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Achieving Enduring Stability in
Cabo Delgado: Weighing the US Military Response

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in African Studies

by

Marcus Julian Amico

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Achieving Enduring Stability in
Cabo Delgado: Weighing the US Military Response

by

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Master of Arts in African Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Michael F. Lofchie, Chair

In Cabo Delgado, the northernmost province of Mozambique, an insurgency has triggered a severe humanitarian crisis. As of today, over 700,000 people have been displaced and close to 4,000 have been killed. The culprit of this violence, a group known as al-Shabab, relies predominately on local frustrations that are the result of decades of political and economic marginalization to mobilize its army. The discovery of natural gas in 2010 exacerbated the already fragile environment in Cabo Delgado by highlighting the extreme poverty of those in the region. In 2018 al-Shabab pledged allegiance to ISIS, which contributed to the international response by providing a justification for foreign intervention. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the appropriateness of the current US military response and determine how America can most effectively assist its African partner.

The thesis of Marcus Julian Amico is approved.

Andrew Apter

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2022

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PREFACE

My professors tell me the future is Africa and its complex problems are changing with extraordinary speed; it is my hope to help meet this future with poise, preparedness, and a deeper understanding for potential sources of conflict and enduring solutions. The views reflected in this thesis do not reflect those of the US military and are solely my own.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis is to provide a case study of the political violence taking place in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. More specifically, it seeks to evaluate the wisdom or lack thereof in increasing the current level of United States (US) military engagement. In order to determine a level of intervention that is proportional to the threat against American interests, this work will consider the implications of the natural gas reserves off the coast of Cabo Delgado, the alleged link to global insurgency (ISIS), and the impact of great power competition. In a geopolitical context wherein US-Africa policy is sometimes labeled as ‘overly militaristic,’ it is vital that any military decision is carefully weighed before selecting a different option from the foreign policy toolkit. The past decade has shown US approaches to helping its African partners counter violent extremism are failing; in West Africa, terrorist activity has increased fivefold since 2016.¹ With East Africa facing similar, albeit less severe, trends, the US must carefully assess where and how its efforts are most effectively directed.²

This thesis will begin by providing a brief overview of African Studies, including its strengths, weaknesses, and how it will color the subsequent analysis of the conflict in Cabo Delgado. The following section will give context for the insurgency by describing the conditions that led to the formation of al-Shabab, the key actors involved, and the impact of the fighting on the region. After, this work will highlight the conflict’s simultaneously local and international dimensions and the importance of the natural gas reserves in Cabo Delgado. Then, having brought attention to these concerns, the next section will analyze the current level of US

1. Eric Schmitt, “Terrorism Threat in West Africa Soars as U.S. Weighs Troop Cuts,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/world/africa/terrorism-west-africa.html>.

2. Sibusiso Nkomo and Stephen Buchanan-Clarke, “Violent Extremism in Africa: Popular Assessments from the 'Eastern Corridor',” Africa Portal (Afrobarometer, May 21, 2020), <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/violent-extremism-africa-popular-assessments-eastern-corridor/>.

engagement and weigh the potential costs of committing more military personnel. Finally, this thesis will explain why the US should avoid increasing its military presence, and instead focus its efforts on strengthening the humanitarian and development assistance structures already in place. While stepping away altogether may brand the US as a fair-weather friend, scaling up military operations incommensurately can be equally detrimental. Rather, a balanced approach that leverages humanitarian, development, and security assistance will be the most helpful to Mozambique.

REVIEW OF AFRICAN STUDIES

This thesis, which represents the culmination of a master's degree in African Studies, has been influenced by a mosaic of courses in the social sciences and humanities alike. The result has been an enriched, holistic understanding of Africa, a deeper appreciation for the breadth of its many cultures, and a heightened sense of humility as an American endeavoring to study this region. The following paragraphs will reflect on the origins of area studies, highlight its strengths and weaknesses, and attempt to situate this thesis within the subject's broader framework. The discipline has unquestionably colored the analysis throughout this work in many ways; acknowledging this influence is part and parcel to guarding against potential biases emerging from this background.

The origins of area studies are widely accepted to be in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. The field first gained legitimacy at universities in the US, which resulted in a connection between area studies in the academy and the shaping of US foreign policy. As Hossein Khosrowjah, author of "A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies," points out, the synthesis of "philologists, archeologists, historians, and classics scholars, on one hand, and economists and political scientists, on the other hand, was not accidental; it was

carefully and strategically planned to create academic programs that would both guide and legitimize US foreign policy.”³ Thus, the majority of the field’s formal existence has been governed by the ever-evolving ‘national interest’ of the US. Beyond this, area studies have produced knowledge and challenged traditional assumptions of the non-Western world via its synthesis of various disciplines. One scholar, Zachary Lockman, even argues that area studies, which first found funding in the private sector during the interwar period, was born out of the need to “overcome what some argued was the debilitating division of the humanities and social sciences into distinct and mutually uncommunicative disciplines in the early 20th century.”⁴ In this way, many academics recognized the strength of its interdisciplinarity and how it might eventually advance its sister disciplines. By the 1970s, the undercurrents of power politics writ large in area studies were being balanced by critiques of the role of the US in the regions that it sought to shape.⁵

During the decolonization of Africa, the US openly espoused independence for the dozens of newly formed countries. The rapid creation of these countries magnified the geostrategic importance of Africa for the US and other Western powers that adopted similar perspectives in voicing support of democracy, development, and African nationalism.⁶ As the Cold War picked up in intensity, there was a shift in policy toward “opposing African socialist, pan-Africanist, and other left-leaning African leaders who were or might become labeled as

3. Hossein Khosrowjahi, “A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 132, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41858661>.

4. “Author Discusses His New Book on the Evolution of Middle East Studies and Area Studies more Broadly,” interview by Scott Jaschik, *Inside Higher Education*, June 17, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/06/17/author-discusses-new-book-history-area-studies-and-middle-east-studies>.

5. *Ibid.*

6. William G. Martin, “The Rise of African Studies (USA) and the Transnational Study of Africa,” *African Studies Review* 54, no. 1 (2011): 63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41304751>.

clients of the Soviet Union or China.”⁷ In the process of vying for African loyalties, the US became involved in the coup that ousted Kwame Nkrumah, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, and the installation of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire. Such violations of sovereignty had inestimable effects on the development, security, and politics of African states. Over time, many scholars within the discipline became aware of the influences that the US government maintained by its provision of funding through the Title VI act of the US Department of Education.⁸

Having recognized the increasingly blurred distinction between the borders of universities and those of the state security apparatus, many Africanists began speaking out about US interventionism.⁹ According to David Wiley, a Professor of African Studies at Michigan State, the Africa Title VI national resource centers were pulled between their relationships with African partners in research and development, on one hand, and trying to help the American government better understand “this long-stereo-typed continent and peoples,” on the other.¹⁰ Unfortunately, as the Cold War revealed, some American institutions were misusing knowledge produced by these Title VI centers. The friction between the academy and their government sponsors climaxed in 1982 when the Defense Intelligence Agency offered four of the Title VI African centers large budget supplements in exchange for “being on call to develop reports and

7. David Wiley, “Militarizing Africa and African Studies and the U.S. Africanist Response,” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 2 (2012): 149, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43904826>.

