



CABO LIGADO

17 August 2021

Cabo Ligado Weekly: 9-15 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

Mozambican and Rwandan forces last week worked to consolidate their gains in Mocimboa da Praia town and prepare a push south toward insurgent bases in southern Mocimboa da Praia district.

On 10 August, Mozambican helicopters fired on and killed two people who ran from them on the road near Mucojo, Macomia district. The two turned out to be civilians on the way to Mucojo to fish. The same day, state security forces arrested and beat a man in Rueia, near Mucojo, who said he was trying to travel to the coast to fish.

The next day, work [began](#) on a bridge across the Messalo River, which forms the northern border of Macomia district. Military vehicles — thirty ground vehicles and four helicopters — thought to be carrying South African troops were seen massing in Macomia town in apparent preparation for a push north toward insurgent bases along the Messalo. They could not reach Miangalewa, across the river in Muidumbe district, because the bridge could not hold the ground vehicles. A private company was brought in to repair the bridge.

Details of the subsequent mooted government offensive are unclear, but sources on the ground confirm that large fires were seen on 14 August in Mbau in southern Mocimboa da Praia district and in Mangoma and Ntowe, both of which sit along the road between Mocimboa da Praia and Awasse. The sources believe that the fires were the result of clashes between insurgents and Mozambican and Rwandan troops.

Also on 14 August, there was a clash between insurgents and Mozambican troops at Chicuaia Velha in Nangade district. No details of the clash are confirmed, but one source suggests that Tanzanian and Botswana troops were both involved in fighting on the government side.

More information also emerged last week about the battle for Mocimboa da Praia town. At a press conference, Mozambican army commander Cristóvão Chume [claimed](#) that pro-government forces killed “at least” 33 insurgents in the fighting without suffering a single casualty, although he provided no evidence to back up either claim. He [added](#) that important insurgent commanders had been captured in the attack, but admitted that Bonomado Omar (see more below in this week’s Incident Focus) has not been captured. He also said that insurgent resistance in the town was light, adding to speculation that insurgents simply withdrew from Mocimboa da Praia rather than risk their military capacity in a standing battle.

In the wake of the battle for Mocimboa da Praia, fleeing insurgents attacked at least four towns in Nangade district, according to a [report](#) from last week. Riding motorbikes, the insurgents set houses on fire and shot at civilians in Mandimba, Chacamba, Nune, and Quissama villages between 4 and 8 August. No specific dates or casualty details are available for the attacks.

In Palma, local civilians report that Rwandan troops are serving a dispute resolution role between civilians and Mozambican forces. At one point during last week, Mozambican troops attempted to confiscate property from some civilians, after which the civilians took their grievances to Rwandan forces. The Rwandans intervened to return the civilians’ property, drawing plaudits from the local population.

INCIDENT FOCUS: INSURGENT LEADERSHIP STUDY

In a recent [report](#), researcher João Feijó from Mozambique’s Rural Environment Observatory (OMR) profiled four people who play leading roles in the Cabo Delgado insurgency. The report draws on interviews with people who had been abducted by the group, who identified leadership figures and offered details on their roles in the insurgency. Feijó also spoke to people from the insurgent leaders’ pre-conflict lives. The researchers offer biographical details about the insurgents, and also provide broader context about the insurgency’s approach to communication with civilians.

For the most part, the interviewees paint a picture of an insurgent structure that would be familiar to any student of rural rebellions. Most insurgents, including the profiled leaders, are Mozambican and draw on long-standing local networks in Cabo Delgado to increase support for the insurgency. Also, reflecting the fundamentally transnational nature of economic and cultural life in Mozambique’s northern border regions, many leaders built international networks before the conflict, some of which the insurgency now utilizes.

The most notable foreign connection highlighted in the report runs through Bonomado Omar, an insurgent leader whom the United States (US) government recently [designated](#) as a core insurgent leader and a “communications conduit for the group.” Omar is Mozambican — a native of Palma and a veteran of the Mozambican navy — and he spent significant time in Tanzania and South Africa while working as a consumer goods trader. According to the report, Omar is in contact with a non-Mozambican who goes by Abdul or Emir Afande. The contact travels in and out of Mozambique, and is often present for major insurgent offensives. The exact nature of his connection to broader Islamic State networks is unclear, but the combination of the narrative presented in the OMR report and the description of Omar’s role in the US designation suggests that there is such a connection.

The report also highlights the political nature of insurgents’ communications directed toward civilians. Captured civilians are subject to indoctrination sessions that focus on grievances against the government of Mozambique. The insurgent messaging holds the government responsible for wealth inequality in Mozambique, and demands that civilians separate themselves from government systems. There have also been fitful insurgent efforts to address inequality within areas they control, including providing food and medical care to bedridden civilians in Mocimboa da Praia after insurgents took the town.

