23 November 2021

Cabo Ligado Weekly: 15-21 November

_Cabo Ligado_ — or ‘connected cape’ — is a Mozambique conflict observatory launched by ACLED, Zitamar News, and Mediafax.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**Cabo Delgado, October 2017-November 2021**

- Total number of organized political violence events: 1,064
- Total number of reported fatalities from organized political violence: 3,541
- Total number of reported fatalities from civilian targeting: 1,568

_All ACLED data are available for download via the data export tool and curated data files._

**SITUATION SUMMARY**

High levels of violence continued in Cabo Delgado last week, with attacks and clashes across the northwestern corner of the conflict zone.

The week began with a friendly fire incident that may have implications for ongoing attempts to restructure the Mozambican government’s counterinsurgency effort. According to a report by the Mozambican publication Ikweli, on 15 November, a local militia member in Nangade town questioned orders from a group of three Mozambican soldiers. Rather than taking the matter to the chain of command that, in theory, both the soldiers and militia members share, the soldiers shot the man in the leg and left him in the street. The man is recovering.

At a time when Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi is calling on his new defense minister to improve collaboration between the military and local militias, the shooting highlights how far apart the two forces still are. Local militias are made up mostly of Frelimo war veterans and were primarily stood up by police, which are viewed as being more loyal to Frelimo than the military. If the military is put in de jure command of the militias but cannot, in practice, overcome the trust deficit between the two groups, the likelihood of local militias acting as independent, unaccountable violent political actors will increase.

Also in the category of strained relationships for Mozambican security forces, on 16 November police in Chiure town fired warning shots and beat displaced people at a food aid disbursement, claiming that displaced civilians were stealing rice during the disbursement. One man was arrested.

The same day, according to two claims made by the Islamic State (IS), insurgents were in action in Nambungali, a village in northern Mueda district along the road between Ngapa and the Negomano border post with
Tanzania. The first claim details an operation in which insurgents captured and killed three civilians who IS alleged to be spies for the Mozambican army and destroyed three motorcycles. According to the second claim, insurgents captured and killed four local militia members in the village. Local sources confirmed that fighting took place in Nambungali on 16 November (one said that the fighting actually began on 15 November), but could not confirm the details of the claims. A new article from Pinnacle News alleges that Nambungali is the site of a new insurgent base.

On 18 November, insurgents returned to 5º Congresso, Macomia district, which has been contested in the most recent round of fighting since 10 November. Insurgents remained in the village overnight. No casualty reports from the attack are available.

The Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) Standby Force Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) issued a press release claiming that its forces killed 11 insurgents across two incidents on 18 November. The first, according to the release, took place at an unspecified location in Macomia district, resulting in the killing of nine insurgents. The second took place near Ninga, in southern Nangade district, in which the release claims that SAMIM forces killed two insurgents and overran an insurgent base. SAMIM reported that two of the insurgent dead were operational commanders (though it is not clear which incident they were killed in) and that no SAMIM forces were killed in the fighting. No independent reports have corroborated either incident.

On 19 November, insurgents attacked Chacamba, a village located just 13 kilometers northeast of Nangade town. IS claimed the attack, saying that insurgents drove Mozambican military forces from the village. No independent accounts of the attack offer detail on the fighting.

The same day, newly appointed Mozambican Defense Minister Cristóvão Chume claimed that Mozambican soldiers killed two insurgents and injured another 10 in Nangade district. He did not clarify the date or precise location of the fighting, but said that Mozambican forces recovered some weapons from the insurgents.

It was reported on 19 November that local militias in Litingina, Nangade district had arrested three civilians who they accused of spying for the insurgency after their phone numbers were found in a mobile phone recovered from an insurgent base near Chitama in southeastern Nangade district that SAMIM forces destroyed in late September. The militia members turned the three over to police in Nangade town. The incident highlights the close relationship between police and militias, in contrast to the strained relationship between militias and the military. Militias have been known to execute prisoners with impunity, so to turn the alleged spies over to the police for interrogation rather than meting out their own punishment indicates the level of trust the militia has in the police.

On 21 November, in Mueda district, local militia fought off an insurgent attack on a camp belonging to a company working on the road between Mueda town and the Negomano border post. The report was unclear about the exact location of the attack, as well as any casualty details. As will be discussed further in this week’s Incident Focus section, however, the attack is another in a series of insurgent actions targeting the road north from Mueda to Tanzania.

