

CHAPTER 15

Disentangling Violent Extremism in Cabo Delgado Province, Northern Mozambique: Challenges and Prospects

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Introduction

Radicalisation and violent extremism in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province¹ are on the rise and are posing a major threat to human security and development in the region. This study sought to investigate the nature of the challenges that the Mozambique government is encountering in addressing the violent extremism posed by Ansar al-Sunnah (also sometimes referred to as Ahlu Sunna Wa-Jama, Ansar al Sunna or Al-Shabaab)² as well as its prospects in addressing the threat.

The study established that Mozambique's wholly militarised approach to addressing violent extremism in the province, marred by human rights abuses, could worsen the problem. The country is at risk of following the path of Nigeria, where a ham-fisted government response to a radical sect led to a surge in support for the group that became Boko Haram.³ However, there is a good chance that the insurgency in Mozambique might be contained if the government embraces holistic, comprehensive and integrated counter-extremism strategies that encompass dynamic military approaches fused with sustained efforts that are aimed at effectively addressing the root causes of extremism in the province.

The Mozambican government also has a better chance of containing the threat if it can curb the extremist group's source of funding, which has enabled it to expand its war chest. Basically, there are two factors driving the conflict in Cabo Delgado province. The first is insurgency capacity to recruit more militants through enticing them with financial incentives that are donated by sympathisers,

who donate via electronic payments. The second is recruitment conducted through family ties and radical mosques, where funds are also provided to new recruits. Government's militarised approach is misplaced as it alienates itself from the rest of the population in the province.

History of Ansar al-Sunnah in Cabo Delgado

The birth of Ansar al-Sunnah in Cabo Delgado province dates back to 2014⁴ when the first signs of extremism came to light in the Mocímboa da Praia district among youths, who were influenced by a combination of push factors such as bad governance, social fragmentation and economic marginalisation, as well as pull factors, notably the inspirational extremist teachings of a Tanzanian radical preacher, Adbul Chacur, and the now deceased charismatic Kenyan imam Aboud Rogo Mohammed. The spread of external fundamentalist ideas in the province, as well as the material and emotional benefits generated from affiliation with Ansar al-Sunnah, contributed to the growing number of youths who were mobilised into violent extremism in Cabo Delgado province. Opportunistic criminals and army defectors have also joined the extremist group.⁵

Most of Ansar al-Sunnah's core militants have come from the Mwani ethnic group in Cabo Delgado. This ethnic group has traditionally been politically, socially and economically marginalised by Mozambique's ruling Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) government and, consequently, their livelihoods are based mostly on informal and illegal trading. The Mwani are distrustful of the local police and military, who mostly come from Maputo and are of a different ethnicity.

During Mozambique's fight for independence against the Portuguese between 1964 and 1974, which was primarily fought in Cabo Delgado, the majority of the largely Christian Makonde ethnic group aligned with FRELIMO to fight the Portuguese, and they have continued to be rewarded by the government through pensions and political concessions. A large portion of the Mwani people remained in Portuguese camps or fought with them against FRELIMO during the war of independence. Consequently, after independence, the FRELIMO government sidelined the Mwani in favour of the Makonde and other ethnic groups.

Many Makondes and other Mozambicans view the Mwani as backward or irredentist for supporting, or at a minimum living among, the Portuguese and eventually supporting the opposition Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) party.⁶ The Mwani are largely recognised as the original occupants of coastal Cabo Delgado, but their current social status and economic standing are not reflective of their past.⁷ The war furthered ethnic tension between the Mwani and other coastal ethnic groups, including the Makondes. These divisions have been kept alive by the memories of war and the ruling party's policies of excluding the Mwani. Ansar al-Sunnah attacks have demonstrated this division, with Mwani people being spared in many instances.

