



15 September 2021

Cabo Ligado Monthly: August 2021

Cabo Ligado — or ‘connected cape’ — is a Mozambique conflict observatory launched by ACLED, Zitamar News, and Mediafax.

VITAL STATS

- ACLED records 28 organized political violence events in August, resulting in 63 reported fatalities
- Both the events and fatality counts almost certainly understate the true level of combat in August, with Mozambican and allied troops operating in southern Mocimboa da Praia district with no media coverage for much of the month
- Beyond clashes in Mocimboa da Praia district, other events took place in Macomia, Nangade, and Quissanga districts

VITAL TRENDS

- Mozambican and Rwandan troops completed their push to retake Mocimboa da Praia early in August and then turned south, targeting insurgent bases near Mbau
- The Southern African Development Community (SADC) began its combat deployment in Cabo Delgado, joining Mozambican and Rwandan troops in southern Mocimboa da Praia district
- Insufficient funding from the international community forced the World Food Programme (WFP) to once again ration food aid for displaced people in Cabo Delgado, a situation that appears likely to persist

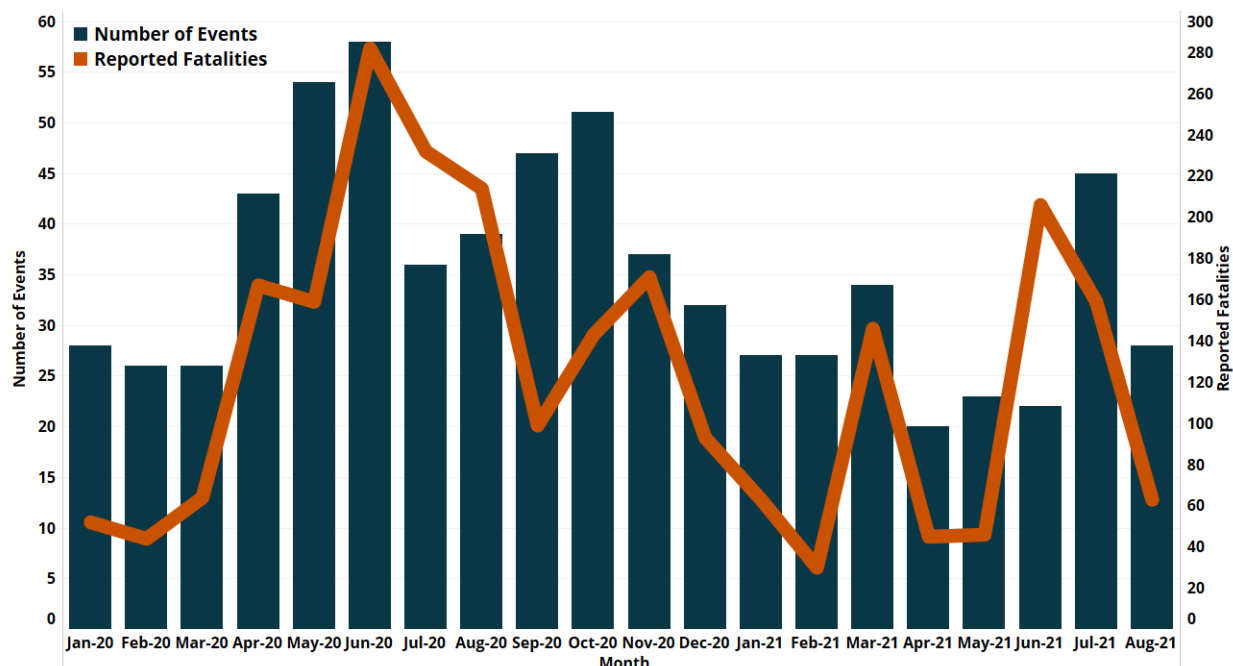
IN THIS REPORT

- Analysis of Tanzania’s response to a shooting in Dar es Salaam that could be related to its participation in the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)
- Examination of likely shifts in insurgent tactical approaches as a result of the success of foreign troops in Cabo Delgado thus far
- Accounts from displaced women living in the Corrane resettlement center in Nampula province about conditions in the camp
- Update on international involvement in the Cabo Delgado conflict with a focus on the potential for dialogue between the Mozambican government and insurgents

