



CABO LIGADO

6 March 2024

Actor Profile: Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM)

[Cabo Ligado](#) — or ‘connected cape’ — is a Mozambique conflict observatory launched by ACLED, Zitamar News, and MediaFax.

INTRODUCTION

The Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM) is the most visible expression of the state’s monopoly of physical force. Though its establishment was rooted in the General Peace Agreement (GPA) of 1992 that ended the civil war between Frelimo and Renamo, the ruling Frelimo party has been able to exercise considerable control over the force in the years since.

In the early years of the Cabo Delgado insurgency, up to 2021, PRM had a prominent role in counterinsurgency operations. For example, its parent ministry, the Ministry of the Interior, was responsible for contracting the South African private military contractor Dyck Advisory Group in 2020 to provide air support to counterinsurgency operations. That contract lasted until the fall of Pemba in March 2021. Subsequent commercial contracting, such as with Paramount, and bilateral training agreements have been with the Ministry of Defense and the Defense Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM).

While its counterinsurgency role has reduced, the PRM’s role in policing protest events and, at times, intervening violently in protests has become more prominent. In particular, the response to opposition protests in the wake of the municipal elections of October 2023 suggests the force’s role in the October 2024 election may be more consequential than its counterinsurgency work.

This profile uses open sources to examine PRM’s origins arising from the GPA, structure, and resourcing. Drawing on ACLED data, it examines the force’s changing role in counterinsurgency and the policing of political protest.

ORIGINS

The GPA set out the basic principles for the “depoliticization and restructuring of the police forces.”¹ Subsequent legislation passed on 31 December 1992 established PRM to replace the People’s Police of Mozambique, which had operated under the one-party state led by Frelimo.² The GPA specifically addressed “depoliticization” for the process of forming the FADM through the contribution of troops from both the Renamo, and the government sides. For police reform, on the other hand, the GPA laid out no such process.

The lack of such a formalized process has allowed Frelimo to let PRM develop into a more politically partisan force than FADM, notwithstanding the latter’s loyalty to the state. In 1993, Renamo complained about police recruitment of former members of the pre-GPA state intelligence agency, the National People’s Security Service. The following year, they alleged the transfer of men from the newly formed FADM to PRM.

1 [General Peace Agreement for Mozambique](#)

2 [Mozambique Government Gazette Series I, No. 53, supplement number 3, 31 December 1992](#)

³Some units of the pre-GPA military, such as the border guard, were also subsumed into PRM.⁴ The Force Intervention Brigade (UIR), a paramilitary police unit loyal to Frelimo, was also strengthened in the years following the GPA, becoming a counterweight to FADM, which had seen the integration of senior Renamo leaders.⁵ Indeed, the UIR deployed against Renamo in 2015-16 after hostilities resumed in 2013.⁶

The PRM has remained adjacent to Frelimo, even after the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation, signed in 2019, brought an end to the hostilities that had recommenced in 2013. The Memorandum of Understanding on Military Affairs, signed in 2018 and which paved the way for the 2019 accord, was more explicit than the GPA about the integration of Renamo's people into PRM.⁷ However, its focus on the integration of elites meant only Renamo leaders actually moved to FADM and PRM, rather than a critical mass of the rank and file.⁸

The appointment of Bernardino Rafael as Commander General of the PRM in October 2017 was seen as an attempt by President Filipe Nyusi to both shore up his position in Frelimo and prepare for the effect of the future reintegration of Renamo officers by putting in place someone loyal to him.⁹ Three weeks before Rafael's appointment, the insurgency in Cabo Delgado began with an attack on police stations in Mocimboa da Praia district headquarters on 5 October 2017. Over thirty years after the GPA, Frelimo remains very much in control of the PRM, while Rafael himself is a potential candidate to be nominated as the party's presidential candidate to succeed President Nyusi.¹⁰

OPERATIONS

Structure and resourcing

The PRM is a complex organization, embracing general policing, border security, paramilitary operations against significant organized violence, close protection of VIPs, and marine security. The bulk of the force consists of the Public Order and Security Branch. Other operational branches include the Frontier Guard Branch and the Marine Branch. Units under the General Command include the UIR, the High-Ranking Individuals Protection Unit, the Counter-Terrorism Operations Unit, and cavalry and canine units.¹¹

Despite being close to the ruling party, PRM is under-resourced. While there are no publicly available numbers for the strength of PRM, by 2006, it was estimated that there were 20,000 police for a population of 18 million.¹² Extrapolating that ratio to Mozambique's current population of 32 million suggests there are just over 35,000 police today. This is noticeably less than the 41,318 envisaged when the force's structure was first set out in 1999.¹³ Faced with ongoing financial pressure, PRM's apparent understaffing is unlikely to

3 [João Paulo Borges Coelho, Alex Vines, 'Pilot Study on Demobilization and Re-Integration of Ex-Combatants in Mozambique,' Refugee Studies Programme, undated, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford](#)

4 [Mark Knight, 'Security Sector Reform: post conflict integration,' University of Birmingham, Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform, August 2009](#)