A great deal of new information on earlier incidents also came to light last week. On 11 November, according to an IS claim, insurgents captured and killed three civilians in Miangalewa, Muidumbe district who the group alleged were providing information to the Mozambican army. The claim also said that insurgents seized weapons from their victims. No independent reports corroborate the claim. As recently as 5 November, civilians reported that Miangalewa was uninhabited though civilians have been returning to Muidumbe district at a high rate.

On 12 November, a group of 20 insurgents attacked Nachitenje, Mueda district in a morning raid. The attackers
killed three civilians, looted food and other supplies, and burned homes.

The same day, according to an IS claim, insurgents clashed with Mozambican military forces at a village the claim calls “Nyida,” Mueda district (possibly Nido, eastern Mueda district on the road between Mueda and Mocimboa da Praia). The claim says that insurgents killed seven Mozambican soldiers and looted their weapons. No independent report corroborates the claim.

Also on 12 November, according to an IS claim, insurgents attacked Nambini, in central Macomia district, roughly 15 kilometers northeast of Macomia town. The claim said that insurgents killed two civilians it accused of spying for the Mozambican army and burned homes. No independent report corroborates the claim.

Insurgents also attacked villages in the Ngapa administrative post in northern Mueda district on 12 November, with fighting spilling into the next day. At least three villages were targeted: Mocimboa da Rovuma, Nambungali, and Chitope. Homes were burned in each village and combined Rwandan and Mozambican military forces killed at least three insurgents, including one child soldier, defending the villages. A second report appears to put the number of insurgents killed far higher, at 24, but the source for that number is unclear in the report. Forty civilians are reported missing after the raids. IS claimed the raids, saying that insurgents killed 10 Mozambican soldiers and wounded others in the fighting and burned buildings in the villages.

On 12 and 13 November, there were a series of insurgent raids in the Masasi district of Mtwara region in Tanzania, across the border from Mueda district. On the night of 12 November, a group of about 10 insurgents arrived in the village of Maparawe wearing masks. They stole food from the village and, over the course of the next day, looted food from the nearby villages of Sindano and Michawe. An unknown number of civilians were killed in the raids, and at least four arrived at the Masasi district hospital to be treated for injuries.

More information on the 10 and 12 November counterattacks against insurgents around 5º Congresso, Macomia district came to light last week as well. A new report says that Mozambican troops and local militias killed 15 total insurgents during the counterattacks, and that one Mozambican soldier was killed in the fighting and another three wounded.

The same report also offers new information about the 13 November insurgent attack on Nanjaba, Macomia district. In addition to the three civilians already reported killed in the attack, another four civilian corpses were discovered in the village in the attack’s aftermath.

**INCIDENT FOCUS: THE MUEDA FRONT**

As the reports from last week make clear, the Cabo Delgado conflict has come to northern Mueda district. Since 12 November, there have been at least 11 incidents involving insurgents in the district, and there have been reports of others that have not yet been confirmed. As a result of the attacks, many civilians who had previously thought themselves safe in the northern reaches of the district have fled south, with multiple sources reporting large numbers of people arriving in Mueda town last week to avoid the violence. These reports have been borne out by new International Organization for Migration numbers, which report that 3,139 people moved within Mueda district just between 10 and 16 November. Of those, 2,366 moved from villages near Ngapa in northern Mueda, where much of the violence has taken place, with women making up 28% of the displaced, men 24%, and children 48%.

The insurgent attacks in the Ngapa administrative post largely target villages that sit on the roadway between Mueda town and the Negomano border post. The road, which travels north from Mueda to Ngapa town before turning west until it reaches Negomano, makes for a tempting insurgent target in some ways. Few troops, either from Mozambican forces or from international intervenors, are deployed to the area, and such foreign
troops as are there seem largely to be from SAMIM -- a force the insurgency seems to prefer fighting, if it must choose between SAMIM and the Rwandan military. The area is also very sparsely populated, and was so even before the recent displacements, meaning that there is a great deal of space -- much of it protected from aircraft by tree cover -- in which insurgents can hide. Despite the sparse population, cross-border trade at Negomano offers insurgents potentially valuable targets for looting. Indeed, according to a recent report, even SAMIM troops are getting in on lucrative illegal export opportunities. Tanzanian soldiers are said to be smuggling timber out of Nangade district -- a trade that likely requires the use of the Negomano road to be profitable.