AUGUST SITUATION SUMMARY

August opened with the Mozambican government’s signal military success of the entire Cabo Delgado conflict: the re-taking of Mocimboa da Praia. After a year in which insurgents had denied government forces access to the town despite repeated efforts to retake it, the assistance of Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) troops created a breakthrough. Insurgents, accustomed to defending the road between Mueda and Mocimboa da Praia with simple ambushes, could not contend with Rwandan forces that could weather initial insurgent fusillades and continue fighting. After joint Rwandan and Mozambican forces took control of the town, they pushed south, retaking the village of Mbau in the southern part of Mo-

Organized Political Violence and Reported Fatalities in Cabo Delgado (1 Jan 2020 - 31 Aug 2021)



cimboa da Praia district. Eventually joined by SAMIM forces, the joint forces advanced on insurgent bases in the vicinity of Mbau. The lack of media access to the southern Mocimboa da Praia area makes it difficult to discern the outcome of the combat in the bush there, but the offensive represents the government's longest-running effort to deny insurgents access to sanctuary areas in the Messalo River valley.

The conflict continued to become more internationalized in August as well, with SAMIM beginning the first stage of its combat deployments. As will be discussed in this edition, SAMIM operations are likely to expand in the future. As it currently stands, however, it appears that SAMIM forces are being used mostly to garrison towns and provide support for Mozambican and Rwandan forces in southern Mocimboa da Praia district.

On the insurgent side, as will also be discussed in this edition, a seemingly Islamic State (IS) affiliated attack in Dar es Salaam toward the end of the month raised questions as to whether the group will take action against international interveners in the Cabo Delgado conflict. IS claims of attacks in Cabo Delgado have quieted since July, but concerns about IS response to the Rwandan and SADC interventions remain front of mind for analysts.