8. James C. McCann, “Title VI and African Studies: Prospects in a Polycentric Academic Landscape,” *African Issues* 30, no. 2 (2002): p. 30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1535086?seq=1>. The Title VI Program provides funding to a select few American universities in order to maintain interdisciplinary area studies and their concomitant languages. Also known as National Resource Centers, Title VI centers were formally established in the National Defense Education Act of 1958. UCLA was among one of the first of such centers.

9. Hossein Khosrowjahi, “A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 131-142, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41858661>.

10. David Wiley, “Militarizing Africa and African Studies and the U.S. Africanist Response,” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 2 (2012): 150, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43904826>.

provide other undefined scholarly services.”¹¹ The gesture had the opposite of its intended effect, which was to quell the growing hostility of the Africanist community towards US interventionism. Each leader of the Title VI centers refused all funding from any military or intelligence agency, as it might “compromise their collaborations and provide legitimacy for those policies.”¹² This sentiment was reaffirmed in 2008 when the directors of the 11 Title VI centers for Africa spoke once more on the matter:

“We believe the long term-interests of the people of the U.S. are best served by a separation between academic and defense establishments. In the climate of the post-Cold War years in Africa and the security concerns after 9/11/2001, we believe that it is a *patriotic* (author’s emphasis) policy to make this separation. Such separation, we believe, can produce the knowledge and understanding of Africa that serves the broad interests of the people of the United States as well as our partners in Africa.”¹³

This stance taken by leaders of the Title VI centers signifies the maturing of the field from a servant of US hegemonic interests to a bastion of research oriented around the long-term interests of both Americans and Africans alike.

Deciding that America had a limited strategic interest in the region, the US government directed focus away from African security issues for a brief period following the end of the Cold War. In August 1998, the continent was jolted back into the geopolitical focus of the US with Al-Qaeda’s bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, resulting in the death of hundreds and the injury of thousands. Next came one of the largest shocks to US foreign policy in the last

11. David Wiley, “Militarizing Africa and African Studies and the U.S. Africanist Response,” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 2 (2012): 151, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43904826>.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

three decades: the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centers. These back-to-back blows precipitated unprecedented change in US defense policy. With a swelling defense budget (that today totals more than the next 11 countries combined), the US was able to direct more resources to Africa, resulting in the creation of US Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2008.¹⁴ However, in addition to the expansion of the US security sector apparatus, the shock of violent extremism also provided an “unprecedented surge of funding for studying Africa and African languages in the DOD, in intelligence agencies, and in military-focused higher education institutions.”¹⁵

Whereas African Studies was once predominately covered by civilian institutions, it has now been overtaken by government agencies. The Foreign Area Studies degrees offered at four of the US service academies and 18 other military higher education institutions are a testament to the surge in funding for US military-supported education about Africa. This phenomenon has been accompanied by a decrease in federal funding through the Department of Education Title VI programs, which in 2011 eliminated “46 percent of the funding to Title VI area studies centers (including 11 Africa centers).”¹⁶ Wiley argues that this transference of knowledge production has decreased the ability of civilian institutions, such as UCLA, to build upon their scholarly relationships with African partners and provide verified knowledge “that is unbiased by the demands of military and intelligence agencies.”¹⁷ Logically, improving the DOD’s understanding of the social, cultural, and political forces that shape the strategic landscape of Africa may result in more effective solutions to regional challenges. However, the

14. “U.S. Defense Spending Compared to Other Countries,” Peter G. Peterson Foundation, July 9, 2021, https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison.

15. David Wiley, “Militarizing Africa and African Studies and the U.S. Africanist Response,” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 2 (2012): 155, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43904826>.

16. *Ibid.*, 158.

17. *Ibid.*

‘militarization’ of African studies stresses the potential biases that emerge from a discipline oriented toward exercising influence abroad. The result of this development may manifest in how scholars participate in discussions surrounding US-Africa policies that support the long-term interests of Africans and Americans alike.

Having addressed the strengths and weaknesses of the discipline from which this thesis operates, it is the author’s hope the following analysis on the insurgency in Northern Mozambique will provide a nuanced understanding of this multi-dimensional conflict. It is essential that the US military be guided by its principle of working “by, with, and through” its African partners in the context of the increasingly militarized character of US-Africa relations.¹⁸ Regrettably, behind AFRICOM is a perceived “thread of continuity” from Cold War-era policies with remnants of a time not-so-long past, where Western powers were undeniably and inexcusably concerned for themselves.¹⁹ In an increasingly globalized world order, where states find themselves more inescapably interconnected, it is crucial that the US recognize these concerns, learn from overreactions to ill-conceived threats, and depart from them in order to make room for African-led growth.

BACKGROUND

The foundations for this insurgency were set in the years immediately following Mozambican independence when members of the ruling party, the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), claimed top government positions and filled military posts with allies

18. US Department of Defense, *U.S Africa Command Posture Statement*, Stephen Townsend, 2021, <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/2021-posture-statement-to-congress>.

19. Boubacar N'Diaye and Sandy Africa, “AFRICOM and the Interests of Africans: Beyond Perceptions and Strategic Communication,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 1 (2009): 63, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260902760116>.

of the anti-colonial cause.²⁰ Over the next 15 years, Cabo Delgado was plagued by patterns of illicit activities that enriched the local elites through the trading of timber, precious stones, and ivory, thereby allowing them to perpetuate the power of the party. Such cronyism and illegal trade practices set Cabo Delgado down a path of marginalization that made economic development difficult. In interviews conducted in March 2021 with the International Crisis Group, senior FRELIMO officials admitted that the unevenness of the country's post-liberation development was the result of their fixation with areas nearest the capital of Maputo: "We paid a lot of attention to the development of the regions of the south and the central part of the country where the war with RENAMO took place."²¹ Thus, the conflict is partially a consequence of the structural issues that stem from political elitism and the scramble for power following independence in 1975. Unfortunately, the discovery of natural gas and the increasingly globalized nature of violent extremism have intensified these foundational issues.

Despite the aforementioned socioeconomic conditions, many are quick to attribute the insurgency in Cabo Delgado to the influx of foreign direct investment from companies seeking to profit from liquid natural gas (LNG). The fighters, known colloquially as "al-Shabab" (although there is no affiliation with the larger "al-Shabab" that is active in Somalia), turned to violence in 2015 as they began to attack both government officials and civilians alike.²² Comprised mainly of former fishermen, artisan miners, and small-scale traders, the members of al-Shabab are

20. *Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado* (Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, 2021): 3-6.

21. *Ibid.*, 4.

22. Eric Morier-Genoud, "The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 398, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.20201789271>.

mostly driven by their frustrations with the Mozambican government.²³ Years of policy geared toward exploitation of natural resources, paired with false hope from the investments of eager foreign suitors, created an unstable environment that was conducive to the establishment of a violent extremist organization (VEO). With their local economy struggling in an increasingly globalized world, the aggrieved took up arms with the intent to benefit from their region's riches.