Feijó takes care to point out that even the group's explicitly religious discourse is couched in what he refers to as nationalism. One insurgent slogan urges Cabo Delgado civilians to "implement the Muslim religion, because the land is ours." Insurgents also portray the north-south divide in Mozambique in religious terms, contrasting the "owners of the land" in Cabo Delgado with the "*kafirs* [enemies of Islam] of Maputo." Beyond nationalism in the traditional sense of making a claim for a separate nation in Cabo Delgado, those statements could be interpreted as commentary on an issue that many civilians see as being core to the conflict: control of land in Cabo Delgado. As some displaced civilians have [expressed](#) concern that the government will leave them permanently separated from the land they lived on before the conflict, it seems that insurgents have taken up that grievance for themselves.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Though questions of resettlement for displaced people are still very much open, the prospects for resettlement appeared to brighten somewhat last week. On 13 August, a team from the Cabo Delgado provincial secretary of state's office traveled to Quissanga district to demonstrate that the district is now secure. In a speech, the Quissanga district administrator requested funds to rebuild infrastructure in the district so that civilian life could return to normal.

The district administrator of Palma also struck a positive note last week, leaving his shelter in Quitunda and taking up his official residence in Palma town. The administrator, appointed a month ago, had been [staying](#) in Quitunda at the behest of Mozambican and Rwandan forces who were attempting to clear insurgents out of the area surrounding Palma town. Now that the government feels it is safe enough for him to move to the district capital, attention has turned to rebuilding Palma. According to a representative of the Northern Integrated Development Agency (ADIN), the government body will play a key role in coordinating the reconstruction of Palma. An ADIN technical team is expected in the town shortly.

Reports from Mocimboa da Praia are more mixed. Mozambican military officials [made clear](#) that the town's infrastructure is totally destroyed and will not be able to support returning civilians in the near future. Banks, bus stops, and shops have all been burned to the ground, and many homes also lie in ruins. Military officials [believe](#) some insurgents may still be hiding out in the buildings that are still standing. The town's airfield, which once supported a substantial transport capacity, is unlikely to reopen soon, [according](#) to officials from the Mozambican national airport company. The airfield offices were destroyed by insurgents.

Yet some work has already been completed. A bridge over the Quinhevo River connecting Mocimboa da Praia town and Awasse to its west has already been rebuilt, reopening travel along the R762 after roughly a year. The road is currently restricted to military use, but will be an important connector for civilians if and when they return to Mocimboa da Praia. It is also an important corridor for shipping building supplies between Mueda and the liquified natural gas projects at Palma, if and when those projects resume construction. Vodacom said that it will be able to [offer](#) cellular service in Mocimboa da Praia within the week, another piece of infrastructure crucial to both military and civilian life.

In all, Mocimboa da Praia's city council president estimated the town will need nearly \$8 million worth of infrastructure reconstruction. As that work progresses, the Mocimboa da Praia district administrator told reporters the government will [announce](#) when civilians can begin to move back.

One group that is certainly ready to turn toward building for the future in Mocimboa da Praia is the Rwandan military units who helped retake the town. In a press conference, Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) spokesman Ronald Rwivanga [described](#) his country's counterinsurgency plan in Mozambique as having four parts: clearing out insurgent forces, consolidating territorial gains, ensuring that civilian confidence in security is high, and

then “security sector reform.” Rwivanga said on 9 August that security sector reform efforts — which he described as “mental training” designed to give Mozambican troops “confidence” — could begin “today.” The focus on security sector reform is notable, as it indicates Rwanda’s approach to ensuring lasting victory over the insurgency. Whereas US counterinsurgency [doctrine](#) of the Iraq War era would focus on development projects in the “build” portion of a “clear, hold, build” sequence, the RDF counterinsurgency strategy instead focuses on increasing the coercive capacity of state security forces once territory has been retaken.

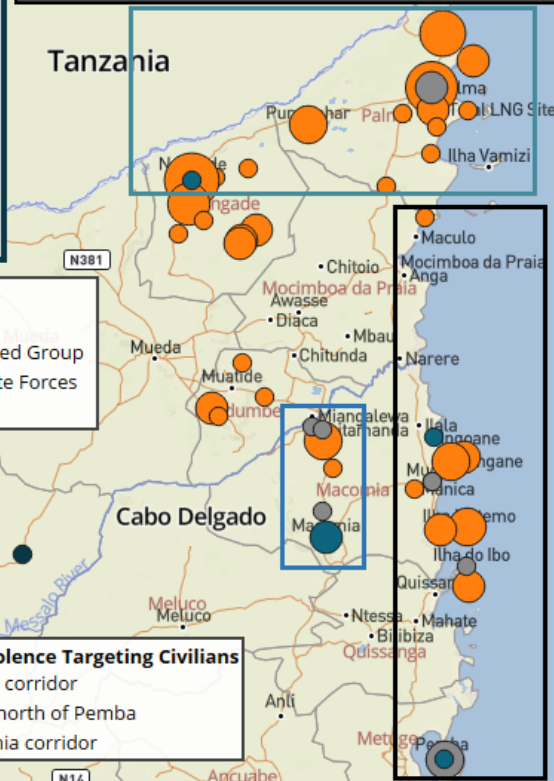
The formal [launch](#) of the Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) Standby Force Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) on 9 August provided no such doctrinal details about the mission’s approach, but did clarify the resources it will bring to bear. The mission will consist initially of 738 soldiers and 19 civilian experts. The largest group will be from Tanzania, which, after some speculation that it would not be contributing, will send 277 personnel. There are indications from some sources that Tanzanian troops are already on the ground in Cabo Delgado. South Africa is sending 270 troops, Botswana 108, Lesotho 70, and Angola 16. The presentation made no mention of the 304 Zimbabwean military trainers [promised](#) to the mission by the Zimbabwean defense minister in late July. The only Zimbabwean contribution referred to in the presentation was a single civilian expert. The force of 757 is a far cry from the 3,000 [recommended](#) by the SADC technical team in June, and even less than the 1,000 personnel deployed by Rwanda alone. The disparity may reflect struggles to fund the mission, as well as ongoing tensions between Mozambique and its fellow SADC members.