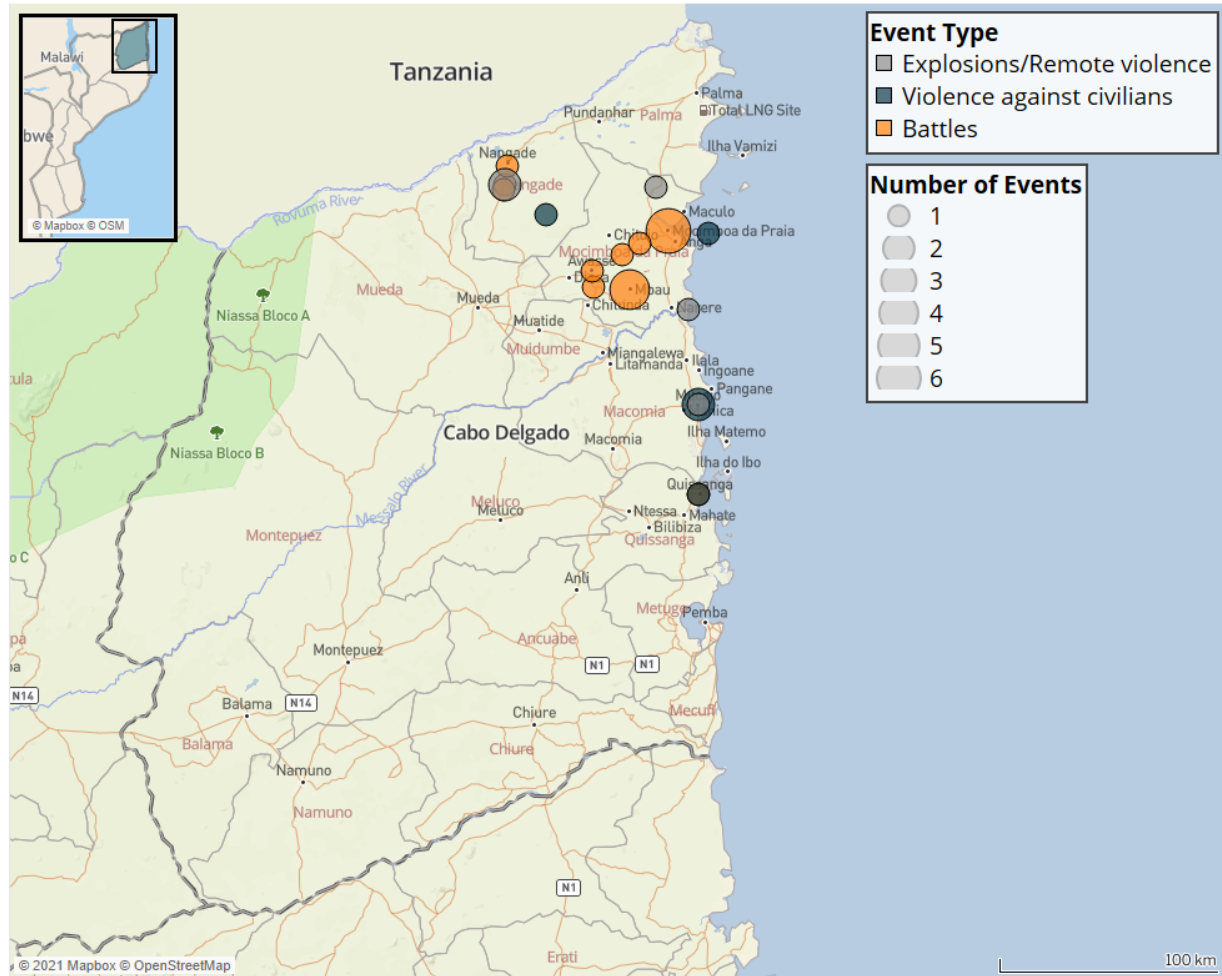
There were some positive humanitarian developments in Cabo Delgado in August as a result of renewed electricity service through the Awasse substation. Some internally displaced persons (IDPs) have already begun to plan their returns to their homes, hopeful that they will be able to plant crops in their fields before the rainy season begins. The government, however, has sent mixed signals about when and whether they will be allowed to return. Officials have alternately trumpeted their successes in returning services to communities in the conflict zone and warned IDPs not to undertake returns until specifically told to do so.

Despite the humanitarian progress in some areas, concern about food distribution looms large over the province. WFP has not received enough funding to provide monthly food disbursements to IDPs, forcing the agency to ration food. With inefficiencies and alleged corruption in food aid distribution still ongoing, the infrequent disbursements threaten to leave some IDPs without necessary nutrition. With the rainy season approaching and WFP's funding situation unlikely to improve, a severe worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado in the coming months is a distinct possibility.

TANZANIA'S ROLE IN SAMIM

The targeted killings of police by a lone gunman in Dar es Salaam on 25 August were a reminder that Tanzania faces a very real terror threat. At lunchtime on 25 August, Hamza Hassan Mohammed killed two traffic police officers, seized

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their sub-machine guns, and went on to kill one more police officer, as well as a security guard, and injure at least six others. He targeted only police, and was seen speaking calmly to others in the area. Most of the episode after the initial seizure of guns was caught on camera phones, and circulated immediately. Police eventually shot him down, firing more bullets into his body as lay on the street. Given that Tanzania now appears to be the dominant force in SAMIM, its approach to terror threats such as this will inform the mission.

Within hours, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Simon Sirro had [suggested](#) a connection to the presence of Tanzanian forces in Mozambique, a Somali media outlet had reported a connection to Al Shabaab, while pro-Islamic State propagandists on Islamic State (IS) social media channels associated his actions with IS. A clip of Hamza miming to an IS *nasheed* while wielding a pistol gave the latter association credence. A widely circulated voice clip, supposedly from a neighbour, told how he had gone to Egypt to study and came back “a changed Hamza, talking jihad and wanting to kill kaffirs.”