Ansar al-Sunnah also refers to itself as Swahili Sunna, suggesting a reference to the Mwani's past as the original people of northern coastal Mozambique.⁸ The group's claim to the coastal region and their former glory, together with their current marginalisation, contributed to the group's discontent with oil exploration in the region and the resultant targeting of foreign oil workers in February 2019.

The group's militants are predominantly young Muslim Mwani youths ranging from 18 to 35 years of age.⁹ Signs of discontent and radicalisation have included abandoning Islamic customs and practices traditionally followed in the region. They have also abandoned traditional mosques, and have built their own where a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam is espoused. The group has also refused to recognise the Mozambican government as the legitimate authority in the province. The penetration of Wahhabism¹⁰ in the province, which is an austere form of Islam that insists on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, has shaken the tradition of religious tolerance in Cabo Delgado. The imported radical religious ideas espoused by Wahhabism, and justifying the recourse to armed struggle, have contributed to the radicalisation of religious discourse and rising intra- and inter-communal tensions in Cabo Delgado.

Wahhabism was introduced in northern Mozambique in the 1960s by graduates from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf schools who began to challenge the country's traditional Sufi customs, which had long been practised in the province. In recent years, the Islamic Council in northern Mozambique, which is heavily influenced by Wahhabism, tapped Gulf nongovernmental organisations to provide scholarships for students to study abroad. It is these returning students who make up the core of Ansar al-Sunnah, and who have capitalised on the

grinding poverty and other grievances in the province to recruit more followers. It is from the Islamic Council's activities and its sub-organisations that Ansar al-Sunna has emerged.¹¹

Ansar al-Sunna is inspired by international jihadism, including the establishment of an Islamic state under sharia law, the rejection of formal education and healthcare, as well as the rejection of state taxes and other state authority. For the politically disgruntled and economically marginalised Mwani ethnic group, 'purified' Islam, as opposed to the more traditional Sufism, holds out the promise of decisive answers to northern Mozambique's inequities and marginalisation.¹² Although Ansar al-Sunna has operated under the guise of wanting to establish an Islamic caliphate based on sharia law, socio-economic grievances play an important role, especially in attracting followers.¹³

Although the Mozambican authorities had intelligence on the activities of Ansar al-Sunna, they failed to act decisively to contain the group during its nascent stages, until its first attacks in October 2017 targeting police and military posts in the coastal town of Mocímboa da Praia. The group had "at least three years of social and psychological work to recruit, indoctrinate, brain-wash and transform the youth"¹⁴ before its first attack. This is because, over the past several years, religious leaders have taken a more active role in governance while the central government's presence in the region has remained limited. Northern Mozambique has experienced growing migration from neighbouring Tanzania, including Islamic preachers who were influenced by radical clerics in East Africa, such as Kenyan-born Sheikh Aboud Rogo who was killed in 2012. These religious clerics have established mosques that preach anti-government ideology, denounce western education, and call for moving away from the existing moderate form of Islam. By 2014, they had capitalised on the long-standing feelings of resentment and marginalisation to build up military cells.

The insurgency group used various methods to further its activities, including radicalisation, recruitment, training, logistical acquisition and the execution of attacks. With regard to radicalisation, Ansar al-Sunna used a number of methods, which included openly preaching its extremist ideology in mosques, secret places, round meetings (*darasa duara*), madrassas, social media and Qur'anic schools, where DVDs and CDs containing extremist messages are distributed.

Ansar al-Sunnah also manipulated four legal Islamic concepts – *jihad*, *kufar*, *shahid* and *hijrah* – to justify its violent actions. In line with its Wahhabist beliefs, the extremist group is waging a jihad as proclaimed in the Qur'an, and fighting against *kufar* (non-believers). The group members also believe that if they die in *jihad* (holy war) they will be *shahid* (martyrs).