Anadarko, an American oil and gas exploration company, discovered natural gas off the coast of Cabo Delgado in 2010.²⁴ In the years that followed Anadarko's discovery, investors flocked to the region. This led to the discovery of two additional gas fields. Today, the three projects include the Mozambique LNG Project (run by Total), the Coral FLNG Project (run by ENI and ExxonMobil), and the Rovuma LNG Project (run by Exxon Mobil, ENI, and CNPC).²⁵ According to the US Energy Information Administration, the Rovuma Basin—the location of all three projects—is estimated to hold 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.²⁶ Revenue generated from this export could be aimed at developing this historically marginalized province of Mozambique, which ranks among the poorest in the country. Furthermore, natural gas may become important as a transitional fuel source in the near future.²⁷ As will be discussed later, this may inform some of the actions of a few intervening countries.

23. Neha Wader and Ed Ram, "The Fight for Cabo Delgado: A Hidden War over Mozambique's Natural Resources," Pulitzer Center, July 22, 2021, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/fight-cabo-delgado-hidden-war-over-mozambiques-natural-resources>.

24. Ilham Rawoot, "Gas-Rich Mozambique May Be Headed for a Disaster," *Al Jazeera*, February 24, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/2/24/gas-rich-mozambique-may-be-headed-for-a-disaster>.

25. Ibid.

26. "Mozambique," U.S. Energy Information Administration, July 2020, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/MOZ>.

27. *The Role of Gas in Today's Energy Transitions* (Paris, France: International Energy Agency, 2019).

While each of the three LNG projects is significant, the Mozambique LNG Project is the most relevant to this thesis due to the onshore infrastructure that renders it most visible to the public. Although the French oil company, Total, is the lead investor with a 26.5% interest in the exploration area off the coast, the project is a global consortium comprised of Mozambican, Australian, Indonesian, Indian, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, and Brazilian investors.²⁸ Total's purchase of Anadarko's assets in 2019 for \$3.9 billion made this LNG project one of the largest single foreign direct investments on the continent at \$20 billion.²⁹ Despite such enormous investments, this money has yet to find its way back to the communities which it grew to displace.³⁰ For the local fishermen and traders, many of whom earn only enough to survive, the billions of dollars flowing into their region have brought few tangible benefits. It is at the confluence of frustrations with the government in Maputo and the lack of economic opportunity in the face of opulence from foreigners where al-Shabab is able to derive support for its cause. Essentially, they present an outlet for the citizens of Cabo Delgado to release their discontent.

Today, most of the infrastructure developed around extracting and refining the natural gas from Mozambique's northernmost shores stands idle. In April 2021, Total declared a force majeure, suspending operations indefinitely until the security conditions are improved.³¹ This decision came in response to the attack on Palma in March 2021, where insurgent forces killed dozens of locals, captured women and children, and occupied the city just six miles from Total's

28. "Mozambique LNG Project, Cabo Delgado, Mozambique," NS Energy, 2020, <https://www.nsenergybusiness.com/projects/area-1-mozambique-lng-project/>.

29. "About the Mozambique Liquefied Natural Gas Project," Total Energies-led Mozambique LNG Project, May 4, 2021, <https://mzlng.totalenergies.co.mz/en/about-mozambique-liquefied-natural-gas-project>.

30. Ilham Rawoot, "Gas-Rich Mozambique May Be Headed for a Disaster," *Al Jazeera*, February 24, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/2/24/gas-rich-mozambique-may-be-headed-for-a-disaster>.

31. "Total Declares Force Majeure on Mozambique LNG Project," Total Energies, April 26, 2021, <https://totalenergies.com/media/news/press-releases/total-declares-force-majeure-mozambique-lng-project>.

refinement facility.³² The coordinated land and maritime strategy included a preemptive infiltration of the city hours before the main invasion and the destruction of communication lines.³³ Palma, a city of roughly 75,000 people, was overrun within days by insurgents donning ragged, motley uniforms. It is unclear whether al-Shabab's goal was to capture and hold the territory. More likely, their victory was in exhibiting their ability to destabilize, disrupt, and delegitimize the Mozambican government.

In the second half of 2021, a combination of forces from Mozambique, Rwanda, the South African Development Community (SADC), the European Union (EU), and the US was able to make significant gains in combatting al-Shabab in Cabo Delgado.³⁴ Of these foreign forces, only those from Rwanda and the SADC are fighting in a direct capacity against the insurgents. Initially, the arrival of 1,000 Rwandan troops in July drew concern from the international community due to their lack of membership in the SADC; however, their effectiveness in countering the insurgency has proven their value to battlefield operations.³⁵ A month later, Mozambique approved the deployment of the SADC Standby Force as part of a regional defense pact to prevent the conflict from spreading across borders.³⁶ These forces were

32. Ashoka Mokpo, "Gas Fields and Jihad: Mozambique's Cabo Delgado Becomes a Resource-Rich War Zone," *Mongabay Environmental News*, April 29, 2021, <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/04/gas-fields-and-jihad-mozambique-cabo-delgado-becomes-a-resource-rich-war-zone/>.

33. Emilia Columbo and Austin Doctor, "Foreign Fighters and the Trajectory of Violence in Northern Mozambique," *War on the Rocks*, April 13, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/foreign-fighters-and-the-trajectory-of-violence-in-northern-mozambique/>.

34. Emma Rumney, "EU Starts Mission to Train Mozambique Troops to Fight Insurgency," *Reuters*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-starts-mission-train-mozambique-troops-fight-insurgency-2021-11-03/>.

35. Thomas Sheehy, "The Need to Build on Security Gains in Mozambique," *United States Institute of Peace*, September 14, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/09/need-build-security-gains-mozambique>.

36. Chris Reese and Bill Berkrot, "Southern African Bloc Extends Troop Deployment in Mozambique to Fight Insurgency," *Reuters*, October 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/southern-african-bloc-extends-troop-deployment-mozambique-fight-insurgency-2021-10-05/>.

able to recapture the port city of Mocimboa de Praia in August 2021. Professor Mpho Molomo, head of the SADC Mission in Mozambique, stated that the intervention by these foreign forces has “been instrumental in stabilizing the situation and assisting the Mozambique defense forces to hold ground.”³⁷ Now, as the insurgents dare the regional forces to engage them in the bush, the future of the conflict is uncertain.³⁸ What is known, however, is that military intervention is a single piece of a multi-faceted solution—it will likely be years before the insurgency has run its course. With hints of the violence spreading to nearby provinces, more than 700,000 internally displaced people (IDPs), and thousands killed, it is essential that the Mozambican government begin to address the legitimate economic and political grievances that continue to fuel the conflict today.³⁹

Military success alone will not guarantee a consolidated victory against al-Shabab in Northern Mozambique. Recognizing this, Mozambican officials turned to development initiatives in the latter half of 2021 to address some of the shortcomings born of the aforementioned structural issues. The Northern Integrated Development Agency, a \$746 million initiative supported multilaterally, was created to promote economic growth and social equality in August of 2021.⁴⁰ It seeks to achieve these goals through different lines of effort. First, the

37. “Experts Agree That Foreign Intervention Will Help Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado to Curb Insurgency,” Southern African Development Community, November 11, 2021, <https://sadc.int/news-events/news/experts-agree-foreign-intervention-will-help-mozambiques-cabo-delgado-curb-insurgency/>.

38. Lenin Ndebele, “Mozambique Insurgents Dare SADC Forces to Follow Them into the Bush,” *News 24*, January 2022, <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/mozambique-insurgents-dare-sadc-forces-to-follow-them-into-the-bush-20220115>.

