Cabo Ligado Monthly: March 2022

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

VITAL STATS

- ACLED recorded 28 organized political violence events in Cabo Delgado province in March, resulting in 90 reported fatalities
- Reported fatalities were highest in Nangade district, where insurgents repeatedly carried out attacks on civilians, and an attack by SADC forces on insurgents resulted in 30 reported fatalities
- Other political violence events took place in Macomia, Mueda, Palma, Ibo, and Quissanga districts in Cabo Delgado

VITAL TRENDS

- Insurgent activity continued in Macomia, Nangade, and Ibo districts
- In Ibo district, an attack on Matemo island led to a curfew and restrictions on marine activity
- Government continues to encourage the return of people to their places of origin

IN THIS REPORT

- Mozambican private media coverage of the conflict curtailed
- An analysis of the issues facing TotalEnergies and government in resuming the LNG project
- Prospects for peacebuilding
- What Islamic State’s March media campaign told us about Mozambique

MARCH SITUATION SUMMARY

Violent clashes with insurgents occurred in Macomia, Nangade, and Ibo districts throughout March. Both state and insurgent forces suffered losses, while the insurgents released more than 100 hostages due to a shortage of food. Continued displacement in the face of attacks, or the fear of attacks, contrasts heavily with government efforts to encourage people to return to their homes.

The insurgents’ most significant activity took place on Matemo island in Ibo district. Starting in the early hours of 16 March, clashes continued for up to 48 hours, despite the arrival of government forces, backed by Southern African Development Community (SADC) troops, after three hours. Follow up security operations on the island continued into April.

Other significant clashes occurred in Nangade and Macomia districts. Nangade and Macomia towns saw attacks at their edges in March. Clashes with government forces continued in both districts, including two at-
tacks by insurgents on one garrison in Macomia district.

In Nangade, government forces collaborating with SADC troops and local militia marked a significant advance, over-running an insurgents' base 30 km from Nangade town and inflicting significant casualties.

The lean season saw hunger biting in insurgent territory, prompting the release of more than 100 women and children. The release reflects insurgents' need to maintain more mobile operations, following the initial disruption of their activities by Rwandan and SADC forces.

March saw the government push hard for displaced people to return home. Prime Minister Adriano Maleiane announced that the plan for return and reconstruction was underway, though an assessment conducted by a Council of Ministers delegation was more downbeat, noting that basic conditions for return are yet to be met. Return is particularly slow in Mocímboa da Praia, despite the town being under state control since August 2021.

Nangade district in particular continues to see people leaving their homes in response to attacks, or in fear of attacks. Local authorities estimate that the town's population has doubled, as people seek protection from attacks in rural areas.

Covering the insurgency in northern Mozambique has been one of the biggest challenges faced by the Mozambican media since the insurgency began in 2017. Journalists have been persecuted, intimidated and kidnapped in Cabo Delgado, which has significantly impacted the quality, form, and frequency of how the conflict is reported in the national media.

Two years have passed since Ibraimo Mbaruco, a journalist from Palma Community Radio, disappeared on 7 April 2020. His whereabouts and the reasons for his disappearance are unknown, but his colleagues reported
that the last message they received from Mbaruco was that he was surrounded by soldiers. For the non-governmental press freedom organizations, Misa Mozambique and Reporters Without Borders, there is no doubt that Mbaruco was kidnapped by Mozambique’s Defense and Security Forces (FDS). The FDS, in turn, denies any involvement in Mbaruco’s disappearance and has promised to investigate his whereabouts.

A year before Mbaruco’s disappearance, Amade Abubacar — another journalist from Cabo Delgado — was detained on 5 January 2019 by elements of the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces (FADM) while taking pictures of families fleeing attacks in the north of the country. A few weeks after Abubacar’s arrest, another journalist from a local radio station, Germano Adriano, was also detained by the FDS. Both Adriano and Abubacar were charged with “public incitement using electronic media” and “violation of state secrecy.” The two journalists were later released. Several other journalists covering events in Cabo Delgado have also been detained, such as Hizidine Achá from Soico Television (STV), and Estácio Valoi, an independent journalist based in northern Mozambique.

