

Cabo Ligado Weekly: 28 September - 4 October

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

Situation Summary

As the conflict in Cabo Delgado enters its fourth year, violence continued in Palma, Muidumbe, and Macomia districts last week. Coastal Macomia, near the town of Mucojo, was hit particularly hard, with nine confirmed civilian fatalities and many more people unaccounted for after a string of insurgent attacks.

On 28 September, insurgents struck a border guard position in Nyica, in northern Palma district, roughly seven kilometers south of the Tanzanian border. Attackers killed one border guard and destroyed most of the buildings in Nyica. [Reportedly](#), the insurgents captured a couple outside the village before the attack to act as guides — the man escaped, while the woman’s whereabouts are still unknown.

The same day, in Chitunda, Muidumbe district, insurgents ambushed a repair truck belonging to Electricidade de Mocambique (EdM), the national electrical company. The workers had traveled to Chitunda to repair a power line that the insurgents had cut. They were met with insurgent gunfire when they arrived. One worker was hit in his right arm, while the other was captured and then released. He was released for the express purpose of conveying a message from the insurgents that the cut power line should not be repaired. The line cut has left Mueda town without power for at least eight days. Chitunda sits on the N380, about 15 kilometers south of Awasse. Insurgents killed an EdM worker in Awasse last week.

Further north, a man was found shot dead in Malamba, Palma district on 29 September. Local sources attributed the killing to insurgents.

On 30 September, widespread insurgent violence disrupted life in eastern Macomia district. Insurgents [occupied](#) Mucojo, Macomia district, burning down homes and public infrastructure. Government forces responded, and there were clashes between government troops and insurgents. No casualty reports are available. The attack was a follow-up to an earlier, previously unreported attack on Mucojo on 24 September in which insurgents burned down homes and beheaded seven civilians.

Insurgents also occupied the coastal village of Pangane on 30 September, driving government troops out in a second attack after initially being repelled. While there, the insurgents burned the

official home of the village mayor and detained civilians in a local mosque. An unknown number of civilians are missing following the attack.

The violence in eastern Macomia on 30 September also included cattle raiding, with insurgents waylaying two trucks carrying cows belonging to Frelimo luminary Alberto Chipande. Chipande's employees were attempting to bring the cows to the relative safety of Macomia town. Both the truck drivers and the cows remain missing. The trucks themselves were found burned on the road between Mucojo and Macomia town.

Three civilians died at the hands of insurgents in Rueia, near Mucojo in eastern Macomia, on 30 September. Over the course of the next three days (the exact timeline is unclear), insurgents killed another three civilians in Rueia and three civilians in nearby Muituro. Insurgent movements were also reported in this time period in the eastern Macomia villages of Nambija 2, Manica, and Messano, all within 10 kilometers of Mucojo. According to a source on the ground, Dyck Advisory Group helicopters were operating in the area and served as a minor deterrent against insurgent action. Insurgents waited for the helicopters to leave and then continued their operations, moving from village to village by motorbike.

When insurgents arrived in Messano on 1 October, they found that some older civilians had not fled the area because they lacked the funds to travel. Insurgents gave the remaining civilians 9,000 meticaís (about \$125) and told them to leave and to not return. They also cautioned the civilians against staying in Macomia town, saying that the insurgency would soon reoccupy the district capital.

The same day, two boats left Pangane for Ilha Matemo overloaded with people trying to escape insurgent violence on the mainland. One of the boats capsized and an unknown number of civilians drowned. With insurgents moving freely on the roads of eastern Macomia district, many civilians see the water route as their only chance to make it to safety, leading to these kinds of precarious escapes.

On 3 October, insurgents burned buildings in Quirimize and nearby Naunde, both south of Mucojo in eastern Macomia district.

Also on 3 October, insurgents attacked the village of Magaia, Muidumbe district and were driven back by an armed local militia. No casualty details have emerged. According to one [report](#), the attack was a second attempt by insurgents to raid the village, with an earlier skirmish on 30 September resulting in the death of one insurgent.

A [report](#) emerged this week of a previously unreported attack at the Cabo Delgado Communal Village in Macomia district on 26 September. According to the report, insurgents decapitated six members of the same family, including two children, in the attack.