39. Ramos Miguel and Andre Baptista, “Officials Say Insurgency in Northern Mozambique Is Spreading,” *VOA*, December 17, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/officials-say-insurgency-in-northern-mozambique-is-spreading/6359526.html>.

40. Delfim Anacleto, “Insurgency: At the Launch of ADIN Nyusi Threatens to React in the Event of an Attack on Cohesion,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 2020, [a-adin-nyusi-ameaça-reagir-em-caso-de-atentado-a-coesão/a-54774977](https://www.dw.com/a-adin-nyusi-ameaça-reagir-em-caso-de-atentado-a-coesão/a-54774977).

agency provides humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict by “ensuring basic education, health services, water supply and sanitation to populations affected by extreme events, and food security.”⁴¹ With approximately one in every three residents of Cabo Delgado displaced, these services are vital for an eventual return to normalcy.⁴² Second, according to President Nyusi, the agency will “create employment and training opportunities for young people, promote investment initiatives for the socio-economic communities through micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and promote the construction of infrastructure for better access to markets and services.”⁴³ This strategy assumes that for the vast majority of fighters a genuine effort to address local economic and social grievances would result in widespread defection. To this end, a better understanding of the organization—its motives, its composition, and its history—would help inform how the US can best assist its African partner.

WHO IS AL-SHABAB?

According to Morier-Genoud, a scholar who specializes in African history, al-Shabab was formed in 2007 around an individual named Sualehe, who upon return to his home province in Cabo Delgado after spending years in Tanzania, began propagating his own version of the Islamic faith.⁴⁴ He and his followers began clashing with local religious authorities, instigating

41. Delfim Anacleto, “Insurgency: At the Launch of ADIN Nyusi Threatens to React in the Event of an Attack on Cohesion,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 2020, [a-adin-nyusi-ameaça-reagir-em-caso-de-atentado-a-coesão/a-54774977](https://www.dw.com/en/a-adin-nyusi-ameaça-reagir-em-caso-de-atentado-a-coesão/a-54774977).

42. “Displacement Crisis Driving up Hunger Rates in Northern Mozambique as Families Flee Violence,” UN World Food Programme, July 2021, <https://www.wfp.org/news/displacement-crisis-driving-hunger-rates-northern-mozambique-families-flee-violence>.

43. Delfim Anacleto, “Insurgency: At the Launch of ADIN Nyusi Threatens to React in the Event of an Attack on Cohesion,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 2020, [a-adin-nyusi-ameaça-reagir-em-caso-de-atentado-a-coesão/a-54774977](https://www.dw.com/en/a-adin-nyusi-ameaça-reagir-em-caso-de-atentado-a-coesão/a-54774977).

44. Eric Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 398, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>.

several conferences of Islamic leaders that sought to alienate the sect through disassociation. By 2016, the group began to engage in violent clashes with both religious and state authorities (for example, an attempt to prevent the sale of alcohol in a local town).⁴⁵ In the following year, the organization made the final jump from religious sectarianism to armed jihad with the attack on Mocimboa de Praia.⁴⁶ Al-Shabab evolved even further in 2018 with its integration into the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP); the group began allowing ISIS to claim responsibility for attacks in Cabo Delgado. On March 10, 2021, the US Department of State officially designated the group “ISIS-Mozambique,” which has implications that will be discussed in a later section.⁴⁷ This development aligns with ISIS’ franchise model of religious extremism, in which it seeks to give the impression of relevancy while having lost territory in Iraq and Syria. However, the benefits of this relationship are less clear for al-Shabab.

The fact that al-Shabab’s existence precedes the discovery of natural gas in the region highlights both the religious origins of the organization as well as the ongoing systemic conditions that motivated many of the insurgents to take up arms. Here, the literature is split between those emphasizing material causes of the conflict, such as “poverty, marginalization, and a lack of perspectives among the youth,” and those arguing that Islam plays a central role in motivating the insurgency.⁴⁸ Whereas the former views religion’s role in this conflict as only a

45. Eric Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 398, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>.

46. *Ibid.*, 405.

47. “State Department Terrorist Designations of Isis Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique,” U.S. Department of State, March 2021, <https://www.state.gov/state-department-terrorist-designations-of-isis-affiliates-and-leaders-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-mozambique/>.

48. Eric Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 397, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>.

smokescreen for economic and political frustrations, the latter perspective points to the group's rejection of the secular state. Interviews conducted in 2018 and 2019 by Morier-Genoud with inhabitants of Cabo Delgado reveal a split between the Islamic practices of the majority and the sectarian nature of members of al-Shabab, which was characterized by distinctive dress codes, the overt denouncement of the existing political and religious order as corrupt, the prohibition of schooling for children, and the insulting of those whom they deemed to possess misguided beliefs.⁴⁹ These factors, prior to 2015, depicted the group as a religious sect more interested in distinguishing themselves from their parent religion than changing the status quo. However, as the insurgency began to develop momentum, it is likely that the majority of its members consisted of frustrated locals who subscribed to religious extremism in order to make sense of their economic deprivation.⁵⁰

IMPLICATIONS OF A LOCAL V. INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

One of the most significant dimensions of this conflict is its unusual blending of local, regional, and international elements. Locally, al-Shabab is able to take advantage of the political, economic, and social (via their Muslim minority status) marginalization of those who reside in Cabo Delgado. It is here where the original nucleus of fighters was able to tailor their ideology in order to reach the 'youth,' galvanizing them against the failures of their government. Regionally, the response from neighboring states and intergovernmental organizations has highlighted the inability of the Mozambican government to unilaterally address the conflict. Internationally, the

49. Eric Morier-Genoud, "The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 399, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>.

50. Thomas Heyen-Dubé and Richard Rands, "Evolving Doctrine and Modus Operandi: Violent Extremism in Cabo Delgado," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 32, no. 8 (July 2021): 1-30, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592318.2021.1936956>.

conflict has taken on greater complexity with al-Shabab's allegiance to ISIS and the concomitant security assistance from the US among other Western countries. Taking these elements into consideration, a careful analysis is required of the regional articulations of this conflict. If this insurgency is specific to the province of Cabo Delgado, then the US military should refrain from further engagements and allow those who are most impacted (Mozambique and surrounding countries) to resolve it internally. Conversely, if al-Shabab has expanded exogenously as a result of international influence from ISIS and other foreign fighters, then a tailored response from the US, beyond training and advising, would be worth evaluating.

One reason Al-Shabab should be considered a localized insurgency is because it was formed endogenously within Cabo Delgado. According to Morier-Genoud, the original members of the group followed and maintained a unique branch of Islam that is distinct from the globalized version propagated by other international terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda or ISIS.⁵¹ Therefore, al-Shabab is not ideologically aligned with ISIS, which weakens their supposed relationship. Moreover, although the organization is reported to have launched attacks in the neighboring Niassa province in 2021, indicating a geographic spread of the insurgency, it would be unwise to assume that the group seeks genuine expansion.⁵² The breaching of Cabo Delgado's borders was most likely an outgrowth of the progress made by forces from Rwanda, the SADC, and Mozambique in driving the fighters from cities and villages. With their numbers weakened and the civilian population wrested from their control, the insurgency was pushed

51. Eric Morier-Genoud, "The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 406, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>. Members of Al-Shabab are Quranists while ISIS follows different teachings not explicitly defined in the Quran.