Recruitment into Ansar al-Sunnah

Ansar al-Sunnah has skilfully exploited the underlying societal vulnerabilities of inequity, pervasive poverty, social exclusion, widespread unemployment, insecure land rights, and excessive use of force by the military and police during their counterinsurgency operations to secure local support and boost its recruitment drive. Recruitment takes place through clandestine operations in mosques, mad-rassas, prisons and social media platforms. The group also leveraged social and familial networks to recruit new members, not only through the offer of wages or bounty, but also by providing recruits with capital to enter into both the illicit and licit economy, as well as offering study bursaries.¹⁵

A close look at the profiles of some of the insurgents reveals how important their entry into the local economy was to both recruitment and funding. In Mocímboa da Praia, Nuro Adremane and Jafar Alawi, who were early leaders of the group, each owned a small shop with an equally small local customer base. They travelled regularly to Tanzania for business, and their small shops became big ones, bringing in large sums of money. Adremane and Alawi both bought expensive cars and houses in Palma, which raised their standing with the town's youth. After the October 2017 attacks, the two sold many of these assets, which had been powerful tools for recruitment.¹⁶

As mentioned, youth unemployment in Cabo Delgado is high, and financial benefits from illegal activities such as drug trafficking have been a key tactic of recruitment. In fact, there are few alternatives that produce similar profits and rapid enrichment in Cabo Delgado, and this has encouraged a large number of youths to join the extremist group to tap into this lucrative criminal economy.

Indirect recruitment is also done through videos obtained from radical movements in Kenya and Tanzania. Some of the popular narratives that the group has used for recruitment include the following:

“Participating in jihad provides one with a purpose in life and is a means to a better life in the holy Islamic land governed by sharia laws and is also a way of freeing one from *kuffars* (non-believers). Taking part in jihad will contribute to the liberations of the world from the ‘unholy’ western culture. Dying as a martyr enables an individual to liberate seven closest members of one’s family who will directly go to paradise.”¹⁷

These extremist ideas, espoused by Wahhabism, have provided a default form of salvation from relative deprivation, dispossession and the fragmentation of social relations. Due to a number of structural factors, mentioned above, Ansar al-Sunnah’s activities have found resonance among some segments of the youth. All of this is against a backdrop of a local population that has been sidelined and marginalised in the wake of considerable investment in infrastructure in the area to support the extraction of petroleum, natural gas, and large deposits of pink sapphires and rubies. The local population, most of whom are unskilled, have been sidelined from employment opportunities in infrastructural development projects such as roads; such employment opportunities have gone mostly to expatriates.

Furthermore, foreign multinational companies, with the aid of the government, have expropriated land from locals without proper compensation. Private security guards employed by these companies, particularly the British-based Gemfields, as well as Mozambique’s security forces have forcibly removed the community from their land and displaced a number of local miners. This has created consternation and social stress among the population, providing fertile ground for militant recruitment. Subsequently, the group has grown exponentially, from about 30 to 40 militants in early 2018 to 1,000 multinational fighters in 2019.¹⁸ The militants are from Tanzania, Uganda, Gambia and Somalia, although the majority are Mozambican. The militants are organised into small autonomous cells along the coast of northern Mozambique and neighbouring Tanzania’s Kibiti region.¹⁹

Ansar al-Sunnah Strategies

Most of Ansar al-Sunnah’s members have received military training in the Cabo

Delgado districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia and Montepuez, where the group established clandestine training camps and cells. Former Mozambican police, army deserters and ex-frontier guards, as well as Al-Shabaab mercenaries from Somalia and Kenya, have trained militants in the province.²⁰ Other group members have received military training in Tanzania and the Great Lakes region.²¹ In 2018, Tanzania arrested 104 Ansar al-Sunnah militants who were undergoing military training in the country's Kibiti region.²² In the same year, the Mozambican government put 189 alleged militants on trial in Pemba for their involvement in violent acts – 50 of them were Tanzanian.²³ This is a clear indication of the strong links that exist between extremist groups in Tanzania and Mozambique.