By 2 September, the Tanzania Police Force Director of Criminal Investigations Camilius Wambura [declared](#) that Hamza was indeed a terrorist who had been in touch with others in other, unnamed, countries, but who for the most part had been radicalized online. He had been on a suicide mission according to Wambura, who would not say if they had uncovered any accomplices. Given his erratic behaviour on the day, and the absence of claims through established channels, it is likely that he was acting alone.

While lone actors present a threat to individuals, they pose little threat to the state. The inability of a radicalized individual to find allies, organize, and plan more sophisticated actions may be a measure of the success of Tanzania’s approach to extremism relative to its neighbours.

The Tanzanian state has always had a kinetic approach to confronting internal threats. Islamist extremists linked to Cabo Delgado’s insurgents were at the sharp end of this in 2017, when hundreds allegedly [went missing](#) in Kibiti and

neighbouring districts. Continuing security force operations in the south of Tanzania since then have been happening in a media blackout.

Yet this is balanced by recognition that the state needs to have cooperation from the communities from which Cabo Delgado's insurgents come, including communities on the Tanzanian side of the border. Statements by Tanzanian security officials filmed at village meetings for social media and news channels assert that while a heavy hand will be applied to those involved in armed actions, there is always a chance of redemption if signs of radicalization are spotted early. Those messages are essentially the only one disseminated to the public, due to the media blackout. As early as September 2018, police offered an amnesty in Masuguru town in Mtwara district to anyone who would hand in arms. Police at the time claimed it was a hotbed for both Tanzanian and Mozambican youth involved with an armed group they referred to as *Jeshi* — a Kiswahili word meaning army. More recently, in November 2020, IGP Sirro called on border communities to work with the police to [spot](#) signs of radicalization in youth so that they can be rehabilitated. Given the absence of deradicalization or reintegration programmes anywhere in Tanzania, such 'rehabilitation' is likely to be tough.

Tanzania also stresses community involvement in its security policy. This has been seen in community policing programs — programs which failed to prevent the insurgent [attacks](#) in southern Tanzania in October 2020. More recently, citizens have been mobilized to man checkpoints in border villages, with a mandate to check papers and seek explanations for travel from those passing through. Cabo Ligado understands that such checkpoints have become lax, after having been first introduced to coincide with Rwandan operations.

The emphasis on community involvement may have a positive impact on the ongoing Rwandan and SAMIM operations in Cabo Delgado. Certainly, Tanzania has the political and military heft to influence behaviour. Firstly, it has the second largest number of representatives on the SAMIM coordination mechanism, and one of the largest — if not the largest (deployment numbers vary) — number of troops on the ground. Secondly, Tanzanian security force chiefs have established good relations with their Rwandan counterparts. Tanzania's Chief of Defence Forces General Venance Mabeyo [visited](#) Rwanda for four days, arriving 23 August, while IGP Sirro spent four days there in early September. The threat to the region from "[radical Muslims](#)" was discussed, according to Rwanda National Police. These visits reciprocate visits to Tanzania by their Rwandan [counterparts](#) in May.

If Tanzania is to make an impact in terms of encouraging the state to rely on local, if tightly controlled, structures, it is likely to do so only if SAMIM has a long term presence in Mozambique. Corrupt and weak administrative, political, and security [systems](#) in northern Mozambique have contributed to the growth of the insurgency. Tanzania has a unique position within SAMIM given its centrality to the mission, and the increasingly close relationship it has with Rwanda's security forces. This may help smooth relationships between the Rwandan and SAMIM interventions. Tanzania's own domestic approach to addressing the extremist threat may also have some influence on Rwanda's stated 'security sector reform' objectives for its mission.

INSURGENT TACTICS IN THE WAKE OF GOVERNMENT SUCCESSES

August 2021 was the most positive month to date for the Mozambican government's counterinsurgency effort in Cabo Delgado. With Rwandan and, eventually, SADC partners at their side, Mozambican troops were able to retake Mocimboa da Praia town and advance on some of the insurgency's base areas in the Mbau administrative post. These moves have been so successful that Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi was recently able to [announce](#) that all towns and villages in Cabo Delgado are back under government control. Military operations against insurgents in the bush are ongoing in Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia, Nangade, Palma, and Muidumbe districts, as well as in Niassa province, but little is known at this point about the result of those operations.