52. Ramos Miguel and Andre Baptista, "Officials Say Insurgency in Northern Mozambique Is Spreading," *VOA*, December 17, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/officials-say-insurgency-in-northern-mozambique-is-spreading/6359526.html>.

eastward into the bush and eventually into the next province. Thus, the “expanding pockets of violence” underscored by the media are, perhaps, less menacing than they seem. They may be viewed as the natural progression of an insurgency on the ropes rather than a cause for alarm.

The localized nature of al-Shabab is also evident in its decision to avoid referring to itself as a hyphenated derivative of ISIS. In an attempt to legitimize themselves as a group possessing religious authority, the group labeled itself initially as Al-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa, meaning ‘adepts of the prophetic tradition and the consensus’—a term utilized by the mainstream Muslim council (the Islamic Council of Mozambique, or CISLAMO) in Cabo Delgado. When locals refused their use of the term, referring to them simply as “al-Shabab” (the youth), the group decided it was best to appropriate the label.⁵³ The significance of this lies in the makeup of the group’s rank-and-file members; the news reports, interviews, images, and videos generated from the 2017 Mocimboa de Praia attack revealed that most of the insurgents had grown up in the city to which they laid siege.⁵⁴ The administrator of Mocimboa de Praia stated afterward, “some of them are our children from various neighborhoods and villages. It is a mixture of citizens who got involved in this confusion.”⁵⁵ Rather than transplanting the majority of its fighters from abroad, this group was able to weaponize the youth of its cities because of the combination of political, economic, and social issues unique to this region.

On the other hand, there are elements of al-Shabab that might support the conclusion that it is an international threat, and it is important to weigh these as well. For example, the organization’s incorporation of foreign fighters may be regarded as evidence of its transition

53. Eric Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 398, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>.

54. *Ibid.*, 397.

55. *Ibid.*, 398

from a domestic issue to a matter of international import. Perhaps if they can field insurgents from abroad, they can export them as well. Some scholars, such as Morier-Genoud, do not believe that the foreign links have “radically and definitively altered the nature of the insurgents.”⁵⁶ The researchers at Cabo Ligado, an extension of the Armed Conflict Location and Date project (ACLED) that monitors violence in Mozambique, have also concluded “there is no evidence from the Palma attack that IS controls the strategic direction of the insurgency.”⁵⁷ Conversely, Emilia Columbo, a senior associate to the Center for Strategic Studies Africa Program, believes the influx of foreign fighters has resulted in an “improved capacity for operational design and tactical execution.”⁵⁸ This does not, however, point to an internal usurping of al-Shabab, nor is it wise to assume that the correlation is due strictly to an affiliation with ISIS.

Although the alleged allegiance between al-Shabab and ISIS is most likely a virtual tethering to an international ideology, it has numerous implications for how the conflict is perceived internationally. For the US, it makes little strategic sense to fight an insulated insurgency in a remote province of Mozambique—the threat to the American homeland is indeed minimal. However, introducing the term ‘global jihad’ into the scene stipulates a justification for military involvement. By labeling al-Shabab a global terrorist organization, as the US decided in 2021, America may be contributing to the narrative that this is a chiefly exogenous issue. In fact,

56. Eric Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (February 2020): 407, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>.

57. *Cabo Logado Monthly: March 2021* (Maputo, Mozambique: Armed Conflict Location and Event Date Project, 2021): 3, <https://www.cabologado.com/monthly-reports/cabo-ligado-monthly-march-2021>.

58. Emilia Columbo and Austin Doctor, “Foreign Fighters and the Trajectory of Violence in Northern Mozambique,” *War on the Rocks*, April 13, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/foreign-fighters-and-the-trajectory-of-violence-in-northern-mozambique/>.

doing so obscures many of the deeper causes of this political violence: decades of neglect from the government in Maputo and the inefficient handling of vast natural resources. The situation is made even more complex with the assortment of natural gas companies that have invested billions of dollars in the province. There is little doubt their presence has an impact on the international response.

The global consortium of gas companies off the coast of Cabo Delgado, led by French company Total, depends on stable security conditions to conduct operations. With Total having claimed force majeure in April 2021, it faces a loss of profit with each day that operations remain on hold. This security threat also applies to the other two natural gas projects along the northern coast in Mozambique. As each project is funded by a multitude of different companies backed by their respective governments, each country has a vested interest in seeing its company succeed. This economic incentive may inform the international security response, especially those of the EU and US. Many of these intervening countries may be seeking to establish a relationship with Mozambique to secure future access to these natural gas reserves. Extracting this resource incurs environmental costs that many countries are unwilling—or unable—to shoulder at home. Many world leaders might find the offloading of this social responsibility quite attractive in the face of elections and soaring prices of oil. Rather than invest in the infrastructure required of harvesting natural gas at home, some countries may see the value of purchasing it abroad.

While there are elements of this conflict that are relevant locally, regionally, and internationally, there are themes that ultimately point to a domestic conflict with only tertiary qualities of internationalization. First, the enormous amount of natural gas in the region has generated international effects that overshadow the preponderance of qualities of the insurgency that demonstrate its particularity to Mozambique. Without the natural gas, the conflict may have

warranted a vastly different response from Western powers. Similarly, al-Shabab's abstract link to ISIS has drawn international attention that is likely disproportionate to the actual threat posed by the insurgency. With these themes considered, the conflict should be addressed first at the regional level, with southern African states (Rwanda, too) pooling resources to militarily defeat the insurgency, then at the local level, with the state of Mozambique implementing structural changes to overcome the systemic conditions that spawned the insurgency. Therefore, the US military should temper its response by assisting only in a supporting role to Mozambican forces.

WEIGHING THE US MILITARY RESPONSE

In March 2021, the US sent a dozen Special Forces operators to participate in a two-month Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) military program. According to Dennis Hearn, the US Ambassador to Mozambique, "this program is a continuation of the United States' security cooperation with Mozambique that has existed for some time, which included military education and training programs."⁵⁹ Thus, the American soldiers currently deployed to Mozambique are serving in a merely indirect capacity by training Mozambican Marines in counterinsurgency operations. This follows AFRICOM's strategy of working "by, with, and through local forces" in order to enable "African solutions to African problems."⁶⁰ By conducting joint exercises with dozens of African militaries, engaging in civil-affairs operations, and providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, AFRICOM delivers an unconventional mélange of soft and hard power that challenges traditional conceptions of military 'intervention.'⁶¹ Compared to the predominately direct military operations of France's Operation

59. Rafael Carvalho, "U.S. Is Conducting Military Training of Mozambican Marines," *Further Africa*, March 21, 2021, <https://furtherafrica.com/2021/03/17/u-s-is-conducting-military-training-of-mozambican-marines/>.

60. US Department of Defense, *U.S Africa Command Posture Statement*, Stephen Townsend, 2021, <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/2021-posture-statement-to-congress>.

