy brief focuses on support provided by private military companies, Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community. It highlights the importance of transparency and the need for foreign missions to be coordinated and tailored to local needs.

Key findings

- ▶ The failed intervention in Mozambique by the Russian private military company, the Wagner Group, took place amid serious disagreements between the company and the Mozambican military.
- ▶ Local militia forces formed by Maconde war veterans were useful in blocking the insurgents from advancing inland in Cabo Delgado.
- ▶ The agreement allowing the Rwandan deployment in Mozambique lacks transparency and was not approved by the Mozambican Parliament.
- ▶ Rwanda's deployment is focused on two districts located close to the liquid natural gas projects in Cabo Delgado.
- ▶ The extension of the rapid deployment capability of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Military Mission (SAMIM) in October 2021 was due to the continued presence of insurgents south of the area where Rwanda is deployed.
- ▶ The presence of insurgents was noted in Nampula and Niassa provinces neighbouring Cabo Delgado in October 2021.
- ▶ SAMIM forces are calling for stricter coordination of all troops in Cabo Delgado to ensure successful operations and prevent friendly fire.

Recommendations

For Mozambique:

- ▶ Strengthen coordination among foreign forces present in Cabo Delgado
- ▶ Increase the military presence on the border with Tanzania
- ▶ Acquire military equipment and improve soldiers' salaries
- ▶ Increase reconnaissance missions and intensify the work of military intelligence
- ▶ Implement programmes to deradicalise and reintegrate youth captured from terrorist bases
- ▶ Support and intensify ongoing inter-religious dialogue

For Rwanda and SADC:

- ▶ SAMIM's current term should be extended from six months to at least two years.
- ▶ SADC should engage countries bordering Mozambique to tighten border control.
- ▶ Both SADC and Rwanda should assist the Mozambican military to improve intelligence-

gathering and ensure respect for civilians' human rights.

- ▶ SADC and Rwanda should help Mozambique to improve humanitarian support to civilians affected by the insurgency.

For the international community:

- ▶ Include respect for human rights, protection of civilians in conflict zones, discipline, integrity and intolerance of corruption in training for Mozambican armed forces
- ▶ Assist in patrolling the Mozambique Channel to cut the insurgents' logistics supply lines and stop the illicit trafficking in goods
- ▶ Mobilise financial and technical support to Mozambique to develop the northern region and Cabo Delgado province
- ▶ Assist Mozambique to rebuild areas destroyed by terrorist attacks and ensure that internally displaced persons return safely to their homes
- ▶ Assist Mozambique to reform the security sector

Introduction

Since October 2017, Mozambique has been facing terrorist attacks carried out by violent extremist groups in the northernmost province of Cabo Delgado, causing the deaths of between 2 000¹ and 3 000² people. More than 730 000 people have been internally displaced.

Following the escalation of the conflict,³ many countries offered military assistance, but until 2020 Mozambique did not accept their help, justifying its attitude by noting that it ‘does not want to create a salad of interventions.’⁴

For about two years, the government insisted on labelling the insurgency as ‘actions perpetrated by criminals’⁵ and crafted its initial defence strategy based on this perception of the type of conflict. The government responded to the attacks by deploying first the police and then the notably ill-trained military to forestall security in the conflict zones. The state response soon proved disastrous as militants continued to advance on the ground, first targeting remote settlements, where they killed and decapitated civilians, burned homes and forced people to abandon villages. Then they attacked district capital cities and destroyed government buildings and economic infrastructure, and robbed banks.⁶

The government's perception of the conflict changed after the so-called *malfaitores* or ‘evildoers’ attacked and temporarily occupied the main towns in the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Muidumbe and Quissanga. In Quissanga, the attackers recorded a video broadcasted by social networks in which an apparent leader of the group outlined, in Portuguese, the objective of the attacks: ‘... our fight is to replace the Frelimo flag with this flag and (...) rule by the Law of Allah.’⁷

Mozambique's National Defence and Security Council (CNDS) met in April 2020 – the same month as the video broadcast – and declared that the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado was an ‘external aggression perpetrated by an international terrorist's organisation,’ stating that the attacks were ‘claimed by the Islamic State, a terrorist organization.’⁸

