

## **Analysis of Armed Separatist Movement Conflict in Casamance, Senegal & Lessons Learned for the Indonesian Government in Addressing Similar Conflicts**

**Sakinatunnafsih Anna<sup>1)</sup>, Anang Puji Utama<sup>2)</sup> Bayu Setiawan<sup>3)</sup>, Pujo Widodo<sup>4)\*</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3,4)</sup> Peace and Conflict Resolution, National Security Faculty, Republic Indonesia Defense University, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author

Email: [sakinatnn@gmail.com](mailto:sakinatnn@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

*This in-depth article explores the complex factors that have contributed to the long-standing armed separatist conflict in Casamance, Senegal. It offers an analysis of the most effective approaches to resolving the conflict, drawing valuable lessons that can be applied to other nations grappling with similar challenges. Historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors all play a role in the conflict, which has endured for decades. There are additional issues to navigate, including military fragmentation, political leadership voids, economic and cultural decline, failed ceasefires, and neighboring state behavior. By examining these causes and lessons learned, this article provides valuable insights for Indonesia and other nations facing separatist movements. Despite the daunting nature of the conflict, there are several potential solutions that can be employed to facilitate successful negotiations in the future, including trust-building, official and unofficial mediation, the establishment of a State Peace Secretariat in Casamance, and a comprehensive, inclusive settlement negotiation.*

**Keywords:** *Armed Separatist Movement; Casamance; Conflict Resolution Strategies; Lessons Learned*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Casamance conflict is one of the longest conflicts in Africa, rooted in a complex history of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. It began on December 26, 1982, when a peaceful protest march by the Casamance Democratic Forces Movement (MFDC), formed to counter the Senegalese government's aggression, turned violent. The movement's goal is to achieve independence for the Casamance region in southern Senegal, which they claim was independent from Senegal but was merged into the country in 1960 by France, the former colonial ruler (UCDP, 2021).

Since acquiring a military wing in 1983, the MFDC has engaged in a series of confrontations with the Senegalese army, resulting in nearly 5,000 deaths and the complete destruction of several villages in the conflict. The conflict's prolonged duration and complexity are striking, with shifts in politics, geography, economics, culture, and religion all playing a part in its separatist nature. Negotiation is the last resort for resolving the conflict, as a military resolution is more likely to lead to a recurrence of the conflict than a lasting solution (UCDP, 2021).

However, negotiating in internal conflicts, especially those centered on independence, is a complex process due to the multifaceted causes of the conflict. In the Casamance conflict, independence is the ultimate goal of the rebels, born out of frustration among the Casamance population, driven by several factors. Firstly, there is dissatisfaction with the Wolof-dominated Senegalese government, which Casamance residents feel has neglected and overlooked them for years. Secondly, there are cultural and ethnic differences between the people of Casamance and Senegal, leading to a sense of minority status and disregard for the government. Thirdly, Casamance is rich in natural resources, but the management of these resources has not sufficiently considered the interests of the local community, leading to a feeling of unjust enrichment. Fourthly, the armed separatist movement was triggered by a separatist group advocating for Casamance independence since the early 1960s, which eventually evolved into a movement seeking full independence for Casamance (Sidibé, 2022).

Despite these factors, not all Casamance residents support the separatist groups, with some remaining loyal to the Senegalese government and rejecting violence as a means to advocate for their rights. However, the fragmentation of the MFDC military wing into several different factions and the ruthless actions of the political wing since the death of the movement's original leader in 2007 have made negotiations even more difficult. Corruption has become rampant, a series of ceasefires have failed, and external actors have intervened in ways that sometimes do not help, exacerbating the conflict's complexity.

Given the complexity of the issue, a more detailed study is needed to understand the conflict's causes and sources of difficulty before analyzing how this conflict negatively impacts peace negotiations and conflict resolution efforts. This will allow us to find lessons learned or evaluations that can be applied by Indonesia and other countries experiencing similar conflicts.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study conducted with a qualitative research method aims to explore the armed separatist conflict in Casamance, Senegal, and understand its intricate causes, dynamics, and challenges. The research methodology involves an exhaustive literature review of academic articles, books, reports, and primary and secondary documents such as government reports and peace agreements. The historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural underpinnings of the conflict will be analyzed to trace its historical evolution and understand stakeholder positions.