The launch event did offer information on where the SAMIM force will be deployed, however. A map shown during the event suggested that RDF troops would have responsibility for Palma and Mocimboa da Praia districts, while the smaller SAMIM force would operate in Macomia, Muidumbe, Mueda, Nangade, and Quissanga districts. It remains to be seen how much of that plan will be borne out on the ground — Rwandan forces have already been [seen](#) in action in Nangade district.

The US also announced additional counterinsurgency support for Mozambique last week, as a new Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) program kicked off. This JCET round will train 100 Mozambican special operations troops as well as provide medical and communications equipment.

Ligado Weekly #62

Violence Targeting Civilians in Cabo Delgado (1 Jan 2021 - 30 Jul 2021)



- Perpetrator**
- Rioters
 - Unidentified Armed Group
 - Mozambique State Forces
 - Islamist Militia

- Number of Events**
- 1
 - 2
 - 4
 - 6
 - 8

- Key Corridors of Violence Targeting Civilians**
- Nangade - Palma corridor
 - Coastal corridor north of Pemba
 - Muatide - Macomia corridor

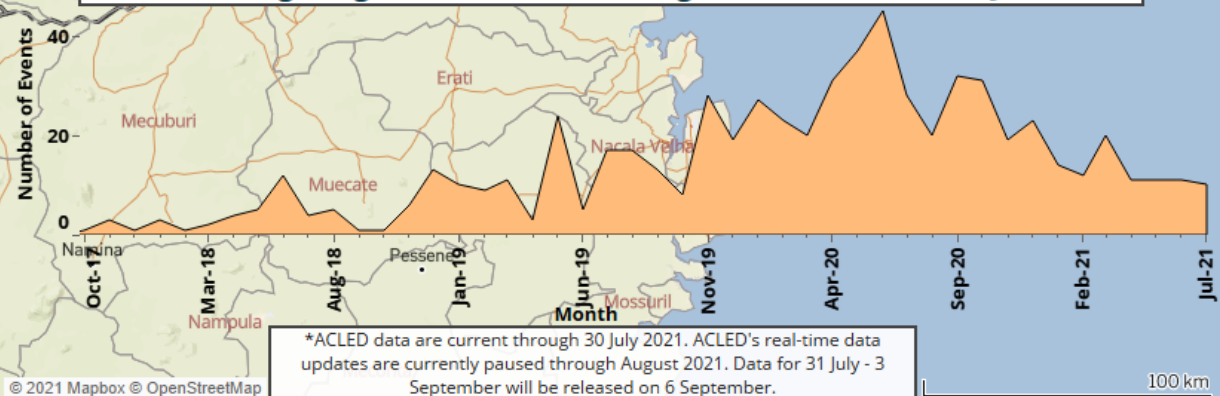
Violence Targeting Civilians in 2021

Violence targeting civilians in Cabo Delgado declined in the first half of 2021 from a peak in 2020. That decline has largely stemmed from two trends: the depopulation of the conflict zone during the widespread violence of 2020, and the insurgency's limited territorial spread in 2021. With the mass displacement of civilians in 2020, in which hundreds of thousands of civilians fled from northeastern districts of Cabo Delgado to areas farther south and west, there were fewer civilians left for insurgents to target in 2021. In addition, with the resource crunch insurgents suffered during the rainy season, the insurgency has had less manpower available to expand the edges of the conflict zone and target displaced civilians.

Corridors of Threat

Most targeting of civilians in 2021 has been concentrated in three important corridors. The first two, west from Palma to Nangade and south by sea from Palma to Pemba, were major axes of displacement following the March 2021 attack on Palma town. To date, some 118,000 people have left Palma district, most of them along these two corridors. While fleeing, many were attacked by insurgents and, less often, targeted by government forces. The third corridor runs from Macomia town to Miangalewa, where civilians were sometimes targeted in the ongoing struggle between the government and insurgents over access to the Messalo River valley.

Violence Targeting Civilians in Cabo Delgado (1 OCT 2017 - 30 JUL 2021)



*ACLED data are current through 30 July 2021. ACLED's real-time data updates are currently paused through August 2021. Data for 31 July - 3 September will be released on 6 September.