



Dialogue Online

"The elders sit under the big tree and talk until they agree... talking until you agree (or agree to disagree) is the essential (essence) of the traditional African concept of democracy..."
Julius Nyerere

Update on the security situation in Northern Mozambique

By Ineke Stemmet, SALO



Image: "northern Mozambique" by krugergirl26 is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Introduction

The jihadist group, Al-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa (ASWJ) (otherwise known as al-Shabaab, with no known ties to the Somali group with the same name) has been active in Mozambique since October 2017. This brief serves as an update to the situation since SALO's last brief, published on the website in September.¹ The armed violence in the Cabo Delgado province has thus far been the cause of 2000 deaths and has displaced 560 000 people. The area is home to the largest private multinational investment in Africa as a result of its liquefied natural gas resources.² Since the last brief was written, the attacks have become more intense and widespread and have attracted greater attention from international actors.

Background

As of February 2021, ASWJ has expanded its presence in Mozambique and has updated its tactics. Early in 2020 the group's strategy was to attack rural villages before retreating. As opposed to this, currently, it has a more permanent presence in most of the Cabo Delgado province's 17 districts. It has taken control of key transport routes and waterways.³ The group has also moved closer towards the Total LNG plant in the Afungi region. In January 2021 Total said it had evacuated 3,000 of its staff after insurgents in December attacked four locations mere kilometres away from its plant.⁴

Further, it has expanded its area of attacks. On October 14, around 300 of the militants crossed the border into Tanzania and attacked the village of Kitaya in the country's south-eastern Mtwara region. In a video capturing the attack, insurgents are heard to say "*we've come to remove Magafuli*" - Tanzania's president.^{5 6} The group has claimed three more attacks in the Mtwara region since then, despite Tanzania sending troops to this region earlier in 2020 in an attempt to secure its border with Northern Mozambique. Furthermore, the group has expanded its reach into the ocean. It has attacked popular tourist destinations on the coast of Mozambique. On 5 September 2020, Ilha Vamize Island was attacked. No casualties were reported but three homes were burnt down and looted. Subsequently, on 18 September 2020, Vamisi Island was attacked, luxury hotels and holiday homes were burnt down, and the insurgents announced the imposition of Sharia law on the residents.⁷ Consequently, during the week of 23 November, ASWJ members captured seven sailboats and detained 20 passengers.⁸

¹<https://www.salo.org.za/mozambique-terrorist-insurgency-an-uncoordinated-response-to-a-looming-regional-crisis-by-fowzia-davids-and-lindiwe-mthembu/>

²Portugal: EU mission flies to Mozambique in response to violence in Cabo Delgado. 2021 Macau Business.com. 19 January. Available: <https://www.macaubusiness.com/portugal-eu-mission-flies-to-mozambique-in-response-to-violence-in-cabo-delgado/>

³Cebola & Kleinfeld. 2020. Mozambique's Cabo Delgado: Militants advance as aid access shrinks. The New Humanitarian. 21 December. Available:

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/12/21/Mozambique-Cabo-Delgado-displacement-mass-killings>

⁴ EU to partner with Mozambique in curbing rising insurgency in Cabo Delgado province. 2021. Africanews. 20 January. Available: <https://www.africanews.com/2021/01/20/eu-to-partner-with-mozambique-in-curbing-rising-insurgency-in-cabo-delgado-province/>

⁵Cebola & Kleinfeld. 2020. Mozambique's Cabo Delgado: Militants advance as aid access shrinks. The New Humanitarian. 21 December. Available:

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/12/21/Mozambique-Cabo-Delgado-displacement-mass-killings>

⁶ Quinn. 2020. The Military-First Approach in Northern Mozambique is Bound to Fail. Council on Foreign Relations. 23 November. Available: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/military-first-approach-northern-mozambique-bound-fail>

⁷ <https://caert.org.dz/Medi-review/Terrorism-bulletin/BULLETIN-Sep-2020.pdf>

⁸ Moss & Pigeon. 2020. ASWJ: What we need to know. Stable Seas. December. Available: https://www.stableseas.org/sites/default/files/aswj_what_we_know_.pdf

This expansion of the group's scope of attacks and geographical expansion indicates that the counter-insurgency strategies that have been implemented have thus far been largely unsuccessful. Mozambique's ambiguous response to the violence, while the group's capacities are seemingly increasing, is concerning.

