



CABO LIGADO

24 August 2021

Cabo Ligado Weekly: 16-22 August 2021

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

BY THE NUMBERS

Cabo Delgado, October 2017-July 2021

- Total number of organized political violence events: 951
- Total number of reported fatalities from organized political violence: 3,218
- Total number of reported fatalities from civilian targeting: 1,471

Please note: ACLED’s real-time data updates are paused through the end of August 2021. Data for the period of 31 July to 3 September will be released on 6 September, at which point real-time data publication will resume. All ACLED data are available for download via the [data export tool](#) and [curated data files](#).

SITUATION SUMMARY

As Mozambican and Rwandan troops prepared for an offensive into southern Mocimboa da Praia district, violence in Cabo Delgado began last week with smaller scale incidents in Nangade district. On 16 August, insurgents attempted to move toward the Nangade district capital, but Mozambican forces repelled them at Litingina, roughly 10 kilometers to the south. There was a firefight in the village. The insurgents are thought to have taken casualties, but no explicit casualty report is available.

The next day, on Ilha Matemo in Ibo District, local civilians accused two people who had been living on the island of belonging to the insurgency. The two were arrested by security forces.

On 18 August, Mozambican forces captured eight insurgents near Pequeue, in coastal Macomia district. The insurgents are believed to have been retreating south, ahead of the joint Rwandan-Mozambican advance from Mocimboa da Praia town to the Mbau administrative post of southern Mocimboa da Praia district.

The same day, Mozambican forces were back in action in Litingina. A civilian report that insurgents had once again gathered in the town led government helicopters to fire on the area. No one was injured by the helicopter attack.

On 20 August, a combined force of local militia and Mozambican troops interdicted a group of insurgents in Samora Machel, Nangade district. The pro-government forces pushed the insurgents from the village, but not before insurgents decapitated a civilian in the village. The insurgents fled toward Lijungo, where they injured two civilians later that day, including a village leader who they shot in the foot.

On 21 August, Rwanda and Mozambique [announced](#) that their combined forces had retaken the village of Mbau, in southern Mocimboa da Praia district. Though significant numbers of insurgents were thought to be in the Mbau area, the pro-government forces reported facing a smaller than expected group of 80-100 fighters, of which they killed 11. No Mozambican or Rwandan casualties were reported. According to a Mozambican military source, the joint force also [liberated](#) over 100 civilians who had been held by insurgents in the Mbau area.

Most of the insurgents retreated rather than stand and fight for the village, suggesting that the battle was more of a delaying tactic for a larger group of insurgents to retreat further. Insurgents [reportedly](#) made pursuit difficult by felling trees and placing them across roads. Operations near Mbau, including targeting the sites of major insurgent bases in the bush near the Messalo River, are ongoing.

Further south, Rwandan troops were spotted by civilians in Quissanga district last week, adding to the list of areas that Rwandans are deployed.

INCIDENT FOCUS: THE COST OF CONFLICT

Recently, Aldemiro Bande and Leila Constantino, researchers with the Mozambican civil society organization the Center for Public Integrity (CIP), published a [report](#) making a first attempt at estimating how much the Mozambican government has spent on the conflict in Cabo Delgado. The report's topline finding -- that the conflict has cost the Mozambican government \$1.1 billion since 2017 -- is eye opening, and the details the report uncovers are crucial for understanding the political context of the government's counterinsurgency effort.

Analysis of Mozambique's national budgeting since 2016 exists in the shadow of the country's "hidden debts" crisis. In 2016, it came to light that the Mozambican government had [backed](#) over \$2 billion in loans to state-owned enterprises, failing to disclose the borrowing to the public or to parliament, whose approval was required by law. When the state-owned enterprises threatened to default on those loans in 2016, the state stepped in to fulfill its obligation to pay, and the resulting revelation of the loans sent the Mozambican economy into a tailspin. One of the most significant effects of the scandal was the suspension of budget support to Mozambique from donor countries and organizations, leading to sharp budget cuts in many areas of state expenditure. Capital spending on education, for example, fell 51% between 2015 and 2016, and has not yet returned to 2015 levels.

Yet, since the start of the Cabo Delgado conflict in 2017, one area of Mozambican government spending has risen considerably: security. Between 2017 and 2020, defense sector expenditure has grown 155%, and domestic security expenditure has jumped 93%. In all, the report estimates that conflict spending accounts for \$1.1 billion in security expenditures that would not have taken place otherwise. In a time of particular scarcity in public funds, it appears the Mozambican government has shifted funds from crucial social programming to the security services to fund the conflict effort.