Despite this month of success, there is still a distinct possibility that the current moment represents not the beginning of a period of military dominance for pro-government forces but instead the apex of their counterinsurgency effort. The threat of stagnation or even rollback of government gains comes from two sources: the limits of the government's current operational concept, and the likelihood of a shift in insurgent tactics.

As noted in the [previous edition](#) of the Cabo Ligado Monthly, Rwandan forces in Cabo Delgado have embraced the Mozambican security sector's operational concept of armored, road-based offensives aimed at strategic towns. SAMIM forces appear poised to pursue much the same approach. The RDF professionalism and competence has given that concept the teeth that it lacked when being executed only by Mozambican troops. However, now that all the strategic towns are

under government control, the concept will have to change in order for pro-government forces to remain on the offensive. Soldiers will have to fight dismounted, in dense bush areas with which they are not familiar, and in tandem with air support they have little experience of working with.

Alternatively, rather than stay on the offensive, pro-government forces could garrison strategic towns and remain in place, leaving only to resupply and patrol strategic roadways. That would have the potential benefit of increasing focus on civilian security and aiding the return of displaced people to their homes. Conversely, it would also create a situation distinctly advantageous for the insurgency. Garrisoned troops (and especially the return of civilians) means the return of readily accessible supplies to the conflict zone — a lack that insurgents have struggled to contend with as the conflict zone has become depopulated. Moreover, foreign troops operating in set areas and traveling easily predictable routes incentivizes insurgents to pursue increasingly complex ambushes against those forces, as evidenced by insurgents' apparent [introduction](#) of anti-vehicle landmines into the conflict on 12 September.

Regardless of the pro-government coalition's approach, insurgents will likely shift tactics to target foreign forces. The introduction of Rwandan troops has shifted the military balance in Cabo Delgado, and their removal could shift it just as starkly in the opposite direction. Increasing the cost of Rwandan (and, to a lesser extent, SADC) intervention is therefore likely to become the insurgency's top military goal going forward. In the conflict zone, this means finding ways of attacking Rwandan forces that go beyond the simple road ambushes that RDF troops have thus far largely brushed aside. Improvised explosive devices, landmines, and other forms of indirect targeting are all likely next steps for the insurgency, provided insurgents can source the materials necessary to carry out such operations. Historically, these forms of indirect targeting become more [frequent](#) as insurgencies are put on the back foot.

The goal of raising the costs of foreign intervention also makes it more likely that insurgents will add spectacular attacks against civilian targets associated with intervening countries to their repertoire. Research [shows](#) that such attacks increase the likelihood that countries intervening in a civil war will end their intervention early, a strong indication of their utility to insurgents.

In addition to hitting civilian targets inside Mozambique, the insurgency could also call on its international connections to help it drive up the cost of intervention. Recent research on international intervention against IS [suggests](#) that intervention drives both organized IS attacks against intervening countries and so-called "lone wolf" attacks against those countries by IS sympathizers. Countries that were directly involved in violence against IS in Syria and Iraq experienced a significant increase in the likelihood of being targeted in their own country by IS and its supporters. Being a source of foreign fighters for IS also made a country more likely to experience lone wolf attacks. Given the Cabo Delgado insurgency's relationship with IS and the fact that the two intervening countries with the largest deployments — Rwanda and Tanzania — both acknowledge their citizens having joined the insurgency, the same dynamics could be at play in the Mozambique case. If so, the recent lone wolf attack in Dar es Salaam, discussed earlier in this Monthly, may be an indication of what is to come.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AT THE CORRANE IDP CENTER

With the security situation in Cabo Delgado improving, those displaced by the armed conflict who are now in Nampula province face several dilemmas. On the one hand, the trauma caused by the violence of the conflict continues to plague the displaced, limiting their interest in an eventual return to their homes. Meanwhile, hunger, lack of jobs, poor sanitary conditions, and local land conflicts make their stay in IDP centers very complicated. A [report](#) published by SEKELEKANI, a Mozambican civil society organization, describes the challenges faced by displaced women in IDP centers in Meconta district, Nampula.