In addition to the disappearances and arrests of journalists, representatives of journalists have accused the authorities of sealing off the province and creating a climate of fear for reporters. This climate of fear was reinforced by Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi. During a meeting with senior army officials in November 2020, he accused some media outlets of serving insurgents’ interests in Cabo Delgado. Nyusi also noted the increase in disinformation and attempted manipulation of public opinion on social media regarding events in Cabo Delgado. The Center for Democracy and Development (CDD), a civil society organization, condemned Nyusi’s
statements and accused him of attacking the press, as well as freedom of expression and thought. For Misa Mozambique, such statements constitute a danger to press freedom, limit the work of the press, and help create a hostile environment for journalists covering the conflict.

This hostility is felt by local journalists working in the north of the country. Buanamade Assane, a journalist based in Cabo Delgado, said that since the insurgency began in 2017, local journalists have not been given free access to the areas affected by the conflict. Even when in August 2021 the joint forces of Mozambique and Rwanda announced the recapture of Mocímboa da Praia, local journalists were not allowed to access the site and confirm the recapture, and still do not have free access. In March 2021, when the FDS were engaged in recapturing the village of Palma, the Mozambican government organized a caravan of journalists to show them that a large part of the town was already under the control of government forces. However, the caravan included only state and foreign media. Private national media were excluded.

The Information Director of Grupo Soico, Olívia Massango, protested saying that “this hurts us a lot to know that we are being excluded from being on the ground, ending our intention to bring the truth to Mozambicans.” Massango also criticized the attitude of the government in prioritizing foreign media to the detriment of the national private media organizations. She said that: “Yesterday, 7 April, the president of the Republic said in his speech that those who will come from outside [in reference to the possibility of foreign military intervention in the conflict] will arrive to support us and not to replace us, but what we witnessed in relation to the coverage of the attacks in Palma, is that we are being replaced.” Of the foreign media, journalists from Rwanda have played the most active role in media coverage, visiting several places in Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, a privilege that the journalists from the private Mozambican media do not enjoy. The Rwandans also came to report on the impact of their government’s forces, but from a pro-government perspective.

The Mozambican state media that continue to cover the Cabo Delgado insurgency are Jornal Notícias, Rádio Moçambique, and Televisão de Moçambique. These media organizations toe the government line, reporting on the insurgency sporadically and focusing on events and government actions that aim to minimize the effects or impacts of the conflict. TVM has been able to deploy senior journalist Brito Simango alongside Mozambican troops in covering the events in Palma and Mocímboa da Praia. The exclusion of private media organizations in this type of coverage suggests that the government intends to reinforce its narrative about the armed conflict. Community radio stations in Cabo Delgado were, at the beginning of the conflict, the first media outlets to report on the attacks on towns and villages. However, they now report very little on the insurgency, and, like the state media, most of the reports are about official events and always echo the government line.

Private media outlets tend to bring a more impartial narrative that focuses on the incidents, events, and impact of the insurgency in its political, social, economic, and humanitarian contexts. The private media organization Mediacoop’s newspapers Savana and MediaFax, online newspaper Carta de Moçambique, and newspapers O País and Evidências stand out. In terms of analysis, Savana is leading the way. The paper has published in its recent editions interviews with government representatives from the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, and Nangade, to assess the process of reconstruction and the return of people previously displaced from those areas. It has also analyzed the impact and role of private military companies and the participation of foreign forces in the Mozambican counterinsurgency efforts. MediaFax and Carta de Moçambique’s coverage details attacks and incursions by both pro-government and insurgent forces. While O País and Evidências do not cover the conflict very often, they provide nuanced coverage of the events when they do.