Mozambique's ambiguous response

At the beginning of 2020, Mozambican President, Filipe Nyusi, stated that he would be willing to start peace talks with the jihadist group, while at the same time promising to "*hunt them down.*"⁹ Subsequently, his response remains ambiguous. Mozambique has carried out a military crackdown on the group and President Nyusi recently reshuffled the military in an attempt to strengthen its response to the conflict. This reshuffle can be seen as a demonstration of the President's commitment to a military response against the insurgents.¹⁰ Nyusi promoted army general Eugenio Mussa to chief of staff of the military, replacing Lázaro Menete. Mussa has been a confidant of the president since 2012. Analysts believe that this move shows that the president will have a more hands-on approach to the jihadist attacks in the north of Mozambique.¹¹

Controversially, this reshuffle happened shortly after the attacks in the Afungi area near the Total LNG plant, which suggests that the reshuffle was a response to this attack. Many have taken this to be indicative of where the government's priorities lie, not with its citizens' safety, but with the safety of the billion-dollar international company. This idea is further embedded by the agreement between and the Mozambican defence forces and Total for the protection of its plant. The details of this agreement have not been made clear.¹²

At the same time, reports have been surfacing that civilian militia groups have started forming in some areas, taking the fight against the insurgents into their own hands. Claims have been made that the government has armed some of these groups who have been accused of torturing and beheading those suspected of being insurgents. These groups and government troops have reportedly been seen attacking one another, indicating a complete lack in coordination.¹³

As stated in the previous brief, President Nyusi had asked for help in May of 2020 from other states in the region to address the advancing insurgency during the Troika Summit of SADC's organs on politics, defence, and security.¹⁴ Seven months later, at the SADC Extraordinary Organ Troika summit held in November, concern was expressed over the security situation in Cabo Delgado, however no concrete plan of action has been established. South Africa's International Relations and Co-operation Minister, Naledi Pandor, said that SADC had been asking

⁹ Louw-Vaudarn. 2020. Can the African Union help Mozambique Combat Terrorism? ISS. 13 February. Available: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-african-union-help-mozambique-combat-terrorism>

¹⁰ Crisis Watch Mozambique. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/southern-africa/mozambique#:~:text=Nyusi%2014%20Jan%20promoted%20General,and%20previously%20under%20police%20control.>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² TOTAL SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF MOZAMBIQUE REGARDING THE SECURITY OF MOZAMBIQUE LNG PROJECT. 2020. Total. 24 August. Available: <https://www.total.com/media/news/press-releases/total-signs-agreement-government-mozambique-regarding-security-mozambique>

¹³ Quinn. 2020. The Military-First Approach in Northern Mozambique is Bound to Fail. Council on Foreign Relations. 23 November. Available: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/military-first-approach-northern-mozambique-bound-fail>

¹⁴ <https://www.salo.org.za/mozambique-terrorist-insurgency-an-uncoordinated-response-to-a-looming-regional-crisis-by-fowzia-davids-and-lindiwe-mthembu/>

Mozambique for a roadmap on its requirements and expectations from the regional body since May and had not yet received one.¹⁵

An intervention by SADC into the area would be illegal without Mozambique's consent. There have been suggestions that Mozambique would opt for a bilateral approach instead, garnering support from some of its neighbours instead of going through the regional body to address the issue. Further, Mozambique has not yet stated that it is a victim of a terrorist insurgency, nor have they reported anything of this nature to the AU PSC nor the UNSC. This could indicate that a SADC intervention is the last thing on the list of what Mozambique is willing to try.¹⁶

Positively, Mozambique has been willing to reach out to international actors for military logistics support and humanitarian aid. In September 2020, the Mozambican government appealed to the European Union "*for help in training its armed forces to battle the insurgency,*" as well as humanitarian aid for the increasing numbers of people being displaced.¹⁷ As will be seen below, the government has also recently engaged in developmental projects, which (if successful and developed further) could be an encouraging step in Mozambique's approach.