The Corrane IDP center is located 400 kilometres from Pemba, and 80 kilometres from the capital of Nampula, and was opened at the initiative of the Nampula provincial government. The buildings housing the displaced people were built out of local materials. As in other IDP centers that host people displaced by the conflict in Cabo Delgado, 60% of the displaced people in Corrane are women and children. National and international relief organizations, most notably the National Institute for Disaster Risk Management and Reduction (INGD) and the WFP, provide support to the displaced families.

The accounts collected by SEKELEKANI researchers show that the life of each displaced person who arrives in Corrane has been impacted by the conflict. Before fleeing their towns and villages, many of them had witnessed and/or experienced violence, including killings and sometimes beheadings of their loved ones. They saw their homes being set on fire and destroyed by the insurgents. They were forced to travel long distances in search of safety, with one of the interviewees giving birth while fleeing. Others became separated or lost contact with their close relatives. The women also carried with them information about the insurgents. Those interviewed identified the insurgents as speakers of local languages and said that when the insurgents arrived, they separated the locals based on religious criteria. Muslims and other non-Christians were spared, while Christians were murdered.

The women told SEKELEKANI researchers that after fleeing the violence in Cabo Delgado, they have encountered substantial new challenges in the Corrane center. The first challenge is that the houses they have been assigned lack basic amenities. Indeed, the houses themselves are too small to accommodate displaced families, which often leads to overcrowding, a risk factor in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. Meanwhile, [according](#) to the INGD, the displaced in Corrane will receive improved housing in an initiative by the government of Mozambique and partners in order to gradually move people out of the shelters where they are staying and into the houses. The initial plan calls for 500 houses for the displaced and allocates land for farming. Yet the scarcity of water in the IDP center makes agriculture in the area difficult.

Another risk factor associated with the high rate of crowding is the outbreak of cholera and diarrhea. According to a [report](#) by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, “in Meconta District, particularly in Namialo and Corrane at least 346 cases of cholera have been recorded” since the beginning of 2021.

Malaria and malnutrition are other problems described by women in Corrane. Having developed eating habits based on sea resources, the diet of the displaced in Corrane is limited to rice, beans, and sorghum, foods not equivalent to necessary daily caloric needs. The WFP, which is in charge of providing food to the center, has faced difficulties in obtaining funding for displaced people in Cabo Delgado. Many families have seen their food baskets reduced. When IDPs ask for increased food, volunteers working at the center on behalf of the Mozambican government’s District Service for Planning and Infrastructure have scolded the IDPs for their request, asking, “Are you fleeing the war, or did you come here to eat?” This interaction is reflective of ongoing tensions between IDPs and government service providers over food distribution.

Given the traumatic experience they went through during their escape, and their current situation, demand for mental health services among the displaced women is high. In Corrane, however, psycho-social assistance is almost non-existent. Religious organizations are filling the absence of specialists by providing psychosocial assistance to various people.

It is not clear whether the government’s intention is to keep the displaced temporarily or permanently in Corrane. The fact is that this situation is creating land conflicts between the displaced and the host communities. Displaced people and local leaders in IDP centers around Cabo Delgado say that they are waiting for instructions from the government as to if and when people will be able to return to their homes.

SADC FORCES BEGIN OPERATIONS

SADC forces are now officially in play in the conflict arena in Cabo Delgado. Under the rubric of ‘sector responsibility,’ SADC and Rwandan forces have [divided up](#) geographical zones of operation in Cabo Delgado. While Rwanda has concentrated its efforts in Palma and Mocimboa da Praia districts, SAMIM forces have been deployed further south and west in Muidumbe, Macomia, and Nangade districts.