Barkhane in the Sahel, which aimed to directly interdict VEOs and armed militants in Mali *alongside* local forces, US operations in Mozambique are relatively subdued.⁶² The difference in strategies comes down to the long-term stability of the host country, which through indirect assistance, benefits from a more self-sufficient security force.

Building on progress made from the first round of training, the governments of the US and Mozambique agreed to participate in a second JCET program in which Mozambican forces were trained on Tactical Combat Casualty Care and Combat Lifesaver courses that aim to increase the survival rate of the Mozambican military. Writ large in these training programs are a prioritization of “human rights, protection of civilians, and engagement with civil society in all security assistance.”⁶³ These programs apply a holistic approach to regional stability by sharing democratic values that function to reduce human rights violations, and by extension, degrade al-Shabab’s ability to recruit new members. Most recently, in February 2022, the US launched its third JCET program with Mozambican forces. Again, this exercise will focus on the “law of armed conflict, human rights, and medical training.”⁶⁴ These three JCET programs in a span of only ten months demonstrate a pattern of commitment to enduring stability in Mozambique and a deepening of relations between the US and Mozambican governments.

61. Cynthia Watson, *Combatant Commands: Origins, Structure, and Engagements* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011): 167-80.

62. Ruth Maclean, “Crisis in the Sahel Becoming France’s Forever War,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/world/africa/france-sahel-west-africa-.html>.

63. US Embassy in Mozambique, *U.S. Government Provides Military Training to Mozambican Marines*, March 15, 2021, https://mz.usembassy.gov/u-s-government-provides-military-training-to-mozambican-marines/?_ga=2.112480002.74871564.1644874260-1968848736.1632981833.

64. US Embassy in Mozambique, *U.S. Government Launches Third Exercise with Mozambican Armed Forces*, February 2, 2021, <https://mz.usembassy.gov/u-s-government-provides-military-training-to-mozambican-marines/?ga=2.112480002.74871564.1644874260-1968848736.1632981833>.

While security assistance may be beneficial for the Mozambican military, and for the US forces who benefit through the exchange of knowledge, both sides should exercise caution before committing to additional military engagements. Although the introduction of US Special Forces was at Mozambique’s request—and was therefore not an unsolicited incursion of US foreign policy—a dozen American soldiers are unlikely to generate major effects against al-Shabab. This is not to diminish the capabilities of the Green Berets; the world-class training that these warriors receive and their ability to disproportionately project power makes them a force multiplier for any army willing to learn. However, the true value of their presence might be derived from their serving as a place-holder for future US engagements in Mozambique. Ambassador Hearn stated that the US government is open to expanding its support, whether that be through military logistics or increasing personnel on the ground: “Training, in this case, creates a relationship in which we can, over time and alongside the Government of Mozambique, see what else would be useful for other aspects of security.”⁶⁵ The Ambassador’s ambiguity with respect to future US engagements might be strategic. Here, he places the impetus of US intervention into the struggling hands of Mozambique, who, facing an insurgency with severely weakened military forces, has few options. The current pace of security cooperation could open the door to more ambitious US strategies in the region, which may be motivated by more than democratic ideals or a perceived threat to the American homeland.

Although the US military’s indirect approach to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado is aligned with the strategy of AFRICOM, the vast reserves of natural gas in the region are also a contributing factor. With 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas off the coast of Cabo Delgado—the continent’s largest reserves—there is an incentive for countries to strategically position

65. Rafael Carvalho, “U.S. Is Conducting Military Training of Mozambican Marines,” *Further Africa*, March 21, 2021, <https://furtherafrica.com/2021/03/17/u-s-is-conducting-military-training-of-mozambican-marines/>.

themselves in order to gain access to this resource in the future. The US is not immune to such thinking. By engaging in security cooperation with Mozambican forces, the US is establishing a relationship that might eventually come to fruition through immense quantities of liquid natural gas. Furthermore, with US companies such as Exxon Mobil and Anadarko invested heavily in the Cabo Delgado LNG consortium, located just south of Total's project, there is an additional motivation to promote stability in the region in order to secure the assets of these American giants. China's lack of military involvement raises questions about their own intentions, which provide another stimulus for US intervention in Mozambique.

It is no secret that 'great power competition' is driving the actions of many countries involved in Africa. Although this strategy is not explicitly stated in its dealings with African states, it would be a mistake to assume that the generated effects of soft power are uncelebrated. General Stephen Townsend (commander of AFRICOM) contends that "a secure, stable, and prosperous Africa—aligned with the U.S.—is an enduring American interest."⁶⁶ Home to some of the fastest growing economies and populations in the world, Africa is important to the United States politically, militarily, and economically. Helping African states satisfy their security interests, and seeking to achieve American strategic interests, are not mutually exclusive activities. Some scholars, such as Boubacar N'Diaye and Sandy Africa, recognize the positive sum relationship between the US and its African partners; pursuing long-term economic interests and seeking arrangements that allow the US to track threats to their source are not "ignoble intentions."⁶⁷ Ultimately, transnational problems, like poverty, corruption, and violent extremism require an internationally collaborated approach.

66. US Department of Defense, *U.S Africa Command Posture Statement*, Stephen Townsend, 2021, <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/2021-posture-statement-to-congress>.

The security cooperation programs led by the DOD exist to guard against attacks on the US homeland, promote regional stability, and strengthen overall relationships with African partners.⁶⁸ Given that China is militarily absent in Cabo Delgado, the US has an opportunity to increase its soft power. To be clear, the US should view this as a secondary effect behind the primary goal of helping African partners achieve enduring stability. It should also take great care to avoid the pitfalls of Cold War-era policies, which African leaders and citizens have not forgotten. Instead, Jon Temin, a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, argues that the US should “demonstrate to Africans that it cares about them because of their inherent value and potential, not because of their role in great power competition.”⁶⁹ Of course, this would require a restructuring of American thinking with regards to US-Africa policy; Africa is not a battleground for the US, China, or Russia to assert primacy, and security assistance cannot be the centerpiece of US-Africa strategy.

One option for US foreign policy is to disengage militarily from Mozambique. Steven Leach, a scholar who focuses on counter-violent extremism programs in East Africa, argues in favor of this strategy. He posits that the US designation of al-Shabab as a global terrorist organization justifies an excessively militarized approach that is detrimental to the long-term resolution of regional grievances.⁷⁰ Additionally, Leach believes that a US presence in the region

67. Boubacar N'Diaye and Sandy Africa, “AFRICOM and the Interests of Africans: Beyond Perceptions and Strategic Communication,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 1 (2009): 64, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260902760116>.

68. US Department of Defense, *U.S Africa Command Posture Statement*, Stephen Townsend, 2021, <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/2021-posture-statement-to-congress>.

69. Jon Temin, “Africa Is Changing-and U.S. Strategy Is Not Keeping Up,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 18, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2021-10-08/africa-changing-and-us-strategy-not-keeping>.

70. Steven Leach, “The US Military Should Stay out of Mozambique's Cabo Delgado; Send Diplomats Who Know the Terrain,” *Just Security*, April 9, 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/75698/the-us-military-should-stay-out-of-mozambiques-cabo-delgado-send-diplomats-who-know-the-terrain/>.