Helping hands

Mozambique has received many expressions of concern and willingness to extend a helping hand. South Africa has stated that it would be willing to come to Mozambique's aid if needed. South Africa understands that the situation in Mozambique is not just one of violence and a securitised response would be a misjudgement of what is required. Minister Naledi Pandor has criticised the Mozambican government for having "*governance deficits, human rights abuses and contestation over resources,*" which have contributed to the current situation.¹⁸

Another one of Mozambique's neighbours, Tanzania, has been working with Mozambique to deter insurgents from moving into Tanzania. Police forces from Tanzania have agreed to conduct joint operations with the Mozambican police against the group after the attacks in October in which more than 20 locals in a Tanzanian village were beheaded.¹⁹

As the death toll of the conflict has started increasing, it has reached international ears more and concerned states have drawn attention to it. In November, an attack on Muatide village, where 50 people were beheaded, led the French President Emmanuel Macron's call for an international response to the insurgency.²⁰

¹⁵Fabricius. 2020. South Africa ready to help Mozambique fight Islamist insurgency. Daily Maverick. 3 September. Available: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-09-03-south-africa-ready-to-help-mozambique-fight-islamist-insurgency/>

¹⁶Svicevic. 2020. The Legality of a SADC Intervention in Cabo Delgado in the Absence of Mozambican Consent. *Opinio Juris*. 2 November.

<http://opiniojuris.org/2020/11/02/the-legality-of-a-sadc-intervention-in-cabo-delgado-in-the-absence-of-mozambican-consent/>

¹⁷Lister. 2020. Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique Grows in Sophistication and Reach. Combatting Terrorism Centre. October. Available: <https://ctc.usma.edu/jihadi-insurgency-in-mozambique-grows-in-sophistication-and-reach/>

¹⁸Harding. 2020. Mozambique's Islamist insurgency: UN warns of rising violence in Cabo Delgado. BBC News. 18 December. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55348896>

¹⁹Whitehouse. 2020. Mozambique LNG prospects lifted by international response to Islamist insurgency. *The Africa Report*. 27 November. Available: https://www.theafricareport.com/52389/___trashed-21/

²⁰Jewers & Stickings. 2020. Emmanuel Macron says 'Islamist terrorism is an international threat that needs an international response' as he condemns attack that left 50 victims beheaded in Mozambique. News Online. 11 November. Available:

In October the European Union drafted a resolution on the humanitarian situation in Mozambique, which passed with 616 votes in favour, 13 against and 57 abstentions. The resolution urges the Mozambican government to take "effective" and decisive measures in the face of the insurgency and warns the region of the risk of a spread to neighbouring countries.²¹ As such, it stated its willingness to aid Mozambique in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance, and security if they were provided with concrete proof that the Mozambican military and police were respecting human rights. The EU has ruled out sending European troops to the country.²²

The EU's Foreign Minister, Josep Borrell Fontelles, travelled to Maputo from 19 to 21 January to assess the matter and to express its willingness to support the government of Mozambique and SADC.²³ He expressed the following critiques of Mozambique's response to the conflict:

*"We cannot say that everything that is happening in Mozambique is a simple extension of the so-called Islamic terrorist movement.... To a certain extent that is true. But the armed violence in the northern part of Mozambique was triggered by poverty and inequality and by the population of the area losing respect for a state which could not provide it with what it needed."*²⁴