Ultimately, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Casamance conflict, offer lessons learned, and formulate recommendations for policymakers and practitioners engaged in conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives. The research report will include details on the methodology, key findings, and actionable recommendations. The study aims to provide valuable insights into the Casamance conflict, offer guidance for addressing similar conflicts, and make a meaningful contribution to the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Armed Separatist Movement Conflict in Casamance, Senegal**

The armed separatist conflict in Casamance has spanned several decades and involved various separatist groups, such as the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) and Rébellion d'Enclaves Sud (RES). The origins of this conflict date back to the late 1970s when the separatist group Front de Libération du Sénégal (FLS) began advocating for autonomy in Casamance. However, in 1982, the FLS transformed into an organization pursuing full independence for Casamance and renamed itself MFDC (Senghor, 2014). In this conflict, separatist groups employed violence, including bombings, killings, and looting, as a form of resistance against the Senegalese government. They demanded Casamance's independence, asserting that the Senegalese government neglected the interests of Casamance's populace.

MFDC essentially comprises two main components: the political wing and the military wing, which can currently be described as moderate and extremist factions. The political wing has both local and external branches advocating for MFDC's independence. Locally, Catholic priest Pastor Augustin Diamacoune Senghor was appointed Secretary-General in 1991 and later became President until his death in January 2007. Before his passing, Pastor Diamacoune played a pivotal role in condemning the Bissau Agreement aimed at restoring peace among the protagonists. He subsequently formed the Southern Front (Front sud) with Léopold Sagna, who

took over from Sidy Badji as the group's leader. An important challenge faced by the Southern Front was internal division, although it was relatively successful in advancing the organization's agenda. As the leader of the Southern Front, Sagna made efforts to meet with President Diouf with the aim of negotiation, but this plan later failed. MFDC resumed violence against the Senegalese government (GOS) in 1982 under the leadership of a Catholic Diola priest, Augustine Diamacounne Senghor (N. Okai M. Abdallah, L. Amedzrator, S. Brewoo, F. Okyere, 2014, Finland). In essence, the Casamance rebellion represents the struggle of ethnic groups (mostly Diola) against the Senegalese state (Senghor, 2014).

Since the outset of the conflict, Presidents Abdou Diouf and Abdoulaye Wade's administrations have attempted to halt the rebellion and have varying approaches to conflict management. Upon assuming power in 1981, Diouf faced a sudden outbreak of rebellion and responded with repressive measures. When a military solution proved ineffective, he attempted negotiations with MFDC and granted amnesty to MFDC members imprisoned after the 1982 and 1983 demonstrations in Ziguinchor (Jeng, 2017).

Under his leadership, external actors such as Gambia and Guinea-Bissau became involved in negotiations. Wade, upon his ascent to power after the presidential elections in February 2000, introduced a new strategy of direct dialogue with MFDC's armed wing and limited the roles of neighboring countries, Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. Furthermore, in December 2000, he issued a public warning to the national press that the dissemination of information collected from MFDC would be considered an attempt to sabotage the Casamance Peace Process and would be prosecuted under the Penal Code. Besides the major figures in this conflict, other national actors such as civilians in the Casamance region, who are typically victims, also played crucial roles. Civil society often finds itself in the most vulnerable position as they are frequently attacked by rebel forces or forced to flee due to the fear of being caught in the crossfire. Local Non-Governmental Organizations usually assist civilian populations, aiding in integration, providing education, and engaging in demining efforts (Fall, 2010).

At the regional level, the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and Gambia have become actors in these conflicts. Due to the connections between Diola, Balante, and Mandingo ethnicities in northern Guinea-Bissau and the troubled Casamance region in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau's role has been crucial in the conflict. Some governments in Guinea-Bissau found themselves assisting MFDC's campaign efforts in Casamance, such as in the case of the Military Junta led by the late General Ansumana Manneh (Kohnert, 2010). A similar linkage makes Gambia's role highly significant. President Yahya Jammeh has been alleged on various occasions to have provided assistance to MFDC in Casamance. Most of the MFDC rebels are ethnic relatives of President Jammeh, and his active role in this crisis has been questioned in various quarters. There are also reports indicating that the weapons used by the rebels in Casamance originate from Gambia with the assistance of the Government (Minteh, 2009).