“may actually attract external support by affiliating a local conflict with global conflict dynamics.”⁷¹ Although Leach makes a great point about how the US should reject the “20 years of widespread conflict escalation that began with the Global War on Terror,” a military drawback from Mozambique is not the most effective solution. With the previous US government administration having considered scaling back its military presence on the continent, this outcome is indeed possible, though foolish. In 2020, both the Democratic chair (Adam Smith) and the Republican ranking member (Mac Thornberry) of the House Armed Services Committee wrote to Esper to warn that “a decrease in our investment now may result in the need for the United States to reinvest at many more times the cost down the road.”⁷² From an African perspective, Senegalese President Macky Sall told the Washington Post that “it would be a mistake, and it would be very misunderstood by Africans.”⁷³ Similarly, Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé said that “if one actor leaves the chain, it weakens the whole group.” Although these African heads of state belong to a different region of the continent, their logic can still be applied to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado.

The military partnership that the US maintains with Mozambique predates the current training mission and transcends counterterrorism. While most headlines about the US military in Africa are concerned with drone strikes in Somalia or ‘shadow wars’ in Niger, they often fail to include stories such as the US Air Force C-130 crews who supported the US Agency for

71. Steven Leach, “The US Military Should Stay out of Mozambique's Cabo Delgado; Send Diplomats Who Know the Terrain,” *Just Security*, April 9, 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/75698/the-us-military-should-stay-out-of-mozambiques-cabo-delgado-send-diplomats-who-know-the-terrain/>.

72. Aaron Mehta and Joe Gould, “Esper's Africa Drawdown Snags on Capitol Hill,” *Defense News*, January 19, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2020/01/17/smith-thornberry-join-congressional-pushback-on-espers-africa-troop-drawdown-plan/>.

73. Danielle Paquette, “West African Presidents Urge U.S. to Stay in the Fight against Terrorism,” *Washington Post*, January 21, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/west-african-presidents-urge-us-trump-to-stay-in-the-fight-against-terrorism/2020/01/20/ac000e3a-3b8e-11ea-afe2-090eb37b60b1_story.html.

International Development (USAID) in delivering 782 metric tons of relief supplies in Mozambique after Cyclone Idai in 2019,⁷⁴ or the efforts of the soldiers of the 712th Engineer Support Company in repairing a well in Chabelley, Djibouti in 2021.⁷⁵ In short, the benefits gained from US training programs with Mozambican forces—and with most other African partners—go beyond counterterrorism; it is an opportunity to forge deeper ties with African governments, promote the values of democracy, and respond to humanitarian crises. However, in working towards these aims, it is essential that the US recognize its subordinate role as a cooperative partner, allow for the majority of military operations to be conducted along regional lines of effort, and consider the non-kinetic ways in which it can support Mozambique.

BEYOND SECURITY ASSISTANCE

Rather than disengaging militarily from the region, the US should pivot away from idealizing missions of counterterrorism in favor of engagement with local communities through other forms of assistance. By fostering relationships oriented around civil societies and assisting with health and humanitarian crises, the US can more effectively address the underlying conditions that enable al-Shabab to exist in the first place. With many pathways for such ‘non-kinetic’ assistance already in place, the US should ensure they are being leveraged in the most effective manner possible. America can do this by approaching the situation multilaterally; with an array of other countries and international organizations engaging in similar forms of humanitarian and development assistance, it would be wise for the US to take stock of other

74. Shawn Nickel, “CJTF-Hoa Completes Support of USAID-Led Cyclone Idai Relief Efforts in Mozambique,” Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa, April 18, 2019, <https://www.hoa.africom.mil/article/22707/cjtf-hoa-completes-support-of-usaid-led-cyclone-idai-relief-efforts-in-mozambique>.

75. Gauret Stearns, “A Job Well Done: Djibouti, U.S. Army Repair Village's Water Supply,” Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa, January 6, 2022, <https://www.hoa.africom.mil/article/24634/a-job-well-done-djibouti-us-army-repair-villages-water-supply>.

initiatives in order to identify and fill the most pertinent gaps. The following paragraphs will explore ways in which the US seeks to strengthen its Mozambican partners outside of the strategies of AFRICOM.

Currently, the US is the largest bilateral donor to Mozambique, providing “over \$445 million in assistance annually” that covers humanitarian relief and developmental assistance.⁷⁶ While this may seem like a significant figure, there have been many well-funded aid programs in Africa that produced only marginal effects. Therefore, it is crucial that bilateral aid is strategically employed within Mozambique to not only lessen the negative impacts of the current insurgency but will also continue to build the requisite institutions that will prevent a backslide into more violence. One way that the US is effectively leveraging its aid is through its vaccination assistance to Mozambique, where it aims to strengthen the country’s resilience to the pandemic by improving its ability to prevent, test, trace, and treat COVID-19 cases in-country.⁷⁷ Through this ongoing support, which totals \$80 million, the US has donated nearly 4.3 million vaccines to Mozambicans, funded emergency equipment (such as ventilators), and provided nurses and physicians to supplement their hospital staff.⁷⁸ Although this form of assistance does not directly degrade the operations of al-Shabab, it does provide value by fostering stability and trust in state institutions—critical in the fight against violent extremism. According to David Kilcullen, author of *The Accidental Guerrilla*, in counterinsurgency operations where the center of gravity of the

76. “U.S. Relations with Mozambique,” US Department of State, April 15, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-mozambique/>.

77. Abdi Dahir, “The U.S. Is Ramping up Vaccination Assistance to 11 African Countries,” *New York Times*, February 18, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/world/africa/biden-africa-vaccine-aid.html>.

78. US Embassy in Mozambique, *U.S. Assistance to Combat COVID-19 in Mozambique*, February 21, 2022, <https://mz.usembassy.gov/united-states-government-support-for-covid-19-response-in-mozambique/?ga=2.129735557.889589423.1638781625-2086456928.1634639222>.

conflict is comprised of the local population, any assistance which saves lives and protects communities is a worthwhile pursuit.⁷⁹

Next, the US should divert more resources to helping Mozambique and the international community resolve the humanitarian crisis resulting from the insurgency. The US is already the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Mozambique; in 2019 the US increased development assistance to Mozambique by \$110 million through USAID. This funding went to programs “focused on accelerating resilient broad-based economic growth, improving the quality of education, and improving health systems and services.”⁸⁰ In May 2021, USAID, alongside the government of Mozambique, international organizations, and civil society organizations, directed its resources to those affected by the violence in Cabo Delgado.⁸¹ As of 2021, over 700,000 people have been displaced by al-Shabab—nearly one of every three residents of the province.⁸² The displacement of so many people has strained host communities, the underprepared institutions of the Mozambican government, and the various international aid agencies offering help.⁸³ To mitigate these effects, USAID provided vital humanitarian relief to those in need of food, water, shelter, and hygiene kits for approximately 250,000 displaced Mozambicans

79. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-38.

80. US Embassy in Mozambique, *U.S. Government Commits \$110 Million in Development Assistance to Mozambique*, May 17, 2019, <https://mz.usembassy.gov/u-s-government-commits-110-million-in-development-assistance-to-mozambique/>.

81. US Agency for International Development, *U.S. Delivers Humanitarian Relief Supplies in Response to Insecurity in Mozambique*, May 6, 2021, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/may-6-2021-us-delivers-humanitarian-relief-supplies-insecurity-mozambique>.