SAMIM, officially launched on 9 August 2021, has adopted a phased approach to its mission, as recommended by its Technical Assessment Mission in April. The first phase began in July with the deployment of special forces, some naval assets, and mechanised brigades. This [reportedly](#) includes two naval vessels from South Africa that will be tasked with bolstering coastal security north of Pemba on the Macomia and Ibo coastline, shutting down a vital element of the insurgency’s operations and improving security for the Quirimbas islands and islands to the north such as Matemo. Although major elements of SAMIM, including personnel from the 43 South African Brigade have yet to be deployed, by late August, SAMIM forces had deployed about 1,000 personnel and were active in several locations, including Nangade, Muidumbe, and even southern parts of Mocimboa da Praia. Forces are drawn from Botswana, South Africa, and Tanza-

nia, as well as smaller contingents from Lesotho and Angola.

As with the Rwandans, SAMIM has huge operational areas to cover. Both forces have limited capacity in terms of operational options to actively seek out and engage with insurgent elements that have now dispersed into smaller groups that are likely to pursue a series of hit and run attacks against the more static elements of the foreign detachments. This pattern follows the classic operational parameters of insurgent groups in the face of better equipped forces.

SAMIM operations will inevitably extend beyond its initial three-month mandate, but for how long remains unknown. Underwriting this operation requires sourcing external financing, which will remain difficult to secure without a clear plan of action. Mozambique, claiming to be in overall operational command, has provided no sense of how its operational plan will unfold. This will present significant intelligence sharing, coordination, communication and, by extension, operational hurdles for SAMIM forces in terms of its immediate security objectives, but also in terms of what can be expected in the consolidation phase of operations.

Is dialogue an option in Cabo Delgado?

Over recent weeks, several Mozambican civil society groups, including [NGOs](#) and [religious groups](#), have called for the Mozambican government to pursue options for dialogue with the insurgency. Dialogue, they argue, is a critical element in [restoring](#) trust with communities that have lost faith in the government and the institutions of state. This push has received support from former [president Joaquim Chissano](#).

The governor of Cabo Delgado publicly [rejected](#) prospects for dialogue in August, echoing Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi's posture that this is a faceless insurrection and, as such, there is no one with whom to talk. In 2019, Nyusi expressed a willingness to talk to insurgents if they would present an interlocutor. In 2020 and 2021, the government called on insurgents to lay down their arms. Nyusi declared on several occasions that Mozambican insurgents who laid down their arms would receive some form of amnesty, but no concrete amnesty plan was ever put forward. The absence of clear modalities have undermined any incentive for fighters to come in from the bush, especially if this means surrendering to Mozambican security forces who have repeatedly been accused of violations against suspected insurgents and supporters.

Recent military successes for the government appear to have put this kind of conciliatory rhetoric on the back burner, at a time when it might be most useful. Few analysts [believe](#) that military force alone will bring an end to the Cabo Delgado conflict, and there is broad consensus that some measure of [dialogue](#) between the government and the insurgency will be necessary to achieve any sort of durable peace.

What exactly might such a dialogue entail? It certainly would not involve any negotiations between IS and the Mozambican government. While the government has emphasised the role of external elements in the insurgency, and has adopted a traditional posture of "not negotiating with terrorists," the nature of the relationship between IS and the actual militants on the ground is unclear. While IS influence is evident in some areas, this is not a fight directed or controlled by IS, at least not at this juncture.

This raises questions and options for exploring dialogue with the constituent elements of the insurgency. Civil society activists [disagree](#) with claims by the government that the insurgency is faceless and argue that there are options for locating entry points to converse with the insurgency. Quietly, there have already been several interactions between insurgents and the government around the ransoming of a handful of hostages taken by the insurgency. Mozambican analysts have also argued that there are other entry points for communication, and that the government has possible avenues to pursue if it wishes.

With Mozambican military power in Cabo Delgado at a high ebb, now could be a propitious moment for the Mozambican government to use such entry points and attempt to open a dialogue. However, experts agree that there will likely have to be internal agreement within the Mozambican government over the goals of such talks before they can take place. Getting the Frelimo elite to agree to concessions that might be necessary to achieve a negotiated end to the conflict might turn out to be the most difficult part of the process. If such a process is to be undertaken, however, it would behoove the Mozambican government to begin working toward it now, while its international partners still have the will to provide military leverage in Cabo Delgado.



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