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1. MediaFax is a partner on the Cabo Ligado project, along with ACLED and Zitamar News.
TotalEnergies is quietly moving to resume operations on the Afungi peninsula near Palma town by the fourth quarter of this year, although it is cautious about the security situation in Cabo Delgado. This would meet early expectations of a 2022 restart, after the tragic events in Palma in March 2021 that prompted the halt of the offshore Area 1 gas project. Both the government and TotalEnergies agree that the market constraints created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine are creating additional pressure to resume work to build two liquefied natural gas (LNG) trains in Afungi. The trains would have capacity to produce 12 million tonnes of LNG per year.

At the last public event in which the TotalEnergies country manager in Mozambique Maxime Rabilloud took part, he was keen to emphasize that there have been “significant improvements in the security situation,” but conditions were still not good enough for the project to resume. “We cannot place the lives of our workers in danger,” he said to an audience of university students in Maputo.

However, at the main camp in Afungi, South African contractors are now working on the premises to meet new security requirements to protect the LNG project workforce. Workers laid off last year, after the shutdown of the project, are now being offered new contracts to return, mainly in social services and community-related activities.

With the districts of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia secured by a 2,500-strong Rwandan force, security concepts are being reevaluated in order to accommodate the new demand for energy created by the conflict in Ukraine. Rwanda will play a pivotal role in maintaining security in the area, but the return of the population is also key, since TotalEnergies wants to avoid any accusations of human rights violations involving those who were forced to leave the project site, or communities displaced by the war.

There are two challenges for TotalEnergies: resettling communities affected by the project, and the return of displaced people now next to the site. Local authorities have been approached to expedite the relocation of displaced people coming originally from Mocímboa da Praia, who have sought shelter in Quitunda and Maganja — communities bordering the project site — while the resettlement and local development process needs to be maintained in project-affected communities.

Quitunda is the model resettlement town on the western edge of the site, which was initiated by previous project operator, Anadarko, to accommodate families removed from the LNG site. Maganja village, to the south, could be eligible to receive additional resettlement funds due to its size and proximity to the sea, in contrast to Quitunda, where the government relocated fishermen, eliciting strong reservations from investors. Quitunda residents also live close to the local airstrip, which poses a clear security risk for the logistics related to the gas project.

After the attack in Palma on 24 March last year, thousands of refugees moved to Quitunda — joining many who had already arrived from Mocímboa da Praia — hoping to be protected by the 800-strong Joint Task Force (JTF), a special Mozambican military unit conceived to protect the gas premises. What was once a model town has been overwhelmed by people who are deprived of water and electricity and which lacks basic sanitation. Displaced families are not only living overcrowded in existing homes, but have also occupied many other forms of infrastructure such as the school, the marketplace, the community center, the children’s playground, and even unfinished houses.

According to local sources, TotalEnergies could eventually pay for the rehabilitation of Quitunda, but never under the present chaotic circumstances. Maganja may also benefit from funding for improved infrastructure. A return to normal life in the villages close to the project site would also change the perception of the project.
over all. As Patrick Pouyanné, TotalEnergies CEO, pointed out previously, workers cannot do their jobs with security forces next to them, while the project could not continue if by so much suffering.

However, there's mixed messaging on the return of the population to Mocímboa da Praia. Both the provincial government in Pemba and the administration at district level are in favor of a gradual move to the district capital. João Saraiva, the current acting District Administrator, himself now lives in Mocímboa da Praia and agrees the population should be supported in their safe return to the town. But, Labor and Social Security Minister Margarida Talapa has argued that it is too early for a safe return. The town now has running water and electricity, and Médicins Sans Frontières (MSF) is providing basic health care in the district, but all other services are missing.

The military has also expressed its reservations, fearing that insurgents may infiltrate returnees, and thereby provide a logistical base for the insurgency — as has happened in the past. Mocímboa da Praia was at the center of the rebellion in October 2017 and it was later under insurgents’ control for more than a year between 2020 and 2021, before the Rwandan forces expelled the rebels from their ‘capital.’

Humanitarian organizations and civil society bodies, which are following the situation closely, argue that vested interests are preventing the return of the displaced. Some allege that the resettlement centers are an excuse to divert aid to corrupt officials and their families, while vacant land — especially along the coast — could be appropriated by influential elites for mining and tourism.