Enter private military companies

Militarily, Mozambique lacks the capacity to apply a practical solution in Cabo Delgado. The Armed Forces for the Defence of Mozambique (FADM) suffers from many

problems related to politics and organisation. Soon after the end of the 16-year civil war in 1992, the army was destroyed and the high-quality military equipment was either sabotaged or sold by political elites. Weapons were stolen or abandoned and for many years, successive governments failed to invest in the armed forces.⁹

President Filipe Nyusi, faced with the insurgency in the north of the country, sought international support – initially from an old ally of Mozambique from the days of the liberation struggle. Nyusi travelled to Russia where he met President Vladimir Putin in August 2019. The following month saw the deployment of the Russian Wagner Group.¹⁰

With government forces unable to stop the insurgency, liberation struggle veterans formed local militias

The terms of the agreement that brought the Russian military contractors to Mozambique were never made public. Neither the cost of the mission nor who was paying for it was revealed to the Mozambican people. Two months after its deployment, in November 2019, the Wagner Group withdrew from Cabo Delgado over allegations of a disagreement with Mozambican troops. The Wagner soldiers apparently wanted to bomb the locations identified as insurgent bases while their Mozambican counterparts rejected this plan.¹¹ The confusion that followed likely contributed to about a dozen casualties in the Russian ranks.¹²

It emerged that the government of Mozambique had expected the Russian military to be deployed instead of a private military contractor. However, after the withdrawal of the Wagner Group, Mozambique turned to another company, from another old Frelimo ally. Colonel Lionel Dyck, a retired Zimbabwean military leader, helped Frelimo fight its opposition Renamo in the 1980s during the Mozambican civil war.

In April 2020 Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) soldiers arrived in Cabo Delgado in a handful of civilian helicopters that were converted to gunships to provide vital air support. DAG soldiers immediately engaged in battle, helping to keep insurgents away from the provincial capital

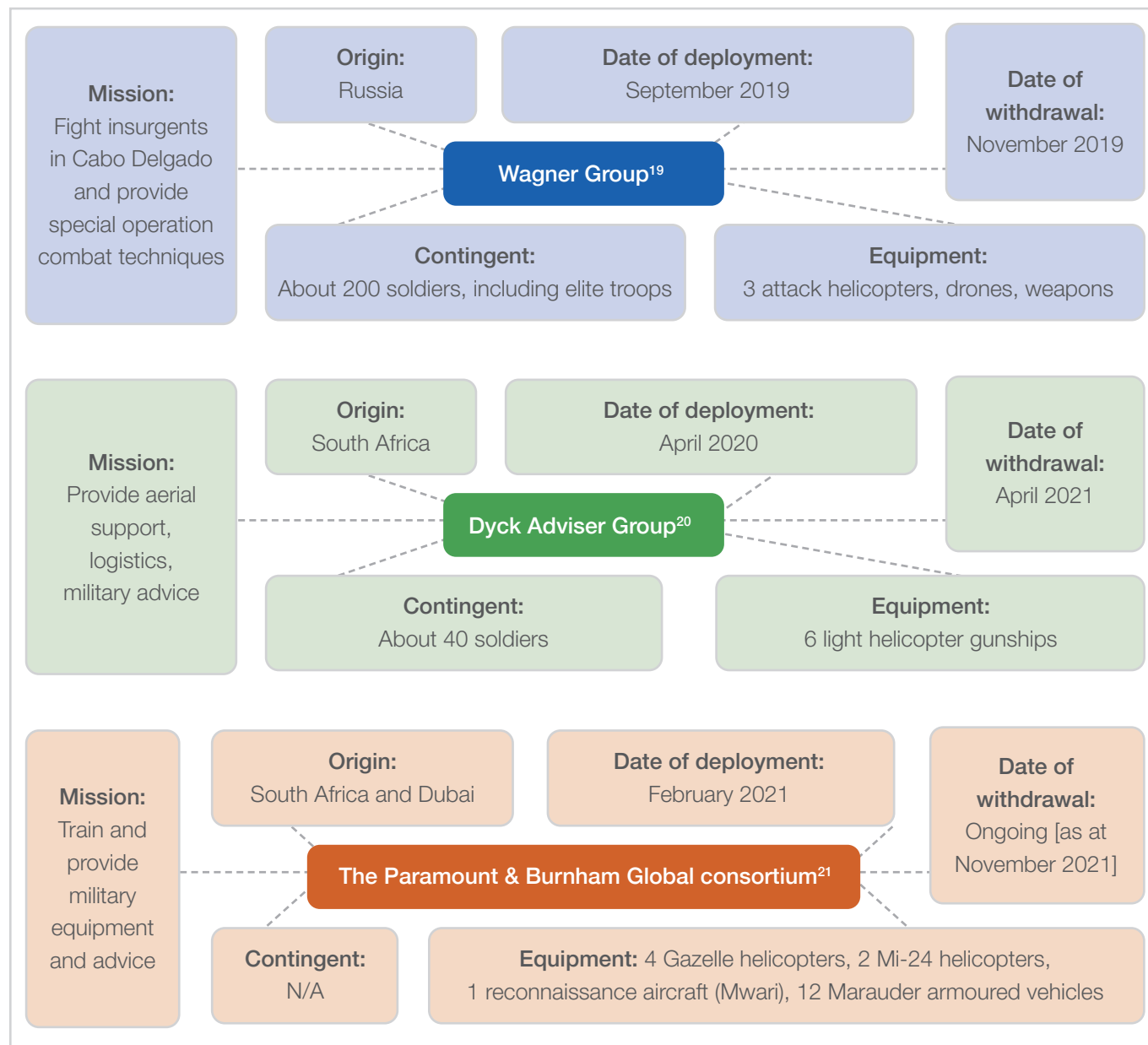
Pemba.¹³ By that time, terrorist groups were attacking villages located about 100 km from Pemba.¹⁴