Incident Focus: Three Years of Conflict

This week marks the three-year anniversary of the beginning of the Cabo Delgado conflict. Since the initial attacks on Mocimboa da Praia on 5 October, 2017, the conflict has expanded to include attacks throughout the coastal areas of the province and forced over 300,000 people to [flee](#) their homes, with no end in sight.

The onslaught of insurgent attacks in eastern Macomia last week seemed to be a prelude to the anniversary, with insurgents warning civilians that they intend to turn west toward the district capital, perhaps in time for the occasion. Attacks two weeks ago in Quissanga came with the same warning, that the insurgents would mark the 5 October anniversary in Macomia town. People in Macomia town took the threat seriously, with many sleeping in the bush outside of town since the night of 1 October. As in previous years, however, no spectacular anniversary attacks seem to have taken place.

Instead, the anniversary is an occasion to reflect on how little the public has been able to learn about the conflict even as it drags on. Only in the past two weeks, for example, have journalists been able to identify some of the people seen participating in attacks and propaganda in insurgent videos.

Reports from the Center for Investigative Journalism offer details about how [two insurgents](#) who have appeared in insurgent videos came to join the group. The stories underline both the international nature of life in northern Mozambique and the local origins of the insurgency. Both men grew up in Mocimboa da Praia, and both received religious education abroad. One worked for a time for an international Islamic philanthropic organization in Pemba, while the other became a successful small entrepreneur in Mocimboa da Praia. They were involved in local dissident Islamic sects well before the first attacks, and have relied on familial, religious, and business networks to survive and grow their capabilities since the insurgency began in earnest. One of the men reportedly undertook training in insurgent tactics at a site in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

These stories add more detail to a view of the insurgency that has very slowly come into focus over the last three years: that the insurgency is local in its origins, but that to be local in Cabo Delgado is to have a variety of ties to regional and global actors. Achieving success in Cabo Delgado, whether in education, trade, or violent secessionism, requires utilizing those ties. So far, the main way the insurgency has used its international ties is to deepen its relationship to the Islamic State. The effect of that relationship, and the competition between local and global priorities it creates, will be a major factor in determining the course of events in the conflict's fourth year.

Government Response

More than 830 Mozambican refugees who had been living in a school in Kitaya, Tanzania after fleeing violence in Cabo Delgado have been [forced](#) to return to Mozambique. The refugees were turned over to Mozambican authorities at the Unity Bridge, which enters Mozambique from

Tanzania in northwest Cabo Delgado. The forced repatriation is only the latest sign of strain on the putative unity between the two countries. Mozambican officials have long suggested that insurgents enjoy sanctuaries across the border in Tanzania, and Tanzanian opposition politicians have recently taken to [criticizing](#) the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party for not improving cross-border relations.

Meanwhile, for those displaced inside Mozambique, conditions continue to worsen. The power line cut that led to the 28 September attack on EdM employees at Chitunda has left Mueda in a blackout that was ongoing as of yesterday. The power cut means, among other things, that the water system in the town is not functioning. As a result, water is being shipped from outside Mueda and sold at a profit, further straining household budgets.

In Palma, where power has also been out for long periods, banks have begun to close. BCI and Millennium BIM both removed their staff from Palma last week, leaving Standard Bank as the only bank branch doing business in the town. ATMs are operating on limited hours, and must be supplied by plane. The generators that power both the banks and the ATMs are running on fuel supplied by Total.

In Macomia, the violence in the eastern half of the district in the last week has led to a thousand new refugees entering the district capital, despite insurgent threats against the town. Many in this new group left their homes quickly and with few supplies, leaving them effectively destitute. Most are staying in a primary school which lacks sufficient bedding and hygienic facilities and is quickly becoming overcrowded.

The Red Cross has resources that could help those displaced in Macomia and many others, but, as country head Avelino Mondlane [told](#) reporters, they have a difficult time delivering aid to those in need in Cabo Delgado because they cannot guarantee the safety of their staff. Without some assurances that Red Cross staff will not be attacked on their way to serve vulnerable populations, Mondlane said, it is difficult for the group to be effective.

When displaced Mozambicans do have access to aid, they have more opportunity to assist the state in its counterinsurgency effort. People leaving Bilibiza, Quissanga district after recent insurgent attacks there quickly turned four suspected insurgents over to authorities once they reached displaced person camps in Metuge district. While the alleged insurgents had been traveling with the refugees from the start of their journey, the refugees were only able to denounce them once they were in Metuge and no longer feared insurgent retaliation.