Further concern has been expressed by the United States. The US's coordinator for counterterrorism, Nathan Sales, visited Mozambique and South Africa in December 2020 to gauge how the US can be of assistance in fighting against the insurgents. Sales expressed that the situation in Mozambique should be regarded as a global terrorism threat and that the US wished to be Mozambique's "security partner of choice." He said that the US could provide the government with the capabilities to investigate and prosecute crimes committed by the group and to respond to attacks.²⁵

'Winning the hearts and minds' approach

As mentioned above, some instances of civilian militias to counter the insurgents have sprung up, however, widespread organised resistance to the violence has not occurred, despite ASWJ's brutal methods. As such, it indicates that the group has used violence to intimidate the population, but not to such levels that would cause them to revolt. Civilians have reported instances where the insurgents have provided them with food and money and sometimes warning them to flee before attacking a specific area.²⁶ As was discussed in the previous SALO brief, some scholars argue that material deprivation, including poverty, marginalisation, youth

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8938809/Emmanuel-Macron-says-condemns-attack-left-50-victims-beheaded-Mozambique.html>

²¹ European Union. 2020. Motion for a Resolution. Available: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0304_EN.html

²² Machando. 2020. EU Counterinsurgency Aid to Mozambique Should Help Protect Rights. Human Rights Watch. 14 October. Available: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/14/eu-counterinsurgency-aid-mozambique-should-help-protect-rights>

²³ Portugal: EU mission flies to Mozambique in response to violence in Cabo Delgado. 2021 Macau Business.com. 19 January. Available: <https://www.macaubusiness.com/portugal-eu-mission-flies-to-mozambique-in-response-to-violence-in-cabo-delgado/>

²⁴ Harding. 2020. Mozambique's Islamist insurgency: UN warns of rising violence in Cabo Delgado. BBC News. 18 December. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55348896>

²⁵ Lewis. 2020. U.S. counterterrorism chief says Mozambique militants are Islamic State affiliate. Thomas Reuters Foundation. 8 December. Available: <https://news.trust.org/item/20201208193829-456v0/>

²⁶ Colombo. 2020. The Secret to The Northern Mozambique Insurgency's Success. War on the Rocks. October. Available: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/the-secret-to-the-northern-mozambique-insurgencys-success/>

disenfranchisement and lack of opportunities, may be the main underlying factors for the insurgency, while religion has been used as a cover for these motives.²⁷

There have been indications recently that the group's membership has increased. The group has also been able to be in more than one place at the same time - while occupying certain areas, other areas have been attacked by other sections of the group. Recruitment to the group initially occurred through family ties but lately incentives such as salaries, scholarships and help with setting up businesses have also been used.²⁸

An in-depth study conducted by Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill and Molly Dunigan (2013) of 41 case studies of counterinsurgency strategies found that the *"iron fist"* approach to counterinsurgencies has historically been less successful. This approach focusses on eliminating the insurgent threat. The concept of *"crush them"* is strongly correlated with a loss rather than a win for governments. More successful strategies were motive-based - addressing the incentives to support or participate in an insurgency.²⁹ This approach is also known as the *"winning the hearts and minds"* approach. Simply put, *"winning hearts and minds essentially mean convincing the populace that the benefits of supporting the government against the insurgents outweighs the benefits of supporting the insurgents."*³⁰

This approach focusses on the civilians more than it does on the insurgents. Thus, it uses a military strategy, together with other approaches that would address the support that the insurgents enjoy from the population.³¹ In the Mozambican case it would address the above-mentioned factors - unemployment, marginalisation, poverty, and lack of access to natural resources in the area.

It is clear from the above that the Mozambican population has not become totally disillusioned with the insurgent group, despite their brutal methods. This could be because they have been marginalised by the state for a long time and relate to their ideology and or /religious beliefs.