Again details were never given on the contract between the government of Mozambique and DAG, showing a lack of both transparency and accountability concerning the presence of private military companies in Mozambique. However, a study of the financial costs of the Cabo Delgado conflict found that the Mozambican government paid US\$30 million to DAG from April 2020 to April 2021, the period when the company was helping government forces fight the insurgency.¹⁵

Yet even with the help of DAG in Cabo Delgado, government troops proved unable to contain attacks by violent extremist groups. DAG was however operating at a disadvantage. The group set up its base in Pemba giving it little time to act in response to its target.¹⁶

In February 2021, the Mozambique government hired a third company to supply military equipment, training and advice. This time the choice was a consortium made up of the South Africa-based Paramount Group and Dubai-based Burnham Global.¹⁷

Chart 1: Details of private military companies, 2019–2021



Source: Author

Faced with the inability of government forces to stop the insurgency, even with private military support, liberation struggle veterans in Maconde-dominant districts of Cabo Delgado formed local militias to fight the insurgents. The contribution of the militias has not yet been studied in depth, but it seems that they were useful in blocking the insurgents' advance towards districts such as Mueda and Muidumbe.¹⁸

Palma attack internationalises the conflict

A huge attack on the town of Palma in March 2021 resulted in the death of dozens of people, including expatriates working on the construction of a multi-billion dollar liquefied natural gas (LNG) processing plant. The attack rang alarm bells in the international community, proving the seriousness of the conflict in Cabo Delgado. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) quickly moved to address the insecurity, convening several meetings (Chart 2).²²

Six months prior to the attack on Palma, there had been a turning point in the conflict when insurgents captured Mocimboa da Praia.²³ The capture and subsequent control of Mocimboa da Praia made it possible for the insurgents to plan and execute a master plan in Palma. The operations in Palma, however, became internationalised because of the insurgents' attack on a hotel frequented by foreigners. The capture of Mocimboa

da Praia was the insurgents' biggest operation, and its destruction far exceeded the damage in Palma.