The report also includes details of the government's deals with private military contractors and suppliers, which have until now been shrouded in secrecy. The authors quote an unnamed source "linked to" Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) as saying that the company was paid \$30 million in all for its services as a private helicopter force between April 2020 and April 2021. For Mozambican purchases from South African arms dealer Paramount Group, the authors use international market data on the equipment Paramount sold to the Mozambican government to estimate the cost of the equipment at just under \$85 million. Experts cited in the report value an additional military training program for which Paramount was contracted at \$40 million. In all, the report estimates that Mozambique has paid just under \$155 million under secret contracts with private security and weapons providers.

The authors raise concerns about the lack of transparency around the government's defense spending, suggesting that it creates opportunities for corruption. The government's failure to disclose the details of how it is paying for its counterinsurgency effort threatens the perceived legitimacy of that effort, they argue. Beyond the narrow question of transparency, however, there is also a concern that the opportunity cost of high security expenditures could pose a political problem for the Mozambican government. During a budget crunch caused by government corruption, to have money drawn away from health and education spending for secret deals in the security sector raises questions, even during times of conflict.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Displaced civilians living in Palma district are beginning to return to their homes. Government officials held a meeting last week in Quitunda, Palma district, where most displaced people in the district were staying to encourage people to return to Palma town. As of 22 August, about 65% of people who had been in Quitunda had moved to Palma town, and Mozambican police had once again taken up their offices there. Civilians living in Quitunda who had been displaced from Mocimboa da Praia were told at the meeting that they will be able to return to Mocimboa da Praia town by 15 September, although that seems optimistic given the level of destruction in Mocimboa da Praia.

Electricity may be restored in the near future, at least. Energy Minister Max Tonela told reporters on 19 August that he [expects](#) electrical service to return to Macomia, Mueda, and Mocimboa da Praia districts within 45 days. The electrical substation in Awasse, Mocimboa da Praia district, has already been rebuilt since the village came back under government control. Now, new power lines from the substation have to be installed to replace those destroyed by insurgents. More recently, Tonela told reporters that the Mozambican government expects to meet with TotalEnergies in early September to discuss the situation with the French energy company's natural gas project in Palma district.

Efforts to furnish displaced people with new identification cards -- a key process in allowing displaced people to return to their homes -- also appear to have taken a step forward last week. Mozambique's National Directorate of Civil Identification announced that it is seeking partners to finance a major push to issue new identification cards to displaced people. A spokesman said that the first priority would be making sure that people living in resettlement camps in Metuge, Pemba, and Mocimboa da Praia districts receive cards (although it is not clear what he meant, given that there are no resettlement camps in Mocimboa da Praia district). If and when the new cards arrive, they may help displaced people establish their connection to their home communities. Some replacement identification documents that have been issued so far in the conflict have listed Pemba as the birthplace of people from elsewhere who have been displaced to the city, leading to concerns that they will not be able to make a legal claim to their former homes.

Any return will have to be gradual, according to International Organization for Migration Director General António Vitorino, who [visited](#) Cabo Delgado last week. Vitorino cautioned that, despite apparent progress in security provision in the province, the lack of infrastructure in conflict-affected areas of Cabo Delgado means that the process of bringing displaced people back to their homes will have to be planned in stages. Vitorino also [called on](#) the international community to increase funding for humanitarian assistance in Cabo Delgado as the province approaches the rainy season, which begins in December. "Significant additional funding is needed to cover life-saving humanitarian needs and work towards lasting solutions," he said, adding that his organization has estimated it needs \$58 million in the near future to support its work in Cabo Delgado.

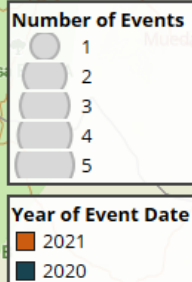
On the international front, Tanzania was [announced](#) last week as the home of the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) new Regional Centre for Combating Terrorism. According to a SADC [communiqué](#), the center will "offer dedicated and strategic advisory services to the Region on terrorism threats." There are no indications of when the center will open, nor what the specifics of its role will be.

New information about the SADC Standby Force Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) also emerged last week. The Botswana government officially [requested](#) around \$18 million last week to finance its deployment as part of SAMIM. News coverage of the budget request in Botswana includes a [report](#) that the country has sent 296 personnel to Mozambique as part of SAMIM, far more than the 108 troops [outlined](#) at the SAMIM launch event.