### **External Factors that Cause Conflict in Casamance, Senegal**

The external dimensions of conflict causation often revolve around a nation's national interests, especially concerning sovereignty and territorial integrity. In some cases, individuals' interests in protecting their regime's security can serve as a basis for one country to safeguard or disrupt another's security. In the case of Casamance, the geographical proximity of the region to Guinea-Bissau and Gambia has been identified as an underlying and exacerbating factor in the conflict. During Guinea-Bissau's struggle for liberation from colonial Portugal, the people of Casamance played a significant role in supporting the people of Guinea-Bissau against Portuguese colonial domination (Sidibé, 2022).

Therefore, they had the expectation that they would benefit from the same support when fighting for Casamance's independence from Senegal. Similarly, in Gambia, a movement led by Kukoi Samba Sagna fought against the forces of Daouda Diawara, the former president of

Gambia. This was also a determining factor in the sense that it convinced the people of Casamance that they had an opportunity to challenge the state (M. Abdallah, 2014). Furthermore, the dense forests of Casamance served as a base in Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, and the presence of Casamançais veterans from the Indochina and Algeria wars, as well as retired Senegalese Army officers, were assets for the Casamance rebels.

The Casamance conflict is not like conventional open armed conflicts but is more complex due to its structure and numerous factions. Nevertheless, the humanitarian impact it has had over the past three decades since the conflict began in 1982 is significant. It is estimated that over 5,000 people have been killed, with at least 652 killed or injured due to landmines and unexploded ordnance. These statistics were updated in 2008 by The National Center for Antimine Action (CNAM), where the number of landmine casualties increased to 748, and large-scale displacement was reported, with estimates of refugees ranging from 10,000 to 40,000 people in Casamance.

Moreover, the conflict has had broader regional implications. It has strained relations between Senegal and its neighbors, particularly Guinea-Bissau and Gambia, due to allegations of support for Casamance rebels. The interception of a weapons shipment from Iran in Nigeria in 2010, believed to be destined for Casamance rebels, added another layer of complexity to the regional dynamics. In December 2011, the rebels launched a deadly attack on the Senegalese Army, resulting in 12 fatalities, ten of whom were Senegalese soldiers, further highlighting the volatile nature of the conflict and its impact on the region (Rizaldi, 2021).

#### **Armed Separatist Movement – Conflict Resolution Effort**

Since President Abdoulaye Wade came to power in 2000, there have been occasional direct contacts with the Maquis during peace negotiations. After his predecessor, Diouf, abandoned all previous negotiations, and Wade announced his intention to resolve the Casamance conflict within 100 days, he appointed General Abdoulaye Fall as a mediator in 2002. Using audio and video tapes, Fall attempted to reach out to the Maquis. He informed them that the military had been ordered to withdraw and offered them amnesty in exchange for laying down their arms. The Maquis, perplexed by Wade's new policy, resumed armed resistance. Wade responded with stricter law enforcement and the destruction of rebel bases in 2003 (Jeng, 2017).

Since September 2004 and onwards, the situation appeared to stabilize as a result of various meetings between the government and the MFDC. This temporary peace allowed many refugees to return home, and people began rebuilding their lives. On December 30, 2004, a new peace agreement was signed. However, not all MFDC factions were involved, resulting in new violent clashes. Wade felt betrayed and withdrew funding from the region. The conflict escalated once again. New peace talks on neutral ground in Fundjul in the Kaolack region in January 2005 were more of a political discourse and were not followed by actions. Especially since the death of Abbé Diamacoune Senghor in January 2007, who had acted as a mediator between the MFDC and the Senegalese government for many years, the situation became even more complex. Fighting resumed in Attika on August 20, 2009. The current situation in the spring of 2010, with new reports of attacks in Casamance, indicates that the conflict is far from over. Wade's strategy is perceived by observers as waiting for signs of exhaustion in the MFDC (Stefan Gehrold / Inga Neu, 2010).