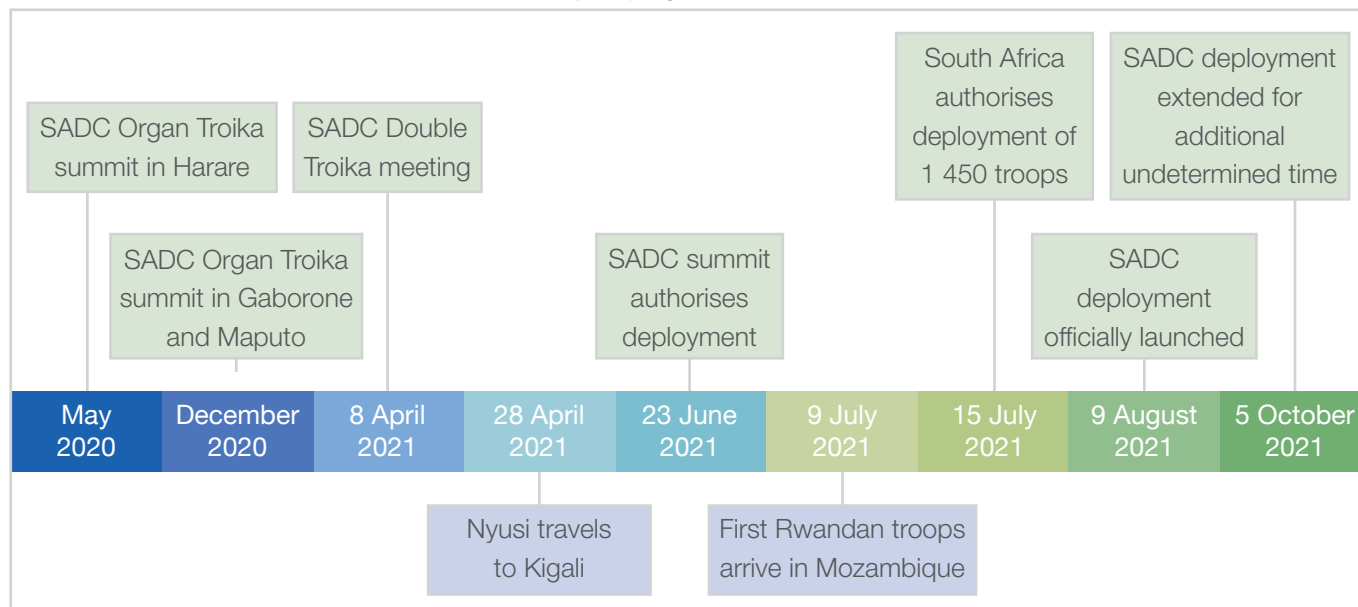
Following the attack on Palma, a SADC technical assessment mission conducted in Cabo Delgado from 15 to 21 April 2021 proposed 'the immediate deployment of the SADC Standby Force to support the Mozambican Defence Forces (FADM) in combating the threat of terrorism and acts of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado.' It was recommended that operations should include the deployment of land, air and maritime intelligence assets and personnel.²⁴

The capture of Mocimboa da Praia allowed the insurgents to execute their master plan in Palma

On 28 April 2021, Nyusi flew to Kigali for a 'consultation' meeting with Rwandan President Paul Kagame, with whom he held a 'discussion on Rwanda's experience in combating terrorism and violent extremism.'²⁵

Mozambique initially rejected any support that would result in the deployment of foreign troops on the ground such as a traditional peacekeeping operation, arguing that the insurgency was a domestic crisis that Mozambique could manage. The government stressed

Chart 2: Timeline for Rwandan and SADC troop deployments



that the country's sovereignty was sacrosanct. It opted rather for the use of private security companies to complement the efforts of Mozambique's security forces, while at the same time requesting soft support (equipment, funds and technical assistance) from the international community.

In line with this policy, Maputo was reluctant to receive SADC military support involving the deployment of boots on the ground, despite the resurgence of attacks in Cabo Delgado and the inability of local defence and security forces to contain the growing insurgency.²⁶

Therefore, Nyusi's trip to Kigali on the same day that a decisive summit on the deployment of SADC forces to Cabo Delgado was scheduled was not a surprise. The SADC summit was postponed *sine die* and Nyusi returned from Kigali with what seemed to be a 'solution in his suitcase.' Weeks after the meeting between the two presidents, Rwandan military personnel began arriving in Cabo Delgado for reconnaissance missions, in preparation for the deployment.

The deployment of SADC troops was only approved on 23 June 2021, when the SADC summit accepted the proposals made by the SADC technical assessment mission.²⁷ And although the SADC Standby Force was given the green light to deploy to Cabo Delgado, Mozambique made the start of operations difficult by not signing the SADC forces' status of forces agreement until the last day scheduled for deployment.²⁸

Rwandan deployment and secret agreements

On 9 July 2021, Rwanda sent its first contingent of 1 000 men and women from the military and police to conduct operations in Cabo Delgado. They would be essentially doing the work that was supposed to be done by the SADC Standby Force. The arrival of Rwandan forces in Mozambique was announced by the Rwandan government. Leaders of SADC, the opposition and rights organisations in Mozambique were taken by surprise, since there had been no official communication from Mozambique concerning the deployment of Rwandan forces to Cabo Delgado.²⁹

As was the case with the Wagner Group and DAG deployments, the agreement framing the deployment of Rwandan troops to Cabo Delgado is not known.

