



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

Brief on the Security Situation in Mozambique

By Ineke Stemmet, SALO, October 2021



Image: ["5.56mm Ammunition Rounds for SA80 Rifle"](#) by [Defence Images](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

Background

Northern Mozambique has been experiencing an escalating conflict since October 2017. The insurgent group operating in the area is called Al-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa (ASWJ), Ansar al-Sunna, or is referred to as Al-Shabaab by locals (with no known links to the Somali-based terrorist group). In 2020, more than 570 violent incidents were recorded. An indication of further intensification occurred in early 2021 – on 24 March 2021, insurgents seized the town of Palma in Cabo Delgado, killing dozens of people, including foreigners.¹ Continued attacks have occurred throughout 2021 bringing the total number of organised political violence events since the beginning of the conflict to 1,013 and the total number of reported fatalities from organised political violence to 3,382.²

Regional Interventions

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) agreed to send troops into Northern Mozambique in June 2021 to assist the Mozambican Defence Force to quell the insurgents. Independently, Rwanda sent troops into Mozambique in July. On 5 October 2021, SADC agreed at a summit of the security organ troika to extend the deployment of these troops. Initially, the deployment was intended to last 3 months, until 15 October 2021. The current extension has no deadline.³

The SADC mission was extended to:

“continue with offensive operations against terrorists and violent extremism to consolidate [the] stability of security and create a conducive environment for [the] resettlement of the population and facilitate humanitarian assistance operations and sustainable development.”⁴

Military Victories

¹ Dialogue Online “Addressing the Resource Curse in Northern Mozambique” By Ineke Stemmet, SALO https://www.salo.org.za/dialogue-online-addressing-the-resource-curse-in-northern-mozambique-by-ineke-stemmet-salo/#_ftn2

² Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. Cabo Ligado Weekly: 27 September-3 October. Available: <https://www.cabologado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-27-september-3-october-2021>

³ SADC extends troop deployment in Mozambique to fight insurgency. IOL. 5. October. 2021. Available: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/world/sadc-extends-troop-deployment-in-mozambique-to-fight-insurgency-16af5c80-8ac7-5295-9b2f-208e8e9bd6b9>

⁴ Khoza, A. Sadc leaders extend deployment of troops in Mozambique. Times Live. 5 October 2021. Available: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2021-10-05-sadc-leaders-extend-deployment-of-troops-in-mozambique/>

The interventions by SADC and Rwanda resulted in several military victories which were previously unattainable. Rwanda helped recapture the critical port town of Mocimboa da Praia in August 2021 after an entire year of insurgent occupation. On 25 September 2021, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) attacked an insurgent base in Nangade district, where prominent leaders of the insurgent group were killed.⁵

President Cyril Ramaphosa, who chairs SADC's security organ troika, has said that despite the progress SAMIM has made in restoring peace and stability in Cabo Delgado, its work was not yet complete *"and the coming few months will be critical in shaping the trajectory of the SADC intervention in Mozambique"*.⁶

Shifting the dynamics of the conflict

The next few months will indeed be critical for the trajectory of the conflict but will also have a significant impact on Mozambique as a whole. These types of offensive strategies during times of conflict are usually necessary to create a situation of negative peace, meaning that violence is absent. The hope is then that negative peace will turn into positive peace through various peacebuilding efforts. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) defines negative and positive peace in the following ways:

Negative peace

- *defined by the absence of war and violence*
- *does not capture a society's tendencies towards stability and harmony*

Positive peace

- *defined by a more lasting peace that is built on sustainable investments in economic development and institutions as well as societal attitudes that foster peace.*
- *can be used to gauge the resilience of a society, or its ability to absorb shocks without falling or relapsing into conflict.*⁷

⁵ Fabricius. P. 2021. South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa says the intervention still faces a few critical months. The Daily Maverick. 5 October, 2021. Available: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-10-05-sadc-leaders-extend-mozambique-military-mission-to-combat-insurgency/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Positive Peace: Available: <https://positivepeace.org/>

Negative Peace

The military victories by the SAMIM and Rwandan forces are significant for the attainment of negative peace. These interventions have made it possible to achieve a situation where violence is absent in the area since 2017. However, negative peace does not necessarily lead to positive peace.⁸

The majority of scholars and experts agree that reaching a situation where violence is absent is important to start the process of peacebuilding but that the root causes of the conflict need to be addressed for this to happen. The United States Institute of Peace writes:

“The government must prioritize the restoration of security in Cabo Delgado. There can be no development while bullets are flying.”⁹

Positive Peace

The area has long been marginalised and alienated by the Mozambican government and disadvantaged in terms of access to the rich natural resource base in the country. Other grievances include corruption, mistrust in the government, unemployment and accusations of human rights violations against the state.¹⁰ The United States Institute of Peace further writes:

“In order to restore peace and stability to Cabo Delgado and for its resource wealth to benefit the people of the region, the Mozambican government should consider a comprehensive strategic approach that addresses the root causes of the crisis.”¹¹

Several factors have been identified by experts in the field that should be prioritised within this type of approach, including:

- Implementing a decentralised, participatory and transparent type of governance;
- Addressing the humanitarian crisis;
- Focussing on economic development that is inclusive to the people on the ground;
- Prioritising the free flow of information between the government and its people;
- Facilitating a reconciliation process between key actors;
- Engaging local communities with the aim of building a rapport and trust;¹² and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sany, J. 2021. Pathways to Peace in Mozambique: Addressing root causes of insurgency and humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado is key to stabilizing this strategically important northern province. United States Institute of Peace. 19 May. Available: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/05/pathways-peace-mozambique>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sheeny, T. P 2021. The Need to Build on Security Gains in Mozambique

- Deradicalising the men and boys who are engaging in violence in Mozambique.¹³

Concerns over the Way Forward

The effectiveness and types of peacebuilding will be defined by the ways in which negative peace was achieved. It is then important to keep in mind that an intervention by foreign troops in a conflict situation will not only shift the conflict dynamics but can have a lasting effect on the country they leave behind when they eventually withdraw, which will, in turn, have an effect on the likeliness of attaining positive peace.

At a SALO dialogue hosted on 16 September 2021, João Feijó, coordinator of the research line on Poverty, Inequalities and Conflicts at the Rural Environment Observatory in Maputo expressed concern over what would happen when the Rwandan and SADC troops leave Mozambique because, at this stage, it is unclear what the exit plan will be.

Fatima Mimbire, Journalist and Human Rights Defender, added to this:

“We are really concerned about that... about the future after the international force's support because we don't see the state doing any investments to prepare the [Mozambican] forces to deal with the situation, to control the situation, to maintain stability in the region. We also don't see the state investing in social cohesion.”

The International Crisis Group agrees that the root causes need to be addressed and that the country's capacity should be built up to handle its security problems,¹⁴ which will help address this issue.

Conclusion

There is largely a consensus that achieving a stable situation of security is important as a means to an end to achieve a longer-lasting peace situation in the country. This will need to be complemented by socio-economic interventions that address the root causes as well as strategies to alleviate the humanitarian crisis faced by many in the country.

The Mozambican government should use this opportunity to address the legitimate grievances of the residents of Cabo Delgado province. United States Institute of Peace. 14 September. Available: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/09/need-build-security-gains-mozambique>

¹³ SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Marginalised voices in Mozambique. 16 September.

¹⁴ International Crisis Group. 2021. Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado. 11 June. available:

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/southern-africa/mozambique/303-stemming-insurrection-mozambiques-cabo-delgado>

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