There are various reasons behind the failure of all peace negotiations to date. On one hand, there are ideological factors on the part of the rebels who do not want to see their goal of 'Casamance's independence' abandoned. This is further compounded by the complex fragmentation within the Maquis, making negotiations nearly impossible. Power relations within the military wing have also not been clarified, leading to hostility among factions. The military wing is almost separate from the political wing of the MFDC. Moreover, since Senghor's death, the situation has become more complicated: the next MFDC leaders were not accepted by all

members. Internal divisions further hindered the identification of negotiating partners. For the Maquis, laying down their arms also means returning to villages where they may have committed atrocities. Traditional revenge and forgiveness play a significant role in the local community, especially among the Jola tribe (Senghor, 2014).

There are also economic and psychological factors hindering the Maquis from surrendering their weapons. After nearly 30 years in the forest, it is extremely challenging for the rebels to change their way of life. Many have not learned trades or professions. Additionally, former agricultural workers looking to reintegrate into society face various difficulties. During their absence, often spanning years, their land was given to others, leaving them with few options to start anew. Many are nearly destitute due to their experiences of persecution by the state during the 1980s and 1990s. Reintegration into rural structures is also problematic. For the Maquis, laying down their arms also means returning to villages where they themselves may have committed atrocities. Traditional revenge and forgiveness play a significant role in the local community, especially among the Jola tribe. Furthermore, many have experienced trauma, some struggle with substance abuse, including alcohol and drugs. Additionally, fighters wishing to leave the Maquis face repercussions in the form of persecution or even murder (Senghor, 2014).

Moreover, the distrust that has arisen between the Casamançais population and the northern population is another significant barrier to achieving peace. To change this perception and reduce distrust, it is necessary for all parties involved in peace and/or development (the state, NGOs, civil society groups, facilitators/mediators) to rethink their current strategies. Sincere efforts are needed to integrate the local Casamançais population and equip them with knowledge and experience so that their presence can be accepted by the local population (Zahedi, 2016).

### **Lessons Learned from the Casamance Conflict, Senegal for the Indonesian Government & Countries with Similar Conflicts**

The separatist conflict that occurred in Casamance, Senegal, provides several valuable lessons for the Indonesian Government in anticipating the possibility of similar conflicts domestically. One lesson that can be drawn is the need for the government to listen to the aspirations and interests of the local population. The Casamance case illustrates the importance of understanding the underlying root causes of the people's demands and engaging in communication with community leaders and stakeholders to find mutually acceptable solutions that meet the needs and interests of all parties involved.

Furthermore, the importance of seeking peaceful solutions through dialogue is another crucial lesson. The Indonesian government can take inspiration from Senegal's efforts in addressing the Casamance conflict, where dialogue and negotiation were the primary means of achieving resolution. Strengthening dialogue and communication with community leaders, including traditional institutions, can aid in finding sustainable peaceful solutions.

Economic and political factors should not be overlooked in efforts to address separatist conflicts. As observed in Casamance, policies related to resource management and economic development that consider local interests can serve as a foundation for conflict prevention. The Indonesian government must pay attention to the political dynamics in conflict-prone regions, establish inclusive political systems, and ensure that the rights of the people are fairly upheld.

The importance of avoiding the use of violence as a solution is also a valuable lesson. As seen in Casamance, violence only exacerbates the situation and results in unnecessary loss of life. The Indonesian government should seek peaceful alternatives and actively engage in communication with involved parties to resolve conflicts.

By learning from the Casamance experience, it is hoped that the Indonesian Government can strengthen its efforts to anticipate similar conflicts peacefully and sustainably. Additionally, the Indonesian Government must take concrete steps to promote inclusive development, including improving access to education, healthcare, and adequate infrastructure. Increasing

regional autonomy is also essential to empower communities in influencing policies related to their interests, ultimately contributing to enhanced stability and peace throughout the nation.

## CONCLUSION

The Senegalese government has made attempts to resolve the conflict in Casamance, such as offering amnesty and engaging in peace negotiations. While progress has been made, complete success has not been achieved. Lessons from Indonesia and other nations have shown that it is crucial to consider the local population's needs and desires, seek peaceful solutions through dialogue, and address economic and political factors without resorting to violence. Additionally, promoting inclusive development and regional autonomy is key to maintaining stability and preventing future conflicts.

To achieve successful negotiations in the future, trust must be established between the government and the community. This can be achieved through formal and informal mediation and the establishment of a State Peace Secretariat in Casamance that can facilitate a comprehensive and inclusive settlement negotiation process.

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