During its initial stages, Ansar al-Sunnah predominantly used machetes and a few guns to carry out attacks. The group seized these firearms, grenades and military uniforms by overrunning police and military posts in the province. The group has now acquired a substantial number of firearms, enabling it to attack multiple places at once. Initially, Ansar al-Sunnah members were armed with knives and machetes,²⁴ but their weaponry is improving after targeting police stations in the area and confiscating weapons and heavy artillery. Some used knives to inscript drawings on their weapons, while others made wooden weapons similar to the ones they confiscated from the police or government forces as a sign of supremacy.

Transnational organised crime and illicit trade are thriving in Cabo Delgado due to a limited state presence. The illicit economy has fostered corruption in the province, which has played a vital role in the breakdown of law and order, allowing the insurgency to establish itself locally and across the region. As a result, security forces, government officials and their cronies who are benefiting from the illicit economy ensure that borders are kept porous and coastlines unmonitored.

Ansar al-Sunnah has taken advantage of the illicit economy to finance its operations through transnational criminal activities, notably heroin, timber, wildlife and gemstone trafficking, as well as internal and external financial donations from sympathisers from across northern Mozambique, including Nampula and other parts of the country. Vietnamese and Chinese nationals are part of an intricate web of criminals involved in transnational organised crime,²⁵ which has helped to finance Ansar al-Sunnah's activities. Funds are used to maintain

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group members and their families, to recruit new members, for propaganda, and to purchase guns. Robberies, extortion, cattle rustling, charcoal trade, artisanal mining, human trafficking to South Africa, and looting food from villagers are also economic lifelines for the group. Travel documents are acquired by recruiting and bribing immigration officers. Some civilians, fearful of the group's growing strength, also provide them with supplies, medical care, and intelligence on the movements of the security forces.

Before executing an attack, Ansar al-Sunnah conducts reconnaissance missions to acquire intelligence on when to time an attack and how to inflict maximum damage, as well as mapping out escape routes. To avoid detection, reconnaissance missions are conducted by small groups of no more than three cadres, who use machetes and assault rifles.²⁶

During the initial stages of the insurgency, Ansar al-Sunnah targeted mostly security installations to acquire weapons. However, after indiscriminate counterinsurgency operations by government security forces, the extremists' *modus operandi* has evolved to include beheadings, mostly of male civilians and community leaders accused of collaborating with security forces.²⁷ The insurgency group's tactics have also morphed to match the brutality of the security forces, and now include indiscriminate attacks on villages, setting homes alight, looting, plundering, pillaging, widespread intimidation, and attacks on women, children and the general civilian population – a new trend not previously experienced. In most of these attacks, the Mwani ethnic group is spared.

In March 2019, the group used an improvised explosive device to attack the Mozambican military, suggesting an evolution in tactics.²⁸ The insurgency group also shifted its operations from night-time attacks on isolated homes to coordinated day-time attacks, as well as attacks on foreign employees working for gas exploration companies in the province. The attacks in 2019 on foreign employees of the United States (US) oil conglomerate Anadarko Petroleum Corporation (since replaced by French oil company Total), currently leading the biggest liquefied natural gas project in the country worth \$20 billion,²⁹ is a case in point. This was an indication that Ansar Al-Sunnah was becoming more extremist.

By February 2020, the attacks had spread across nine of the 16 districts in the

province, with most attacks concentrated on the coast of Cabo Delgado, from Pemba to the Tanzanian border. Consequently, villages have been completely abandoned, and hunger is growing as people abandon their farms and other economic activities. Many people, some of them women and children, have taken refuge on the small islands that dot the coast, with no access to clean water. Some have been forced to live in public buildings or even under trees. By February 2020, at least 100,000 people had been internally displaced, with more than 300 killed, and, since 2017, more than 1,000 properties have been destroyed.³⁰ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has provided \$2 million to respond to the growing humanitarian catastrophe.³¹ Many areas affected by the attacks were also devastated by Cyclone Kenneth in April 2019, compounding the already dire humanitarian situation.