Although it is an intergovernmental agreement that requires parliamentary oversight, the Mozambican Parliament has not been notified of such an agreement.

There is also no military cooperation agreement between the two countries in the public domain, which raises concerns about the legality of the Rwandan military intervention in Cabo Delgado. The first General Cooperation Agreement between Mozambique and Rwanda was signed on 6 July 1990, by presidents Juvénal Habyarimana (Rwanda) and Joaquim Chissano (Mozambique). The General Cooperation Agreement, as the name suggests, is a broad agreement and would only become reactivated by Nyusi and Kagame in a meeting held in Maputo on 24 and 25 October 2016.³⁰

Like the Wagner Group and DAG deployments, the agreement for deploying Rwandan troops is not public

After successive public questions about the legal framework that allowed Rwandan military intervention in Mozambique, Nyusi explained that: 'Rwanda forces are in our country under the bilateral Agreement between our two countries in the field of security' and announced 'a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Republic of Rwanda on Cooperation in the Defence and Security Sector and the Agreement on the Status of the Support Force in the Fight against Terrorism in Mozambique.'³¹

Such agreements were not ratified by Parliament or the Council of Ministers in Mozambique and published in the official Gazette, as mandated by the country's constitution. The success achieved so far by Rwandan forces in Cabo Delgado may overshadow the non-transparent way in which Rwandan troops were deployed in Mozambique.

Foreign troops achieve quick gains

In all, more than 20 countries from Africa, Europe and North America are directly involved in combating the insurgency in Cabo Delgado, whether in the form of military operations or the training of Mozambican military personnel (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Foreign troops deployed in Mozambique to help fight the Cabo Delgado insurgency

Country of deployment	Staff estimate	Mission type	Date deployed	Duration of mission	Observations
Rwanda	± 2 000, double the official announcement	Military operations	July 2021	Undetermined	After their operations, troops will conduct security missions in areas recaptured and train Mozambican military and police
South Africa	270 out of 1 495 planned	Military operations	August 2021	3 months, then extended indefinitely	SA's mission is integrated in SAMIM. It has a greater presence and military equipment for land operations and maritime security. SA commands SAMIM
Angola	20	Aerial transport/logistics	August 2021	3 months, then extended indefinitely	Part of SAMIM
Botswana	296	Military operations	August 2021	3 months, then extended indefinitely	Part of SAMIM
Lesotho	70	Military operations	August 2021	3 months, then extended indefinitely	Part of SAMIM
Malawi	1	Military expert	August 2021	3 months, then extended indefinitely	Part of SAMIM
Tanzania	277	Military operations	August 2021	3 months, then extended indefinitely	Part of SAMIM
Zimbabwe	1	Military expert	August 2021	3 months, then extended indefinitely	Part of SAMIM
EU (Portugal, Finland, Spain, Italy France, Greece, Romania, Belgium, Luxembourg, Estonia)	140	Military training and assistance in non-lethal equipment	November 2021	2 years	Training for 2 000 Mozambican special forces from 1 November. Based in Maputo for naval forces training and Manica Province for commando training
USA	N/A	Military training, medical and communication equipment support	March 2021	2 months	In August 2021 the US announced a second Joint Combined Exchange Training military programme, bringing Special Operations Forces to train Mozambican commandos

Source: Author's compilation based on various documents and interviews³²
SADC extended SAMIM on 5 October 2021 for an undetermined period.

First Rwandan troops and later soldiers from the SADC Military Mission (SAMIM), helped Mozambique significantly contain attacks in Cabo Delgado. In just over two months of their presence in Mozambique, Rwandan troops helped consolidate government control in Palma district and dislodge insurgents from their main bases in Mocimboa da Praia district. This included the recovery of the city of Mocimboa da Praia, which for about a year had been occupied by insurgents.