The situation in the rest of Palma, where Afungi is located, is much better than Mocímboa da Praia. The population has returned in significant numbers, two hotels are now functioning, and even street markets are re-opening.

Nevertheless, the Northern Integrated Development Agency (ADIN), the development agency created by the government to promote economic recovery and stability, continues to be ineffective. Funded by foreign donors, ADIN’s $2.4-billion strategy, conceived with support from the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, and the African Development Bank, has met a Council of Ministers-shaped blockage, owing to disagreements among ministers about the origins and motivations of the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. A consultant has explained that the government disagrees with the emphasis placed on the “internal causes” of the conflict presented in the strategy document, namely: poverty, unemployment, inequality, and ethnic and linguistic cleavages. The government usually avoids referring to domestic religious motivations for the violence and prefers to frame the insurgency as the result of external aggression — state shorthand for the Islamic State.

Another challenge for the restart is the prevailing insecurity in districts such as Nangade and Macomia. These were supposed to be defended by SADC forces, although they lack sufficient hardware and personnel to do so. SADC leaders addressed this situation in the past two summits in Lilongwe and Pretoria, while President Filipe Nyusi has been knocking on doors in Brussels and Amman, looking for funds for the international contingent. There are indications South Africa is increasing the size of its deployed force, although questions persist about the apathetic attitude of the Tanzanian forces in Nangade. President Nyusi was quoted in Palma a few weeks ago, speaking in Swahili for the Rwandan forces, as wishing Rwanda would expand its mandate to the districts where the insurgency remains active.

That sounds very much like a recipe for addressing the reservations expressed by TotalEnergies on the challenges of resuming the Area 1 gas project.

**CABO DELGADO: PROSPECTS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION?**

*By Piers Pigou, Cabo Ligado*

Mozambican and regional and international civil society organizations have been urging the Mozambican government to explore dialogue and peacebuilding options as part of a longer-term investment in a sustainable
solution to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. This focus, they argue, should be integral to a wider-angle response that deals with an array of causal and aggravating contextual factors that have fueled support and participation in the insurgency.

In some respects, the government has swung back and forth on this issue. In December 2021, President Nyusi was largely dismissive of the link between local grievances and the unfolding attacks in Cabo Delgado. This echoed the government’s previous position from 2018 and 2019, when insurgent attacks were invariably described as “banditry” and “criminality.” Domestic civil society actors and international donors, however, have pushed for a developmental approach that has seen government adopt a Resilience and Development Strategy for the North and establish the ADIN in 2021 — which in theory will drive a three-phase, five-year strategy focused on Niassa, Nampula, and Cabo Delgado. The strategy outlines three core pillars: improving access to public services, enhanced governance, and greater opportunity for public participation; support for economic recovery, and; strengthening state and civil society capacity to build peace and reconciliation. While the strategy is certainly a “step forward,” how these strategic objectives translate into tangible plans is unclear, and civil society remains largely in the dark at this stage.

Several groups met with the government in Pemba in March to discuss the Cabo Delgado Reconstruction Plan (PRCD). They urged government to have an integrated strategy and give greater attention to social issues as part of broader development spending. The PRCD — which runs from 2021 to 2024 — was approved by government in October 2021. While welcoming government efforts to involve civil society, as demonstrated by the provincial forums set up by ADIN, civil society organizations have complained about a lack of transparency in the overall process, from the design to the implementation phase. Government representatives reportedly acknowledge these concerns and the need to “socialize the plan,” but say that these limitations were unfortunately necessary given the sensitivities of the current situation in Cabo Delgado, and “fears of infiltration within the working group” responsible for coordinating PRCD implementation.

This lack of transparency illustrates the historically testy relationship between the state, the ruling party, and certain elements of civil society, and underscores a major lack of trust that must be addressed. This goes to the heart of the weakness of the existing social contract and multiple governance challenges across the country, brought into sharp relief by the challenge of providing government services in Cabo Delgado.