It is pertinent to note that Ansar al-Sunnah has also targeted its own members who took loans from the group to start small businesses but later deserted or failed to cooperate when they were needed to launch attacks. This is why attacks on whole villages result in only a few deaths; the men who have defaulted are beheaded – and if they cannot be found, family members are made to pay the price.³²

Challenges in Combating Ansar al-Sunnah

The Mozambican government is facing a number of challenges in dismantling Ansar al-Sunnah due to a multiplicity of factors. The extremist group's diversified funding portfolio and ability to raise money through transnational organised criminal activities have enabled it to survive and expand its war chest. Since political corruption related to the illegal drug industry is high in Mozambique, with proceeds often used to fund election campaigns, there is little incentive for politicians to clamp down on the militants.³³

The government's counter-extremism efforts have failed to effectively tackle the group's funding mechanisms due to the province's highly informalised economy, which makes it extremely difficult to track illicit financial flows to Ansar al-Sunnah. Terrorism financing in Mozambique is also difficult to track because the country's Financial Intelligence Unit is too weak to track funds from Cabo Delgado's predominantly cash-based economy, where cash is transferred outside

the formal financial sector via telecommunications companies, transport companies, bus services or other businesses.

Ansar al-Sunnah has continued its recruitment drive as a result of the government's failure to address the root causes of the crisis, particularly poverty, inequality, unemployment, social exclusion and disputed land resettlement schemes, whereby locals were removed from their land to pave way for multinational corporations' mining concessions. For instance, Anadarko Petroleum Corporation's development of a \$20 billion liquefied natural gas project has led to the forced resettlement of thousands of farmers and fishermen from the Afungi peninsula in the Palma district of Cabo Delgado. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the implementation of the resettlement programme, which is characterised by the diversion of funds intended to assist the displaced population, inadequate compensation for lost land, and lack of compensation for what the communities have invested and done on the land.³⁴ Some resettled households, particularly fishermen, were settled inland and have lost their livelihoods.³⁵ Despite the billions of dollars invested by major oil and gas companies in the province, there has been little benefit to local communities, and this has aggravated local grievances and fuelled the insurgency.

Furthermore, the heavy-handed responses of Mozambique's security forces, including extra-judicial killings, an extra-judicial state of emergency, the closure of mosques, as well as arbitrary detentions and harassment, have forced more people to join the group, either out of fear or to avenge human rights abuses which they have suffered. Mozambique's security forces have consequently lost legitimacy and local support, creating more grievances against the government. Seventy-one percent of former Ansar al-Sunnah members say that they joined the extremist group in response to violent or repressive government actions against them or those close to them.³⁶ The ongoing heavy-handed intervention by government security forces will likely lead to more radicalisation and tension, and risks further alienating a population that already feels that the government has abandoned them. The pattern of escalating violent extremist attacks, followed by indiscriminate security responses, has played out repeatedly elsewhere in Africa, notably in Somalia, Nigeria, the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel and the Maghreb.

Ansar al-Sunnah's use of guerrilla tactics and ability to melt into the population

after attacks have led the military to indiscriminately target whole villages,³⁷ which has deepened local grievances against the government. Since most of the militants come from local communities, residents are reluctant to provide intelligence to the security forces for fear of reprisal, while others are sympathetic to the group. In this regard, poor civil-military cooperation has reduced the security forces' ability to collect intelligence about the group's activities.

The Mozambican government's ineffectiveness in countering Ansar al-Sunnah's extremist narrative, as well as downplaying the situation as mere 'banditry', ignoring the broader narrative of socio-economic grievances, also risks aggravating the problem. An understanding of the deadly interplay of push and pull factors is therefore necessary for tackling the underlying causes of militancy and criminality in the province.