Rwanda's quick achievements were due to better combat experience, but also better equipment, which allowed them great superiority over the insurgents. While the insurgents' bases had already been identified by the Mozambican military, they did not have the capability to dislodge the insurgents. The attempts that had been carried out in the past had resulted in failures and in some cases, tragedies.³³

SAMIM troops entered the battleground about a month after the Rwandan contingent. The SADC forces were assigned a greater number of districts compared to the Rwandans. SAMIM troops are in Nangane, Macomia, Mueda and have a presence in the Indian Ocean, where South African naval forces are patrolling the seas. After an initial period of silence, SAMIM began releasing information about its operations, showing that the troops are destroying insurgents' bases, seizing equipment and rescuing kidnapped civilians.³⁴

Despite the successes achieved by foreign troops on the ground, insurgents are still active in Cabo Delgado province. There are clear signs that they are dispersing into small groups and moving into the southern districts. The Mozambiquan media have reported frequent attacks in the districts of Quissanga and Macomia – a reminder that a four-year terrorist insurgency cannot be destroyed in two months.³⁵

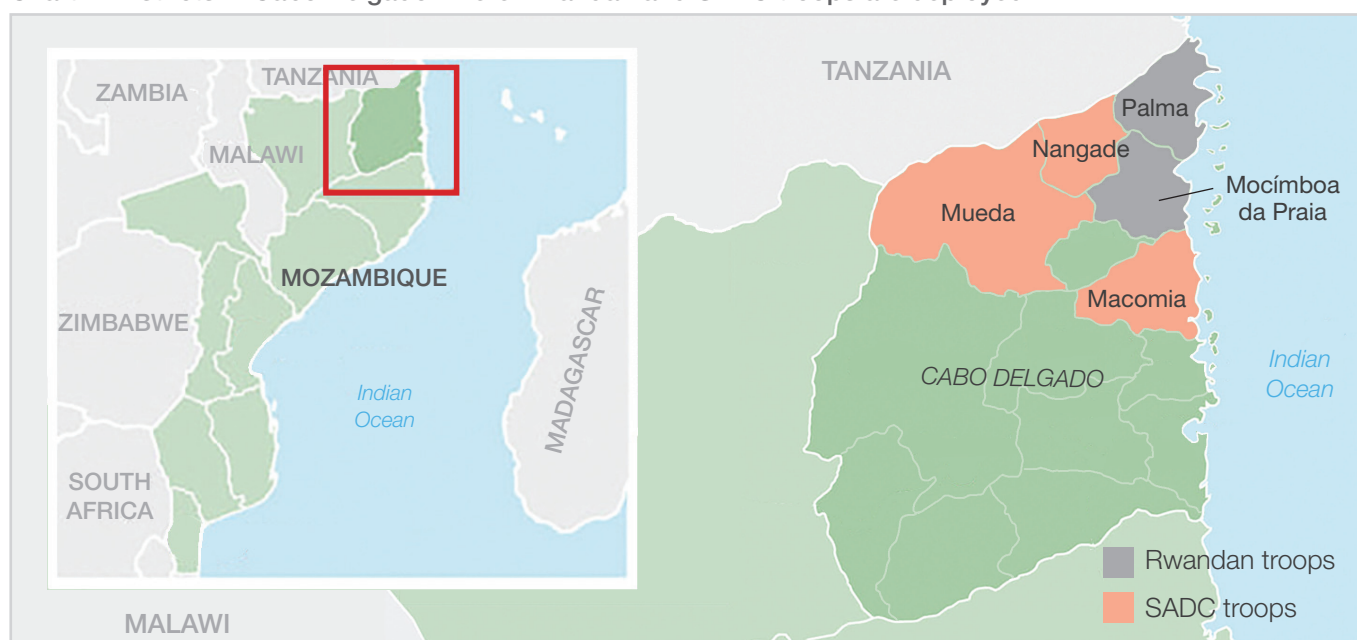
Conclusion

Despite progress in combating violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, there is still a long way to go. After more than a decade of the radicalisation of local populations and a multi-year armed insurgency, three months of foreign intervention is just the start of the process towards building peace and stability in Cabo Delgado.

The insurgents are now dispersing into small groups and moving into the southern districts

Terrorism is a transnational phenomenon in which foreign fighters leave their countries of origin to join organisations in other states, or move to and from new conflict zones. Terrorist organisations often have members and cells in multiple countries, using the media and the internet

Chart 4: Districts in Cabo Delgado where Rwandan and SADC troops are deployed



to coordinate and communicate their operations and transfer money and other assets across borders to support their activities. They use international criminal trafficking networks to raise funds and acquire weapons, skills and explosives.