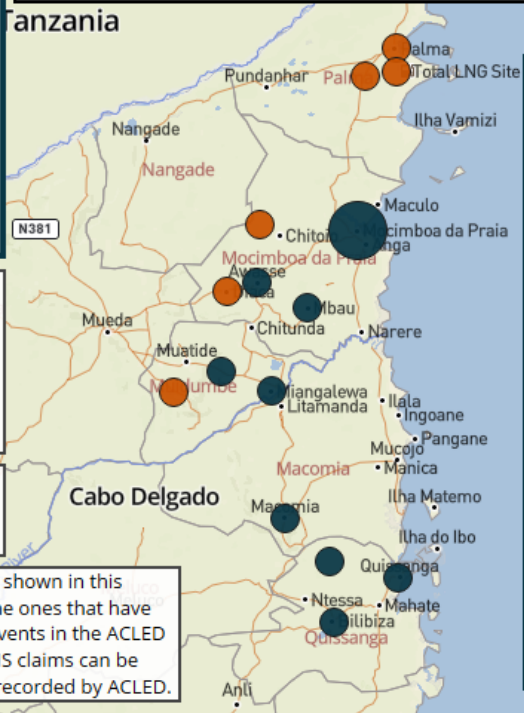
Though the initial SAMIM deployment is slated for three months, Mozambican defense minister Jaime Neto suggested at the SADC summit in Lilongwe last week that SAMIM forces would only withdraw at the end of three months if conditions are in place for a withdrawal. It is unclear what specific benchmarks have been set for SAMIM, nor is it clear how the mission would be funded after three months in the field. National budget authorizations, such as the one in Botswana, have not clarified the schedule by which funding must be renewed for deployments to remain sustainable.

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Organized Political Violence and Strategic Developments Claimed by Islamic State (1 Jan 2020 - 30 Jul 2021)



*The IS claims shown in this infographic are the ones that have been matched to events in the ACLED dataset. Not all IS claims can be matched to events recorded by ACLED.



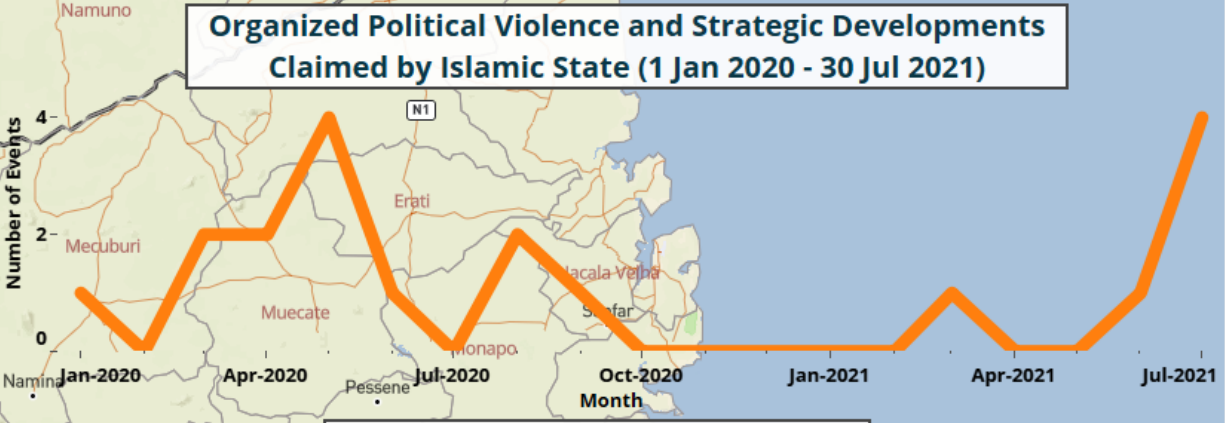
Islamic State Claims Move to Periphery

Islamic State (IS) claims in 2021 have differed from the claims IS made in 2020. In 2020, claims followed well-documented insurgent successes such as the occupation of district capitals across northeastern Cabo Delgado. Since Rwandan troops entered the conflict on the side of the Mozambican government in July 2021, the most strategically important fighting has taken place between Rwandan troops and insurgents in Mocimboa da Praia district. IS claims that can be matched to incidents recorded by ACLED in this time frame, however, have largely focused on Palma and Muidumbe districts. This is likely an attempt to draw international attention away from the narrative put forward by Rwanda that its entrance into the conflict has blunted insurgent combat power.

Islamic State Claims by Year

Claims by IS in Cabo Delgado were frequent in the first half of 2020, as the Cabo Delgado insurgents scored a string of battlefield successes. As the conflict began to stagnate in the latter half of the year, IS claims slowed as well, leading to a lull over the lean season at the end of the year. In early 2021, IS was quiet about the Cabo Delgado conflict, with the major exception of claiming the insurgent attack on Palma town in March. Once Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community declared their entrance into the conflict, however, the pace of IS claims picked up precipitously, as though the insurgency was attempting to match the Mozambican government's internationalization of the conflict.

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