Scant information about the group's membership base, as well as a lack of a clear-cut leadership structure which the security forces could identify and target, has equally constrained the Mozambican government's counterinsurgency operations. Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi expressed his frustration at a political rally he addressed in the Chiure district of Cabo Delgado ahead of the October 2019 elections by saying "if they show their face, we will go and meet them",³⁸ an indication that his government was finding it difficult to negotiate with an insurgency group whose leaders are unknown.

By February 2020, the Mozambican security forces had arrested hundreds of Ansar al-Sunnah militants, but security-force interrogations have failed to yield substantial intelligence because those arrested have been reluctant to release any information on the group's activities – a sign of extreme radicalisation.

Porous borders between Mozambique and its neighbours, particularly Tanzania, make it easy for Ansar al-Sunnah militants to cross the border. Fragile loyalty to the central state is further weakened in Cabo Delgado, where the Mwani ethnic group straddles the border between the two countries. Identities there are forged on a local rather than a national level, and frequent trans-boundary movements reinforce this disconnect from the central state. Daily life is regulated in an ad hoc, informal manner built around ethnic or local customs. Border porosity has also enabled militants to sneak out of the country to undertake military training in the Great Lakes region with few constraints. Criminal groups also use the porous border with Tanzania to export drugs and minerals. Efforts to limit

smuggling and the free flow of people and goods in the region of Mocímboa da Praia and the Tanzanian border have failed.

Mozambican security forces also lack key skills in counter-extremist operations. Infantry forces deployed by the government have proved to be very weak in combating violent extremist groups on the continent. The Mozambican security forces also lack force enablers and multipliers, as well as adequate organic human intelligence,³⁹ to effectively counter the extremist group. This is reflected in the fact that the insurgents are attacking administrative centres, even those protected by the army.⁴⁰ The security forces also lack discipline; its command structure “often releases suspected extremists from custody in exchange for large amounts of money”.⁴¹ Consequently, many soldiers have avoided handing suspected extremists over to their superiors, preferring to collect the cash payments from the suspects themselves.

The government has also not put in place population-centric programmes to enhance governance and development to address the structural causes of the insurgency. In addition, the security forces have failed to put measures in place to protect members of the civilian population who have provided them with intelligence against reprisal attacks. Ansar al-Sunnah has targeted informers, which has frightened other civilians out of providing intelligence against the insurgency group.

The terrain and isolated nature of the five districts where most of the attacks have taken place – Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, Nangade, Palma and Quissanga – has provided a safe haven for the insurgency group. All of these districts, with the exception of Nangade, are on the coast overlooking the Mozambican Channel, and Macomia has a large plateau area that stretches into the interior.⁴² It is also pertinent to note that, with a population of 24,7 people per square kilometre, Cabo Delgado is the fourth least-populated of Mozambique’s 10 provinces.⁴³ The largely uninhabited landscape is characterised by wetlands, undulating hills and ridges, and flat-bottomed valleys, speckled with small villages and settlements. Cabo Delgado also has a tropical savanna climate with a wet season from October to March. Combined, these factors make reconnaissance by the security forces challenging.

Recommendations

There is a chance that the insurgency could be addressed if the Mozambican government first acknowledged the real nature of the problem. Ansar al-Sunnah has genuine grievances to which the government should be paying attention. The government should embrace a holistic, comprehensive and integrated counter-extremism strategy, encompassing dynamic and selective military approaches fused with sustained efforts aimed at effectively addressing the root causes of the problem. A hard-line response that depends solely on repression will only make things worse. Improving the quality of life for Cabo Delgado's residents, particularly its youth, is an essential first step in improving trust between the government and local communities. This trust will provide tactical advantages to the government, such as intelligence on militant movements, members and activities, as well as strategic gains. The British counterinsurgency effort in Malaya from 1952 to 1955 featured increased efforts to improve the quality of life of civilians, including initiatives to accelerate self-government and increase access to economic opportunities, community halls and medical assistance – programmes that helped increase civilian support for the counterinsurgents.⁴⁴

A more comprehensive approach, which focuses on shared socio-economic development and leverages international partnerships, would be more effective in fighting extremist groups such as Ansar al-Sunnah. There are prospects that if the government develops a holistic security, community engagement and communication approach, the insurgency might be contained. This strategy would include investigating allegations of abuse by multinational mining interests, and offering compensation to the aggrieved if abuse is established.