Some of the combatants in the armed group that operates in Cabo Delgado have strong ties with fighters from other countries or come from other countries. This makes stemming the insurgency a complex matter involving various state and non-state actors. This requires great coordination among the forces present on the ground and careful planning to achieve the desired results.

Recommendations for Mozambique

- Interference by the high level military command in Maputo in decisions made in the theatre of operations should be reduced.
- Training programmes for Mozambican forces should include the training of intelligence officials to deal with terrorism threats in a timely manner. The courses should also cover compliance with the law, respect for human rights, discipline and integrity.
- Coordination among the various forces present in Cabo Delgado must be strengthened.
- ‘Islands of integrity’ should be created in counter-terrorism programmes through zero tolerance of nepotism, bribery, trafficking or influence in access to public services. The effective management and distribution of aid to internally displaced people must be guaranteed.
- Military equipment needs to be acquired for all the branches and sub-specialities in the army. Logistics should be better organised and salaries of military personnel improved (they are considered the lowest in Mozambique).
- The military presence on the border with Tanzania should be increased to boost the capacity of the police who are tasked with border security.
- Reconnaissance missions should be increased and the work of military intelligence and counterintelligence intensified at all likely insurgent dispersal points.

- Programmes for deradicalisation and social reintegration of the youth captured from terrorist bases must be developed and rolled out.
- Ongoing inter-religious dialogue within the different orientations of Islam, Christianity and other recognised religions in Mozambique should be developed and intensified, especially in the districts now affected by the insurgency. They should aim to inculcate the principles of co-habitation and respect.
- A policy of forgiveness and reconciliation should be promoted among local populations, especially among different ethnic groups.
- Employment opportunities and rural development policies are needed in the area. The government’s ongoing Integrated Northern Development Agency (ADIN) project is a good model but must be managed as an island of integrity.
- Technical training courses should be offered for communities surrounding the liquid natural gas projects to enable the employment of local labour in the gas industry.
- Good governance and a rejection of corruption must be promoted in the state apparatus.

Recommendations for Rwanda and SADC

- SAMIM should extend the current term of the mission from six months to at least two years.
- SADC should engage countries bordering Mozambique to tighten border control to prevent the entry and exit of insurgents to and from Mozambique.
- Both SADC and Rwanda should help Mozambican defence and security forces to build intelligence to distinguish insurgents from civilians in communities where SADC is embedded.
- Mozambique’s defence and security forces should be trained to detect and neutralise threats of various nature, including the movement of insurgents across land and maritime borders.
- SADC and Rwanda should help Mozambique’s defence and security forces build a disciplined combat doctrine, stop the brutalities committed against civilians, and respect human rights.
- SADC and Rwanda should help Mozambique’s defence and security forces to establish response

mechanisms of humanitarian support for civilians affected by the insurgency.

- SADC and Rwanda should help Mozambique to establish effective law enforcement services in the area affected by the insurgency.
- There is an urgent need for all forces including SADC, Rwandan and Mozambique's defence and security forces to strengthen operational communication, coordination and cooperation in all aspects of the fight against insurgents. This will prevent misunderstandings, the tendency to duplicate efforts and the inefficient use of resources.

Recommendations for the EU and USA

- Respect for human rights and the need to protect civilians in conflict zones should be included in the training of Mozambique's armed forces. Training courses should also cover discipline, integrity and an intolerance for corruption in military operations.
- Assist the Mozambique Channel Patrol to cut off insurgents' logistics systems and illicit trafficking in goods.

Recommendations for the AU, UN and the wider international community

- Financial and technical support to Mozambique should be mobilised to develop the northern region and Cabo Delgado province in particular.
- The government of Mozambique should be encouraged to respect the human rights of populations in conflict zones.
- Mozambique needs help to rebuild areas destroyed by terrorist attacks and ensure that internally displaced persons return safely to their homes.
- Reform of the defence and security sectors should be encouraged and supported, to enable more professional forces committed to integrity in the fulfilment of their missions.
- Mozambique needs help to promote good governance in Cabo Delgado, free from corruption and focused on the needs of the citizen.
- Mozambique needs support in creating strong institutions with legitimacy that can be trusted by the population.

Notes

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