Independent of this, several civil society organizations have introduced social cohesion initiatives focused on the north of the country in general, and Cabo Delgado specifically. The CDD, the MASC Foundation (Civil Society Support Mechanism), and the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE) launched the Civil Society Action for Social Cohesion in Northern Mozambique program in October 2021. Provincial coordination committees are being established with implementing agencies and relevant stakeholders. It is still early days, and the effectiveness of this approach remains to be seen.

Several civil society programs are focused specifically on dialogue and conflict resolution. The CDD, for example, has initiated a series of discussions designed to promote greater interaction between the energy sector, government, and civil society, and to raise awareness of and adherence to the “Voluntary Principles on Human Rights and Security.” These principles are intended to minimize the risk of human rights violations and security-related incidents in communities where industrial exploitation of natural resources occurs, and are obviously essential for sustainable LNG development in Cabo Delgado. How government and the LNG sector engage in the development of these conversations is an important indicator of their commitment to the core objectives of the Voluntary Principles.

The CDD has also promoted a series of webinars exploring options for dialogue and conflict resolution in the insurgency. This includes calls for exploring direct interaction with insurgent groups. The government has considerable experience exploring dialogue with insurgent groups, although in distinctly different circumstances. While there is no evidence that the insurgent leadership has a particular interest in dialogue, Mozambican civil society groups reject the government’s claim that the enemy is faceless, and that by extension there is nobody
to talk to. The Mozambique Rural Observatory, for example, claims that there are available channels of communication the government can use to open negotiations with the insurgents.

As the government ramped up its security response from mid-2021, this call for dialogue was supported by former Mozambican president, Joaquim Chissano, and echoed by international think tanks such as International Crisis Group. Since the intervention of Rwandan and SADC forces in mid-2021, however, the issue has largely been pushed to the sidelines, as priority is given to hard security objectives. A consolidation of the security gains made to date on this front, however, should prompt government to reconsider options for dialogue, especially in a context where many insurgents remain unaccounted for and speculation is growing that a large number of insurgents may have infiltrated local communities. Dialogue initiatives present a critical opportunity for strengthening communications and, by extension, building trust. Some in place are focused on engaging constituencies which are vulnerable to potential recruitment and victimization. The CDD initiative, for example, gives priority to women and youth inclusion.

Building dialogue capacity in affected communities is also critical, as is a longer-term investment in (re)building local social capital. A multifaith initiative involving the Conselho Islamico de Mocambique (CISLAMO), the Christian Council of Mozambique, and the Anglican Church has led to the establishment of “Peace Clubs” in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa. These remain largely formative and are focused on managing relations between the displaced populations and host communities which have been experiencing significant tensions.

The option for extending the role of such clubs in resettled communities can also promote a conflict-sensitive approach to rebuilding and development. Although the impact and effectiveness of these initiatives have yet to be assessed, they provide an important investment in promoting cohesive leadership, in a context where communities have been ripped apart. Several international organizations with experience of facilitating dialogue have also begun exploring options for supporting local initiatives and building local capacity. Despite this, dialogue capacity remains limited. Profiling these domestic and international actors, and related dialogue initiatives, would help to integrate the development agenda and commitments of support.

There is scope for these wider issues to be addressed in the SADC military intervention, as it moves towards Scenario 5 of “complex, multidimensional peacekeeping.” However, SADC support in that context will depend on the state championing a wide range of peacebuilding initiatives which SADC can then scaffold.

**WHAT ISLAMIC STATE’S BAY’AH COMMUNICATIONS TELL US ABOUT ISLAMIC STATE IN MOZAMBIQUE**

By Peter Bofin, Cabo Ligado

Islamic State’s (IS) announcement of its new leader, Abu Al Hasan Al Hashimi Al Qurashi, on 10 March was an opportunity for IS to bounce back from the killing of his predecessor, Abu Ibrahim Al Qurashi, in a US special forces raid in February. The announcement marked the end of an IS communications hiatus, and was immediately followed by an elaborate communications campaign of photo sets and video clips of declarations of allegiance, or bay’ah, across IS provinces. For Mozambique, the campaign presents an opportunity to look at the insurgency’s relationship with IS, and to examine how IS propaganda channels in East Africa dealt with the event.