In Maputo, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi has begun to hear more criticism of his handling of the conflict from leaders in his party. Nyusi's former boss and current rival, former president Armando Guebuza, [said](#) on 2 October that Mozambique has the military resources to defeat the insurgency, but that they are not being utilized correctly. Joaquim Chissano, who led Mozambique before Guebuza and has become a respected negotiator and peace advocate, [urged](#) Nyusi's government to find an interlocutor within the insurgency in order to begin negotiations that could lead to an end to the conflict.

Nyusi's government is also facing budgetary issues, with Finance Minister Adriano Maleiane [admitting](#) that the Cabo Delgado conflict will force him to draw funds from other programs in order to pay for security forces. Maleiane's predicament is unlikely to be helped by the actions of Mozambique's military Chief of Staff Lázaro Menete. Menete [locked](#) the entire armed forces a day of salary in September in order to pay the expenses of the Matchedje sports clubs in Mocuba and Maputo, which are associated with the military. The move went over poorly with soldiers, especially those deployed in Cabo Delgado.

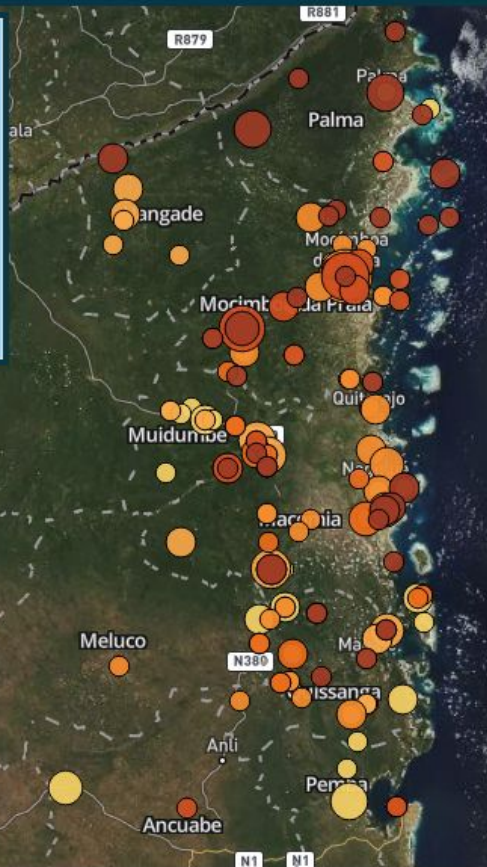
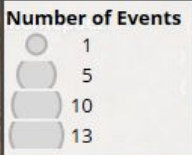
On the international front, Mozambique confirmed that it has requested counterinsurgency support from the European Union in the form of training, medical equipment, and logistical support, but remains opposed to outside military intervention. Total CEO Patrick Pouyanne came out in favor of the counterinsurgency support, [urging](#) "Western powers" to take an interest in the conflict.

Foreign Minister Verónica Macamo specifically [shot down](#) the idea that United Nations troops would be invited to Mozambique, and expressed confidence in the ability of Mozambican security forces to do the job.

A report came out last week suggesting another potential source of external intervention, however. A Bloomberg [article](#), citing unnamed sources, said that US Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Tibor Nagy asked the government of Zimbabwe to play a larger role in supporting the Mozambican government in Cabo Delgado. The State Department denies the report, and multiple sources say that, while Mozambique was discussed, Nagy made no request for Zimbabwean intervention. In any case, Zimbabwean military involvement in Mozambique, if it did happen, would likely come through the auspices of the Southern African Development Community. There has been no recent movement on developing a framework for SADC assistance in Cabo Delgado.

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.

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Three Years On

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Growing Criticism of the Government's Response

President Filipe Nyusi has begun to hear more criticism of his handling of the Cabo Delgado conflict from members of his own party. Nyusi's former boss and current rival, former president Armando Guebuza, said that Mozambique has the military resources to defeat the insurgency, but that they are not being utilized correctly. Joaquim Chissano, who led Mozambique before Guebuza and has become a respected negotiator and peace advocate, urged Nyusi's government to find an interlocutor within the insurgency in order to begin negotiations that could lead to an end to the conflict. The government is also facing budgetary issues, with Finance Minister Adriano Maleiane admitting that he will have to draw funds from other programs in order to pay for security forces.

Organized Political Violence in Cabo Delgado (2020)

