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*Cabo Ligado* — or ‘connected cape’ — is a new conflict observatory monitoring political violence in Mozambique, launched in partnership with Zitamar News, Mediafax, and the International Crisis Group.

**Situation Summary**

Last week was a quiet one in Cabo Delgado until insurgents launched a large-scale assault on Mocimboa da Praia town, a crucial logistical hub for economic activity and humanitarian relief for the northern part of the province, in the early hours of 27 June. The attack, the third on Mocimboa da Praia town since the start of the conflict, followed an approach similar to that used in other attacks on district capitals in recent months. Insurgents used the element of surprise to defeat a Mozambican security force contingent garrisoned in the district capital, then openly occupied the town.

Casualties from the battle are still unclear, although they appear to be substantial among combatants on both sides. In their claim of the attack, the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) put the total number of security forces killed in the attack at 10 (and released photos of what appear to be six dead Mozambican soldiers), while government sources report killing seven insurgents in the early stages of the battle. Two videos, reportedly from Mocimboa da Praia, show government soldiers with the bodies of 11 dead insurgents. Civilian casualty numbers are also unclear, although at least one woman sustained gunshot wounds, a source reports that two employees of Total subcontractor Fenix remain unaccounted for after being caught in the fighting, and insurgents kidnapped eight girls, a businessman, and a religious leader during their time occupying the town.

In all, the apparent ease with which insurgents re-formed to attack Mocimboa da Praia after breaking into smaller groups in the face of the government’s offensive through the district lays bare how ineffective that offensive has been and how easily insurgents have been able to communicate when separated. Insurgents retain the ability to impose themselves on strategically crucial populated areas, seemingly at will. The government’s heavy-handed counterinsurgency effort in Mocimboa da Praia (see more in the Government Response section below) has, at best, been ineffective and, at worst, played directly into the insurgency’s hands.

**Incident Focus: Another Battle for Mocimboa da Praia**

The insurgent attack on Mocimboa da Praia kicked off before 5 o’clock in the morning of 27 June. Mozambican security forces stationed in the town pushed back the initial assault, but were overrun by a second attempt after insurgents regrouped. Once in control of Mocimboa da Praia, insurgents
set about cutting off access roads into town, destroying mobile phone infrastructure, and looting the military barracks and district administration building.

Eyewitness reports described insurgents armed with RPGs in addition to their more standard kit, and one report, which remains unconfirmed, had insurgents using an SPG-9 Kopyo 73mm recoilless gun and an 82mm mortar. If the insurgents did use a mortar, it was their first use of indirect fire in the conflict, which would constitute a significant escalation. Photos published by IS of weapons captured from Mozambican security forces in early May show four 82mm or 81mm mortar shells and a Chinese-made W87 mortar tube. Two 60mm mortars were also captured earlier in the conflict. No SPG-9 has yet shown up in IS claims.

After being defeated on the ground, government forces struck back from the air. Three Dyck Advisory Group helicopters targeted insurgents in the town, although reports differ as to how effective they were in pushing the attackers back. Between the fire from the helicopter gunships and the heavy ground fighting, the battle caused what one source described to The Daily Maverick as "significant losses within the ranks of both sides as well as major collateral damage in terms of the loss of civilian lives."

One of the losses on the government side was Horacio Charles, the Mozambican Navy officer who commanded the security force contingent at Mocimboa da Praia. Charles had been a key figure in the government’s military response to the conflict, acting as a liaison with natural gas companies as part of the security force deployment on the Afungi peninsula before taking command in Mocimboa da Praia. Charles’ death will likely further unsettle the energy companies that hold Mozambique’s economic future in their hands.

**Government Response**

The counterinsurgency tactics the government deployed against Mocimboa da Praia civilians in the 10 days leading up to the attack were so brutal that multiple sources described the attack as a direct response to government violence. In addition to abuses detailed in last week’s report, on 25 June residents heard gunfire as special police units went door-to-door in the Nanduadua neighborhood on the outskirts of Mocimboa da Praia, arresting men they believed to be involved in the insurgency and abusing women in homes where men were not present. Twelve of those arrested were released, many having been injured in custody. On the same night, police beat the muezzin of a local mosque in the Universitario neighborhood so badly that he could not make the call to prayer the next morning. Another man reportedly died from his injuries a day after being abused by police.

On 26 June, residents of the Milamba neighborhood found the corpses of 26 people who two sources identified as being civilians police had arrested in the preceding nights. The bodies were discovered near the Quinhevo River, a few kilometers outside of Mocimboa da Praia town center.
Violent government repression has also ramped up outside of Mocimboa da Praia. Local informal businessmen report ongoing harassment from security forces, including “kidnappings” by police of businessmen in Nangade, Macomia, and Pemba districts in the past 10 days. In Maputo, prosecutors indicted Canal de Moçambique executives Fernando Veloso and Matias Guente for their paper’s reporting on suspected irregular security contracts between gas companies and the Mozambican Ministries of Defence and Interior, and police arrested Carta de Moçambique journalist Omardine Omar, who frequently covers Cabo Delgado. Omar has since been released, but he faces summary trial on vague charges of disobeying Mozambique’s state of emergency on 30 June. Journalist Ibraimo Mbaruco, taken over two months ago in an apparent military arrest, has still not been heard from.

