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**Hanns
Seidel
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INSURGENCY, ILLICIT MARKETS AND CORRUPTION

The Cabo Delgado
conflict and its
regional implications

MEDIA RELEASE

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Summary

The northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado has been dubbed Cabo Esquecido, or the ‘forgotten cape’ because it has long been Mozambique’s poorest and most politically marginalized region despite its wealth of natural resources in the form of rubies and natural gas. The rise of an insurgent group (known locally as al-Shabaab, though unrelated to al-Shabaab in Somalia), which has terrorized the population since 2017, means that eyes around the world are now focused on this formerly ‘forgotten’ region.

Almost five years after the insurgency began, the region remains in the grip of conflict, with knock-on effects for regional security in East and Southern Africa.

The prevalence of organized crime has shaped the region’s political economy and contributed to the breakdown of governance. As the conflict has worn on, the question of the insurgent group’s involvement in or control of illicit economies has been the subject of intense speculation, politically driven allegations and, at times, outright disinformation.

This new study from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), funded by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, cuts through this noise and investigates the relationship between the insurgency and the illicit economy. It also analyzes the potential impact that such an Islamic State-aligned insurgent group in Mozambique could have on extremist networks regionally, with a focus on South Africa.

Trafficking routes through northern Mozambique have been disrupted as criminal networks have sought alternative, more secure routes. These networks are, however, highly resilient and have adapted to the new security situation. For example, drug trafficking routes have moved south through the southern Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces. Many of the illicit flows through Mozambique, such as drug trafficking, have not diminished. On the contrary, drug trafficking has grown and diversified as the insurgency has continued. This means northern Mozambique continues to be a key illicit economic corridor to the wider region.

From September 2021 to January 2022, the GI-TOC research team conducted over 100 interviews in Mozambique and South Africa. The study draws on analysis of Islamic State media relating to Mozambique and court documents relating to counterterrorism prosecutions in South Africa. This builds on extensive research into illicit economies in northern Mozambique that the GI-TOC has been conducting since 2018.

As international forces from Rwanda and SADC have made inroads into recapturing insurgent-held territory since August 2021, the report finds that there are fears that fighters could scatter to other regions of Mozambique – and internationally. This is particularly because foreign fighters make up a significant proportion of al-Shabaab’s fighting force, though the group remains majority Mozambican, and Mozambican-led. The insurgency’s connections to Islamic State have waxed and waned over the course of the conflict. A spate of propaganda around recent attacks in Mozambique suggests the insurgents have re-established these connections recently. The authors refer to this affiliation as loose and mutually opportunistic: it offers the Cabo Delgado insurgents a global publicity platform, and offers Islamic State the chance to claim they are fighting the Islamist cause on a new frontier.

Key findings

- Illicit economies make up only a small proportion of the insurgents' funding base, mostly through kidnap for ransom. The main sources of funding are local, primarily support from local businesspeople, and cash, weapons and goods seized during attacks.
- Trafficking routes through northern Mozambique have been disrupted as criminal networks have adapted to alternative, more secure routes. For example, drug trafficking routes have moved south through southern Cabo Delgado and Nampula province. Northern Mozambique continues to be a key illicit economic corridor to the wider region.
- Islamist extremist networks in South Africa are not widespread and do not appear to have many links to the insurgency in northern Mozambique. However, our analysis found that key institutions that monitor and prosecute extremism in South Africa are weak.

Recommendations

For the Mozambican government:

- Ensure stability of local governance structures and tackle the drivers of corruption and maladministration that have undermined governance in Cabo Delgado. There needs to be a sense of a governed and ordered space in which local people can rebuild their lives and futures following the conflict.
- Improve trust between state and local populations, for example by bringing local civil society and community leaders into governance at district and provincial levels to ensure local issues, especially around service delivery, are heard and government spending is addressing local grievances.
- Support ongoing decentralization by making decision-making about government investment in Cabo Delgado, such as through the ADIN, as transparent and locally based as possible. This will help to ensure that money is directed to the needs of Cabo Delgado communities, to create the conditions for economic opportunity and prosperity, and to give more legitimacy to the funding if it is not perceived as being pre-programmed in Maputo.
- Professionalize law enforcement agencies into organizations that protect and serve the citizens of Mozambique. Reforms should focus on improving trust between the local population and the state. Leadership changes are needed to create behaviour change and prevent future human rights abuses by security forces. These abuses drive insurgent recruitment. Human rights abuses that have already taken place should be investigated transparently.
- Use specialist police teams and prosecutorial capacity in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula to tackle the illicit economies that helped create the conditions for the insurgency and drive corruption. Consider establishing targeted medium-term support partnerships with international partners to help provide the resources and capacities to achieve this, and to address the transnational nature of the criminal networks.
- Communicate transparently about developments in Cabo Delgado, and allow national, regional and international press easy access to Cabo Delgado.