Yet there are also major drawbacks for insurgents operating in northern Mueda district. The area is far from the insurgency's traditional base areas near the coast, from which much of the group's leadership hails. Insurgents are unlikely to be as familiar with Mueda as they were with Mocimboa da Praia or Palma districts, which reduces some of their key tactical advantages. Moreo, the sparse population means there are few recruiting opportunities for the insurgents, a problem compounded by the fact that Mueda district tends to be politically more pro-Frelimo than the coastal districts in northern Cabo Delgado. There will be few people in the area with natural sympathies toward the insurgency.

Yet with the group effectively pushed out of Mocimboa da Praia district and fighting to reconstitute itself in Macomia district, northern Mueda offers the insurgency an opportunity to expand the conflict zone and force the pro-government coalition to extend its limited forces over an even greater area. In doing so, it can show that it has survived the government’s offensives and remains a dangerous fighting force. IS has seized on the group’s Mueda attacks as a way to make that point, highlighting operations in Mueda in six claims since 12 November, the most for any district during that time.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Perhaps part of the reason the insurgency appears to prefer fighting SAMIM forces to Rwandans is the regional force's apparent supply issues. South African special forces soldiers deployed as part of SAMIM in Macomia district wrote a letter to their superiors in Pretoria complaining that they were suffering from diarrhea as a result of being served rotten food and not having sufficient water to wash their kitchen implements. The soldiers also said they had been denied their allowances and that officers were disbursing high-interest loans to soldiers to be paid off out of future allowances. The South African military eventually denied the allegations, saying that the soldiers had been allowed to purchase food locally after a refrigerator on their base failed, but an expert quoted in the initial Independent Online story on the issue found the soldiers’ complaints totally plausible.

For civilians in Macomia town, however, the news last week was rather less dire. Government infrastructure is being rebuilt in the town, with work already begun on a health center, district offices, and a registration center. Schools, agricultural infrastructure, and a new police station are expected to begin construction soon.

On the international front, Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov offered intelligence support to the Mozambican government’s counterterrorism efforts during a visit to Maputo last week. Bogdanov, Russia’s special envoy for Africa, was in Mozambique as part of a series of visits to raise interest in next year’s Russia-Africa summit.

The European Council approved $45 million in funding for the European Union Training Mission in Mozambique (EUTM) last week. The money will go to purchase non-lethal equipment for the quick reaction force units the EUTM seeks to create within the Mozambican military. In the current EUTM plan, five companies will be trained by the end of 2022 and another six at some point thereafter.

The United Nations (UN) last week urged the Mozambican government to create a special court to hear charges
of human rights abuses in Cabo Delgado province. The court, in the UN’s vision, would hear cases against both insurgents and members of state security forces for human rights violations related to the conflict. Legally, the court would get around questions of jurisdiction raised by the shifting geography of the conflict, and it might lead to more prosecutions of state human rights violators than the zero that have taken place so far. Yet such a special court, which would likely have to be supported with outside donor funds, would likely do little to expand the overall capacity of the Mozambican justice system to investigate and punish human rights abuses.

In another UN-backed effort to reduce human rights violations in the conflict, the UN Children’s Fund has partnered with the Dallaire Institute, a Canadian NGO focused on the plight of child soldiers, to train 100 Mozambican soldiers on the particular human rights concerns and best practices involved in fighting a conflict against an opponent that uses child soldiers. Children have been active in insurgent ranks since at least the March 2021 attack on Palma town, and insurgents show no sign of stepping back from the practice of pressuring children into service as fighters. The training will help soldiers balance understandings of child soldiers as both belligerents and victims, and urge them to take special care to use only proportional force against child soldiers on the battlefield.
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**Displacement in Mueda**
As the reports from last week make clear, the Cabo Delgado conflict has come to northern Mueda district. As a result of recent attacks in the district, many civilians who had previously thought themselves safe in the northern reaches of the district have fled south, with multiple sources reporting large numbers of people arriving in Mueda town last week to avoid the violence. These reports have been borne out by new International Organization for Migration numbers, which report that 3,139 people moved within Mueda district just between 10 and 16 November. Of those, 2,366 moved from villages near Ngapa in northern Mueda, where much of the violence has taken place, with women making up 28% of the displaced, men 24%, and children 48%.

**SAMIM Supply Woes**
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**Organized Political Violence in Cabo Delgado (1 JAN 2020 - 19 NOV 2021)**

*NOTE: Some events from this coverage period will be included in next week’s infographic due to reporting delays.*