A declaration of allegiance from new affiliates, and its acceptance, is associated with initial pledges of affiliation to IS in the first instance. The process of assimilating IS Central Africa Province (ISCAP) into IS began in this way in 2017 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and 2019 in Mozambique. Allegiance is given to the leader, rather than to the entity, and so must be renewed with each new leader. The pledge contains commitments to “hear and obey” the new leader, and to “not obstruct your will.” Similar pledges were made when Abu Ibrahim Al Qurashi succeeded Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi in 2019.
Of the photo sets, ISCAP’s was the last of the 21 released in the week after 10 March. The subsequent video did not appear until 1 April. Its seemingly delayed delivery was not compensated for by any sophistication. Though operating in two distinct locations, only one photo set was produced for ISCAP. The more highly developed IS West Africa Province produced five photo sets for its five areas of influence, and some accompanying video clips. Though there are clearly two distinct groups, differentiated by dress, arms, and picture quality, no effort was made to differentiate them through captions or voice-over, or address by the speaker. The video is thought to feature Musa Baluku of DRC leading fighters in a pledge of allegiance, and discussing the struggle in general terms, with no reference to local or regional grievances or objectives. A second featured group, likely in Cabo Delgado, has a peripheral role in the clip.

The photo sets and videos were released through ‘official’ IS channels on Telegram. Such material is often re-purposed by IS supporters working on open platforms to ensure deeper reach into target audiences. In East Africa, since at least 2019, there has been a network of Facebook accounts operating in Swahili language. They target East African public figures such as President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania, and Muslim leaders across the region, mostly through visual memes.

In the days following the announcement of Abu Al Hasan Al Hashimi Al Qurashi as leader, these accounts were busy. Within two days of the campaign beginning, a full text of the pledge in Swahili was posted, along with a theological justification for it. Within a week of the start of the campaign, a clip of the pledge along with Swahili subtitles, spliced together from a number of videos disseminated in that week, was produced and shared. This was posted with accompanying text on the purpose of bay’ah.

Yet three of the busiest IS-supporting East Africa-focused Facebook accounts made no mention of Cabo Delgado when sharing the pictures and subsequent video of the ISCAP pledge. “We depend on our brothers in Congo, may they crush the unbelievers,” began a short poem accompanying the pictures on one account. Another similar account made no specific reference to ISCAP’s pledge at all, though its feed regularly features IS material, and is one of the most active in inserting IS-supporting propaganda into mass membership Facebook groups focused on Tanzania.

This is surprising, given the effort made in recent years by IS supporters to target East Africa through open online platforms. The Facebook accounts supporting the bay’ah campaign above have been part of a campaign running since at least 2019. Another increasingly important forum for IS supporters is the Al Hijrateyn stable of podcasts, of which there are now three. These, too, were not part of the bay’ah campaign. Al Hijrateyn’s latest show, featuring the writings of jihadist figures, was launched on 2 April. Its lead podcast, which features battlefield reports from weekly Al Naba, has yet to mention the campaign or the ascension of Abu Al Hasan Al Hashimi Al Qurashi.

Online IS support networks that target the region are not focusing on Mozambique. Rather, they continue to disseminate a mix of ideological material, IS history, and updates on actions globally, combined with some regionally relevant material. Content with a local flavor consists of propaganda against Tanzanian political and religious leaders, or diatribes against Somalia’s Al Shabaab. Mozambican leaders do not feature. While the operations of African affiliates are important to IS, the communications campaign in March suggests that for the moment, the Mozambican end of ISCAP remains only loosely connected to IS structures. Whether the first appearance of the “Central Africa Media Office,” to which the ISCAP video was attributed in its final frames, will change that remains to be seen.