For SADC:

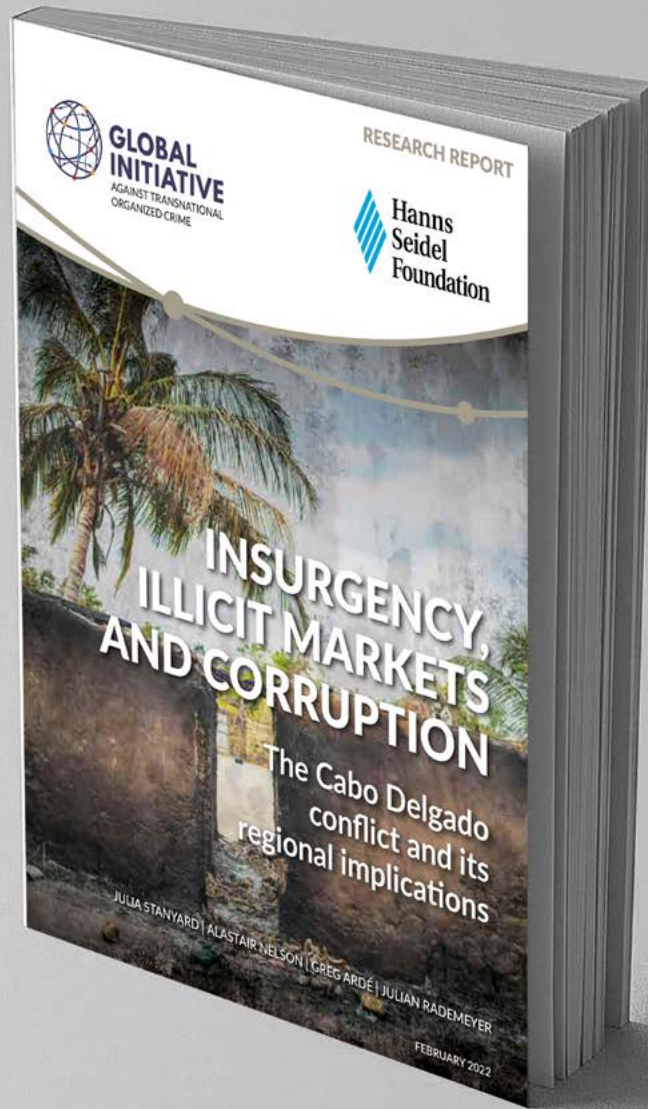
- Support key member states in collaborating on regional threats linked to Cabo Delgado. For example, improved intelligence-sharing among SADC states and Mozambique to help counter regional trafficking routes and monitor regional extremist threats.
- Support Mozambique in addressing the humanitarian crisis in northern Mozambique to ensure the immediate needs of the population (particularly women and other marginalized groups), such as safety, food security and shelter, are met. Also, support Mozambique to improve security force relationships with local people, and to promote transparency and unimpeded press access.
- Support Mozambique in creating the changes in security-force culture and management recommended above, in order to improve security-force relationships with local people.
- Maintain engagement with the government of Mozambique on key issues to ensure long-term stability in northern Mozambique, including around human rights abuses, transparency and corruption, and to commit to improving local governance and socio-economic conditions.

For the international community:

- Maintain engagement with the Mozambican government to address the underlying issues in northern Mozambique that led to the emergence of the conflict. In particular, the international community should focus on supporting processes that strengthen local governance systems and build institutions that are more resilient to corruption, more transparent, and expose and prosecute all human rights abuses.
- In order to address the drivers of the conflict and support ongoing decentralization in Mozambique, as far as possible development support programming and aid for the north should be decoupled from the Mozambican central government and provided directly to northern Mozambique at the provincial and district level.
- Provide direct support to local NGOs and civil society groups that help communities to be resilient in the face of illicit economies and weak governance.
- Bilateral and multilateral support to military and police training missions should be embedded in a joint strategy that aims to strengthen leadership and professionalism. Preconditions must include a clear commitment by the Mozambican government to reform the security cluster towards professional, effective and service-oriented law enforcement agencies.

On behalf of civil society:

- Mozambican civil society organizations have a critical role to play in monitoring the situation, reporting on human rights abuses, and conducting research in very challenging circumstances and at great personal risk. They also play a critical role in developing innovative programmes and forums for debate to help resolve the conflict. This role needs to be acknowledged and supported by the Mozambican government and international community.
- The international community and international civil society should engage and partner with local organizations to support them in their critical roles.
- The Mozambican government should allow civil society organizations the freedom to operate and to take a meaningful role in conflict resolution and reconciliation.



The whole report can be downloaded here:

<https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/mozambique-cabo-delgado-conflict/>

Enquiries:

Claudio Landi: claudio.landi@globalinitiative.net

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