82. “Displacement Crisis Driving up Hunger Rates in Northern Mozambique as Families Flee Violence,” UN World Food Programme, July 2021, <https://www.wfp.org/news/displacement-crisis-driving-hunger-rates-northern-mozambique-families-flee-violence>.

83. *Cabo Logado Monthly: March 2021* (Maputo, Mozambique: Armed Conflict Location and Event Date Project, 2021): 5, <https://www.cabologado.com/monthly-reports/cabo-ligado-monthly-march-2021>.

throughout 2021.⁸⁴ The humanitarian crisis was further exacerbated by Cyclone Eloise and Tropical Storm Ana, which made landfall in January 2021 and January 2022, respectively; both extreme weather events destroyed homes and negatively impacted farmlands, livestock, and fisheries.⁸⁵ It is within these gaps that the US contributes most effectively to stability in Cabo Delgado.

Rather than increase its military presence, the US should focus its efforts on leveraging the humanitarian and development assistance structures that already exist. To help respond to the challenges posed by al-Shabab and the cyclone season, USAID launched three programs to “support socioeconomic development and youth leadership in Cabo Delgado.”⁸⁶ The first two projects, USAID Olipihana and USAID Recovery Cabdo Delgado, “will create training and work opportunities to develop the skills needed to succeed in entrepreneurship and employment.”⁸⁷ USAID Youth-Led, the third project, will “develop leadership and vocational skills for youth aged 15-29 in Cabo Delgado.” This project is especially important in the fight against al-Shabab because it degrades the organization’s capacity to recruit at-risk youth. It is precisely the caliber of work that addresses the structural issues that allowed al-Shabab to propagate. In short, the international humanitarian and development assistance effort is essential for enduring stability in Mozambique because it helps consolidate the security gains that have thus far been

84. US Agency for International Development, *U.S. Delivers Humanitarian Relief Supplies in Response to Insecurity in Mozambique*, May 6, 2021, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/may-6-2021-us-delivers-humanitarian-relief-supplies-insecurity-mozambique>.

85. *Revised Emergency Appeal: Mozambique, Africa 2021-22 Floods and Cyclones* (Switzerland, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, January 2022).

86. US Embassy in Mozambique, *U.S. Government Support Socioeconomic Development and Youth Leadership Initiatives in Cabo Delgado*, October 19, 2021, <https://mz.usembassy.gov/u-s-government-supports-socioeconomic-development-and-youth-leadership-initiatives-in-cabo-delgado/>.

87. *Ibid.*

accomplished. Without it, IDPs would go without life-sustaining supplies and face longer periods of displacement, rendering the population more vulnerable to exploitation by al-Shabab.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

A report by Amnesty International, based on interviews with 79 IDPs from 15 different communities, satellite imagery, photographs, videos, and medical information, has documented numerous violations of international humanitarian law from al-Shabab, private military contractors, and most significantly, Mozambican military and police forces.⁸⁸ That the US pursued a joint training program in the face of these human rights abuses should not be overlooked; war crimes include torture, rape, and extrajudicial killings of alleged al-Shabab fighters by Mozambican security forces. Kilcullen's *The Accidental Guerrilla* states, "in counterinsurgency the population is the prize, and protecting and controlling it is the key activity." The heavy-handed approach by Mozambican forces that failed to recognize the importance of Kilcullen's point has likely worked against them, increasing the already bitter resentment of the government by the youth in Cabo Delgado. For the US military, assisting forces accused of war crimes might negatively reflect on America by contradicting its values. On the contrary, it might be argued that the grievous actions of the Mozambican forces should, if anything, compel training by US forces who prioritize the protection of civilians. One potential compromise might be to make security assistance conditional upon respect for human rights, thereby protecting the integrity of US forces and contributing to the stability of the region.

Next, this thesis would like to draw attention to the lack of a coherent US-Africa strategy. Although this work is centered around US military posturing in Mozambique, it should be

88. "What I Saw is Death": *War Crimes in Mozambique's Forgotten Cape* (London, UK: Amnesty International, March 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/mozambique-civilians-killed-as-war-crimes-committed-by-armed-group-government-forces-and-private-military-contractors-new-report/>.

contextualized within the rather disjointed US grand strategy across the continent. Africa is changing at an incredible rate, and if the US fails to develop a coherent strategy to accommodate the pace of its development, it will find itself having missed out on the immense opportunities of African growth, innovation, and prosperity. Absent a continent-wide policy, Michael Shurkin and Aneliese Bernard argue that US statecraft is susceptible to inconsistencies that have previously resulted in overreach and disengagement.⁸⁹ Moreover, in order for a US-Africa strategy to be effective, the US needs to extend its policy timetable and frame its shared interests with Africa in the long term. According to Temin, it can do this by supporting political institutions and good governance over individual African leaders who are susceptible to leadership change.⁹⁰ Fundamental to this strategy is recognizing how a commitment to democratic principles distinguishes the US from China and Russia. Allowing this understanding to guide foreign policy decisions increases the likelihood for a more coherent Africa strategy that is resistant to mission creep. As it stands today, the lack of a US-Africa policy may help explain why efforts in development and security assistance have amounted to less than the sum of their parts.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that militarily defeating this insurgency will require a carefully coordinated regional response. It is unlikely that the security forces of Mozambique would have been unable to accomplish the gains made in the latter half of 2021 without the combat support of the Rwandan and SADC forces. However, this security assistance should continue to be oriented around Mozambican forces—too large of a foreign intervention could

89. Michael Shurkin and Aneliese Bernard, “Ten Things the United States Should Do to Combat Terrorism in the Sahel,” *War on the Rocks*, August 30, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/ten-things-the-united-states-should-do-to-combat-terrorism-in-the-sahel/>.

90. Jon Temin, “Africa Is Changing-and U.S. Strategy Is Not Keeping Up,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 18, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2021-10-08/africa-changing-and-us-strategy-not-keeping>.

result in strategic quagmire. Targeted operations, complemented by efforts from the Northern Integrated Development Agency, are necessary in order to prevent a recurrence of campaign losses that were seen in 2019-2021. Moreover, the failure of the private military contractors came, in part, from their overall lack of knowledge of the local terrain; a large deployment of similarly ill-informed Western troops might do more harm than good. Rather, Mozambique should lean on regional forces that are willing to support its fight against violent extremism.

CONCLUSION

The geopolitical importance of Africa is growing; surging populations, expanding markets, and increasing numbers of violent extremist organizations all mean the US will need to adjust quickly to the shifting strategic landscape. In Cabo Delgado, where counterinsurgency operations are complicated by immense quantities of natural gas, a potential link to global jihad, and great power competition, the US has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to helping Mozambique achieve enduring stability. This thesis does not argue that the US should halt its current security assistance programs in Mozambique. In fact, it recognizes the importance of the relationships that have been built via AFRICOM and the various humanitarian missions it has supported. Instead, this work contends that the US should direct the majority of its foreign policy strategy through diplomatic, humanitarian, and developmental efforts in Africa. At present, the US can best serve the citizens of Cabo Delgado by respecting the authority of its African partner, providing security assistance that is both proportionate to the threat and coordinated with parallel forces, and delivering humanitarian and development aid that addresses the systemic conditions to which this conflict can originally be attributed.

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