The Mozambican government, with the help of the international community, should train the national police, other state actors and private-sector security forces to carry out their responsibilities in ways consistent with international standards of human rights in conflict settings. This should be accompanied by providing the means to hold security forces accountable. Such actions are important not only on their own merit, but also because the failure to uphold human rights standards is recognised as one of the strongest drivers of militant recruitment on the continent. For instance, the killing of Boko Haram's charismatic founder, Mohamed Yusuf, in police detention in 2009 was a trigger in turning the group into an indiscriminate violent insurgency in Nigeria.

The Mozambican government also has better prospects of countering the insurgency if it addresses Ansar al-Sunnah's sources of funding. If the government manages to counter the group's funding, it would have solved 90% of the insurgency.⁴⁵ In this regard, the Mozambican government should intensify the specialised training of people engaged in counterterrorism financing and anti-money laundering, especially in the sphere of financial intelligence gathering, analysis and investigation, as well as the interoperability of agencies engaged in the implementation of counterterrorism financing and anti-money laundering regimes. The unregulated informal sector should be brought into the formal sector, and financial inclusion should be promoted in the province.

The security forces involved in counterinsurgency should improve civic-military relations and work closely with local communities to obtain intelligence; counterinsurgency is an intelligence war that puts much more emphasis on human intelligence sources to infiltrate and weaken the group. According to Williams and Hashi, "locals are best placed to identify insurgents and inform counterinsurgency operations of militants' movements and routines".⁴⁶ Short of these, it is most likely that the group will continue to launch more deadly attacks because its strength is steadily increasing. There is also a possibility that its capacity will be enhanced through foreign fighters relocating from Iraq and Syria.

Multinational companies that have been given mining concessions in the province could positively impact on local communities and contribute to long-term stability through social corporate responsibility in community development, such as in health, agriculture, fishing and skills training. This would address some of the local grievances about marginalisation and unemployment. The government should also ensure that local youths benefit from the multi-billion-dollar natural gas projects in the province through massive infrastructural development that could create employment for the large number of unemployed young people.

Community dialogues between a broad spectrum of traditional, faith-based (Muslim and Christian) community leaders – which should include women and youth, government and administrative officials, educators, security personnel and health providers – are equally key in disentangling violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. Likewise, local media, especially community radio stations, are critical in promoting civic engagement and disseminating counter-extremist messages and alternative narratives that are credible and persuasive among the

Mozambican youth who are being recruited. Without the support of local people, Ansar al-Sunnah will not survive. Mao Tse Tung famously observed that a guerrilla swims among the people like a fish swims in the sea; without the support of the people, the guerrilla is a fish out of water and it cannot survive.⁴⁷ Ansar al-Sunnah is also vulnerable to internal divisions as it lacks a charismatic leader who can set clear goals. The government could leverage that weakness.

Regional and international cooperation with Mozambique on countering violent extremism has been limited in scope to only intelligence-sharing.⁴⁸ However, if cooperation was widened to include other areas of countering violent extremism, there is a good chance that the insurgency could be addressed. Close collaboration with Tanzania, to at least reduce access to safe havens abroad, will be an important factor in putting pressure on the insurgents. Enhancing maritime monitoring of the area, paired with joint operations and patrols along the border, would help to increase pressure on the militants. These operations would be especially effective if supported by actionable intelligence that prevents the security forces from targeting civilians. Enhanced border security and regional cross-border cooperation, especially in tracking illicit financing, could undercut the financial resources Ansar al-Sunnah requires for its growth.