As the government cracks down on the press, other less scrupulous outlets have attempted to fill in some of the conflict’s information gaps. The mysterious, recently launched DefesaMoz.info website, which seems carefully curated to provide a relentlessly pro-government spin, claimed the battle for Mocimboa da Praia as a victory for state security forces, claiming that government troops managed to “repel [the insurgents] in good time.” Yet reports differ as to how long insurgents stayed in Mocimboa da Praia, with some coming in from the outskirts of the town suggesting that insurgents remain there even as of the morning of 30 June. What is more, the photo that the site pairs with the story, which purports to show Mozambican troops “in yet another counterinsurgency activity in Cabo Delgado,” is actually a photo of a mine-clearing exercise in Maputo from 2011. Whatever the goals of the site’s owners, it is unlikely that such crude propagandizing will realize them.

On the international assistance front, the US State Department released its Country Reports on Terrorism 2019, which emphasized the threat that violence in Cabo Delgado poses to natural gas development and pointed out that Mozambique lacks a counterterrorism strategy and that its law enforcement agencies struggle to prevent terrorist attacks. State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Nathan Sales was evasive when asked if the US was helping draw up a counterterrorism strategy for Mozambique. The criticisms of Mozambique’s counterterrorism capacity are certainly fair and accurate, but applying a counterterrorism framework to the conflict asks the Mozambican government to address the symptoms of anti-state violence in Cabo Delgado without inquiring too closely into its local causes. As researcher Salvador Forquilha argued persuasively last week, a purely military approach to the conflict is more likely to exacerbate violence than quell it.

At a meeting of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Ministerial Committee of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation on 27 June, members made only cursory mention of Mozambique, with no movement announced on any sort of SADC aid in the Cabo Delgado conflict. For its part, South Africa announced the transfer of undisclosed quantities and types of weapons to Mozambique to help fight the insurgency. The news came a few days before the attack on Mocimboa da Praia and ISCAP’s subsequent claim of the attack. The ISCAP claim was notable because, for the first time, it referred to state forces as representing the “Coalition of South Africa States,” suggesting that ISCAP is perhaps more eager for a multilateral SADC deployment to Cabo Delgado than the Mozambican government.
Finally, the private consortium that had been operating the port at Mocimboa da Praia has thrown in the towel in the face of continued insecurity, handing its concession back to the government so that it can transfer the job “to a consortium better able to secure the port and conduct operations in a heightened threat-level environment.” No new concessionaire has been announced, but at a time when northern Cabo Delgado is increasingly being supplied by sea to avoid insurgent attacks, securing and operating the Mocimboa da Praia port could become a lucrative endeavor. Opportunities for private security seem to be growing in Cabo Delgado, and the Mocimboa da Praia port could be a key indicator for how much the Mozambican state wants to open those opportunities up.
Note: There is often a lack of consensus over the spellings of place names in Mozambique. We endeavor to be consistent within Cabo Ligado publications, but be aware that alternative spellings exist and may appear in other publications.
Violence in Mocimboa da Praia

During the early hours of 27 June, insurgents launched a large-scale assault on Mocimboa da Praia town, a crucial logistical hub for economic activity and humanitarian relief for the northern part of the province. The attack followed an approach similar to that used in other attacks on district capitals in recent months. Insurgents used the element of surprise to defeat a Mozambican security force contingent garrisoned in the district capital, then occupied the town. The apparent ease with which insurgents re-formed to attack Mocimboa da Praia after breaking into smaller groups in the face of the government’s offensive through the district lays bare how ineffective that offensive has been.

The counterinsurgency tactics the government deployed against Mocimboa da Praia civilians in the 10 days leading up to the attack were so brutal that multiple sources described the attack as a direct response to government violence. On 25 June, residents heard gunfire as special police units went door-to-door, arresting men they believed to be involved in the insurgency and abusing women in homes where men were not present. On 26 June, residents of the Milambá neighborhood found the corpse of 26 people whom two sources identified as being civilians that police had arrested in the preceding nights.

Attacks on Mocimboa da Praia

Mocimboa da Praia town, which has been a frequent location of clashes between insurgents and the military, houses an important port used for the delivery and transportation of relief distribution and administrative logistical supplies to both the district government and the A funded LNG site. Several important access roads are also linked to Mocimboa da Praia. Sustained attacks will result in ever-increasing militarization of the corridor between Mocimboa da Praia and A funded, create security concerns, and delay the initiative to use the port of call for domestic shipping services.

Timeline of Organized Violence in Mocimboa da Praia District

During October 2017, insurgents launched several attacks in Mocimboa da Praia and gained control of the town from 5-6 of October. Mozambican security forces responded, and were able to regain control.

On 23 March 2020, insurgents attacked and seized control of Mocimboa da Praia town. ISCAP claimed credit for the attack.

On 27 June 2020, insurgents conducted a large-scale attack on Mocimboa da Praia town.