An integrated approach - the way forward

Therefore, a more integrated response to the security problem in Mozambique would likely have a higher rate of success. The military response should be more coordinated and would benefit from regional coordination in this regard. Another element of the response is development. The Mozambican government has made attempts to include this element with its recently launched Integrated Development Agency of the North (ADIN). This programme seeks to improve the quality of life in Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Nampula by providing humanitarian assistance and employment programs. These will be used to counter some of the narratives used by the insurgent group of corrupt elites and the neglect of poor Muslims - thus addressing the elements that would

²⁷ <https://www.salo.org.za/mozambique-terrorist-insurgency-an-uncoordinated-response-to-a-looming-regional-crisis-by-fowzia-davids-and-lindiwe-mthembu/>

²⁸ Columbo. 2020. The Secret to The Northern Mozambique Insurgency's Success. War on the Rocks. October. Available: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/the-secret-to-the-northern-mozambique-insurgencys-success/>

²⁹ Paul, Clarke, Grill & Dunigan. 2013. Paths to Victory

Detailed Insurgency Case Studies. Rand Corporation. Available: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR291z2.html

³⁰ Miller. 2016. On Winning Hearts and Minds: Key Conditions for Population-Centric COIN. Small Wars Journal. 2 August. Available: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/on-winning-hearts-and-minds-key-conditions-for-population-centric-coin#:~:text=Winning%20hearts%20and%20minds%20essentially,benefits%20of%20supporting%20the%20insurgents.>

³¹ Ibid.

skew the population's favour towards the insurgents.³² This is encouraging and should be streamlined into more partnerships, including regional and international ones.

One such partnership has been between the European Union, Portugal, and Mozambique. They are launching a four-year project in Cabo Delgado which will train and employ young people. The four-year +EMPLOYMENT pilot project seeks to offer vocational training in natural gas to 800 young people aged 15-25, of which 25% are women. This project aims to have at least half of those trained, employed or ensure that they have created their own jobs.³³

It appears that the Mozambican government has recently grasped the value of developmental and humanitarian approaches to the area in general, to decrease the security threats it poses. Whether these responses will be too little, too late, remains to be seen. If these programs are successful and can convince the population of Northern Mozambique that the government is on their side (thus winning their hearts and minds), it could be the first steps in an integrated approach to the security problem facing the region.

³² Columbo. 2020. The Secret to The Northern Mozambique Insurgency's Success. War on the Rocks. October. Available: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/the-secret-to-the-northern-mozambique-insurgencys-success/>

³³Portugal: EU mission flies to Mozambique in response to violence in Cabo Delgado. 2021 Macau Business.com. 19 January. Available: <https://www.macaubusiness.com/portugal-eu-mission-flies-to-mozambique-in-response-to-violence-in-cabo-delgado/>

The Dialogue Online, is an online extension of SALO's national, regional and international consensus-building dialogues (typically workshops, seminars and small meetings) on Peace and Security, Development, SA Foreign Policy, Gender (including LGBTI rights), Natural Resource Governance, Human Rights and the rights of migrant communities through *weekly written articles and/or commentary*. It is a channel through which critical issues raised during dialogue events are synthesised and shared with wider audiences. By taking the dialogue 'online', the conversation is enabled to continue beyond the limits of space and time and to a wider audience.

Since SALO's central focus is peace and security, *Dialogue Online* articles focus primarily on this theme, but drawing attention to the nexuses with development, natural resource governance, human rights and gender, mediation, environment and climate change. Preference is towards articles that speak to international development and peace building policy and practice, raise awareness about conflict situations and the gender dimensions thereof and provoke fresh thinking and policy debate. Contributions are drawn from SALO's pool of experts, peace building and development practitioners, activists, academics, former and current diplomats and workshop participants.

Please note that the articles represent views of respective contributors and do not necessarily reflect SALO's view or position.

Interested contributors are welcome to email articles of 750 to 1000 words in length to info@salo.org.za for consideration.

Please follow us on twitter [@salo_info](https://twitter.com/salo_info) and [#DialogueOnline SALO](https://twitter.com/DialogueOnline) for comments.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

info@salo.org.za

www.salo.org.za