The government, in line with the Africa Amnesty Month for the surrender and collection of illegally owned weapons/arms, should also accelerate its amnesty programme for youth who have taken up arms. As part of the programme, the government should offer rehabilitation with skills training and employment opportunities.

Community policing through the development of close-knit neighbourhood-watch associations and peace-and-security committees could prevent clandestine operations and serve as an early-warning network against violent extremism.

Conclusion

Addressing violent extremism in Cabo Delgado requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders. A security-oriented approach is not the answer. There are specific remedies that the Mozambican government could undertake to alleviate push and pull factors of violent extremism in the province. Some are developmental in nature and require a governance-oriented response, along with a

determined effort to invest in neglected geographic areas and ensure equal access to economic opportunity for aggrieved youth. These responses should be people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented.

According to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, there are eight interlinked processes that create a development pathway for preventing and addressing the growth of violent extremism in Africa. These include strengthened socio-economic conditions, effective rule of law and security, disengagement and reintegration strategies with a development lens, efficient leveraging of media and technology to counter extremist narratives, resilient and cohesive communities, and gender-specific engagements that take into account the differential impacts of violent extremism on men, women, boys and girls.⁴⁹ Taken together, these elements form a comprehensive and inclusive development response to violent extremism.

If the government fails to take into consideration the factors listed above, there is a likelihood that violent extremism in Cabo Delgado will escalate and have a negative impact on food security and economic development in the province.

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DISENTANGLING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN CABO DELGADO PROVINCE

Endnotes

- 1 Cabo Delgado, with Pemba as its capital, is the northern-most province in Mozambique, bordering Tanzania and the provinces of Nampula and Niassa.
- 2 Ansar al-Sunnah began as a religious organisation in Cabo Delgado in 2014 and only later became militarised. Its early members were followers of Aboud Rogo Mohammed, the radical Kenyan cleric who was shot dead in 2012, possibly by the Kenyan security services. Continuing Rogo's work, the early Ansar al-Sunnah members first settled in Kibiti, in southern Tanzania, before entering Mozambique. Cabo Delgado, with its large Muslim population, high youth unemployment and marginal economic development, provided a suitable environment for the militant group to grow its membership.
- 3 Boko Haram was founded in 2002 in Maiduguru, northern Nigeria, by the late religious leader Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. In 2004, it moved to Kunama, Yobe State, close to the border with Niger, where it set up a base dubbed 'Afghanistan' from where it attacked nearby police outposts. The group draws its membership from religious zealots.
- 4 Fabricius, 2018:23.
- 5 Perkins, 2019:12.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Morier-Genoud, 2018:9.
- 9 Vicente & Vilela, 2019:56.
- 10 Wahhabism is the Saudi Arabian version of Islam. It is the product of mid-18th century fundamentalist theologian Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab. He preached a strict interpretation of Islam and condemned other interpretations. He saw western values and civilisation as abhorrently evil.
- 11 Perkins, 2019:13.
- 12 Boukhars, 2015:6.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019.
- 15 Habibe et al, 2019:9.
- 16 Haysom, 2018:10.
- 17 CISSA, 2017.
- 18 Assaye Risk, 2018.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 West, 2018:5.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Dausen, 2018:6.
- 23 Haysom, 2018:11.
- 24 West, 2018:6.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Columbo, 2019:12.
- 29 West, 2018:23.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Mahecic, 2020:43.
- 32 Haysom, 2018:17.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Pirio et al, 2019:26.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Columbo, 2019:25.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Rogers, 2019:23.
- 39 Bande & Alfroy, 2019:5.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Paul et al, 2013.
- 45 Annette, 2007:13.
- 46 Williams & Hashi, 2016.
- 47 Tse-tung, 1961.
- 48 Kajjo & Solomon, 2019:76.
- 49 United Nations Development Programme, 2014:45.