5 [Bernhard Weimer, 'Walking the Talk: a critical perspective on sustainable peace and reconciliation in Mozambique, 2020, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung](#)

6 [Joseph Hanlon, 'Police, Army, SISE Heads Changed,' Club of Mozambique, 30 October 2017](#)

7 [Assuntos Militares: Memorando de Entendimento,' Maputo/Gorongosa August 2018](#)

8 [Bernhard Weimer, 'Walking the Talk: a critical perspective on sustainable peace and reconciliation in Mozambique, 2020, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung](#)

9 [Joseph Hanlon, 'Police, Army, SISE Heads Changed,' Club of Mozambique, 30 October 2017](#)

10 [Zitamar Explains: what to expect in 2024,' Zitamar News, 22 December 2023](#)

11 [Decreto n.º 58/2019: Altera e república o Estatuto Orgânico da Polícia da República de Moçambique, aprovado pelo Decreto n.º 85/2014, de 31 de Dezembro,' Boletim da República, 1 Serie, Numero 125, 1 July 2019](#)

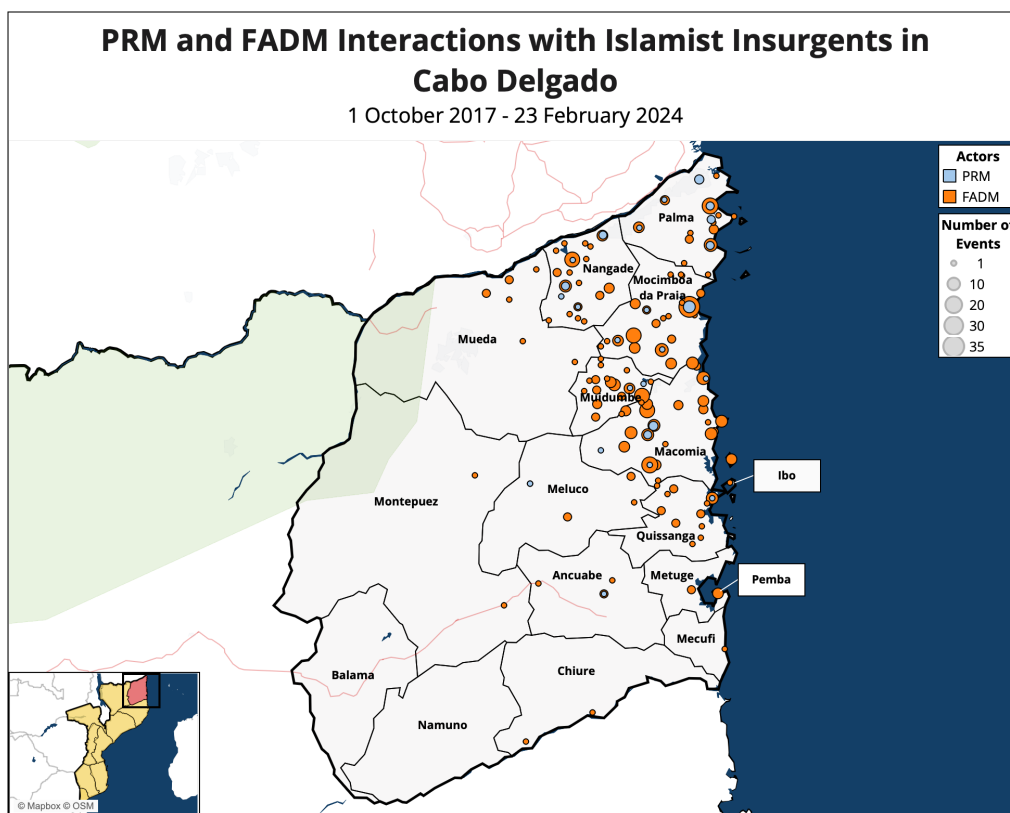
12 [Anicia Lalá & Laudemiro Francisco 'The Difficulties of Donor Coordination: Police and Judicial Reform in Mozambique', in Civil Wars,8:2, 2006163-180](#)

13 ['Decreto No 27/99: Aprova o Estatuto Orgânico, o Quadro de Pessoal o Quadro de Funções de Comando,](#)

be resolved soon. In May 2023, Rafael announced that no new recruits would be inducted for the coming three years so that training costs could be diverted to infrastructure development.¹⁴

Fighting the insurgency, policing protest

Patterns of PRM involvement in political violence events have fluctuated considerably in recent years. This has been partly due to shifts in PRM involvement in the response to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. PRM Commander General Rafael was in charge of the Northern Operational Theater until December 2021. The [transfer of that role](#) to FADM in late 2021 did not lead to any significant diminution in PRM's involvement in the conflict in the insurgency. The number of recorded political violence events in which it was involved in the province did not fall precipitously until 2023. However, the number of recorded events has always been low, and its relative involvement was greatly overshadowed by FADM as the insurgency spread across the province (see map below), and in the wake of military intervention in 2021 by Rwandan Security Forces (RSF), and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM).



Direcção e Chefia e os Organigramas da PRM' Boletim da Republica, 3 Suplemento, 24 May 1999

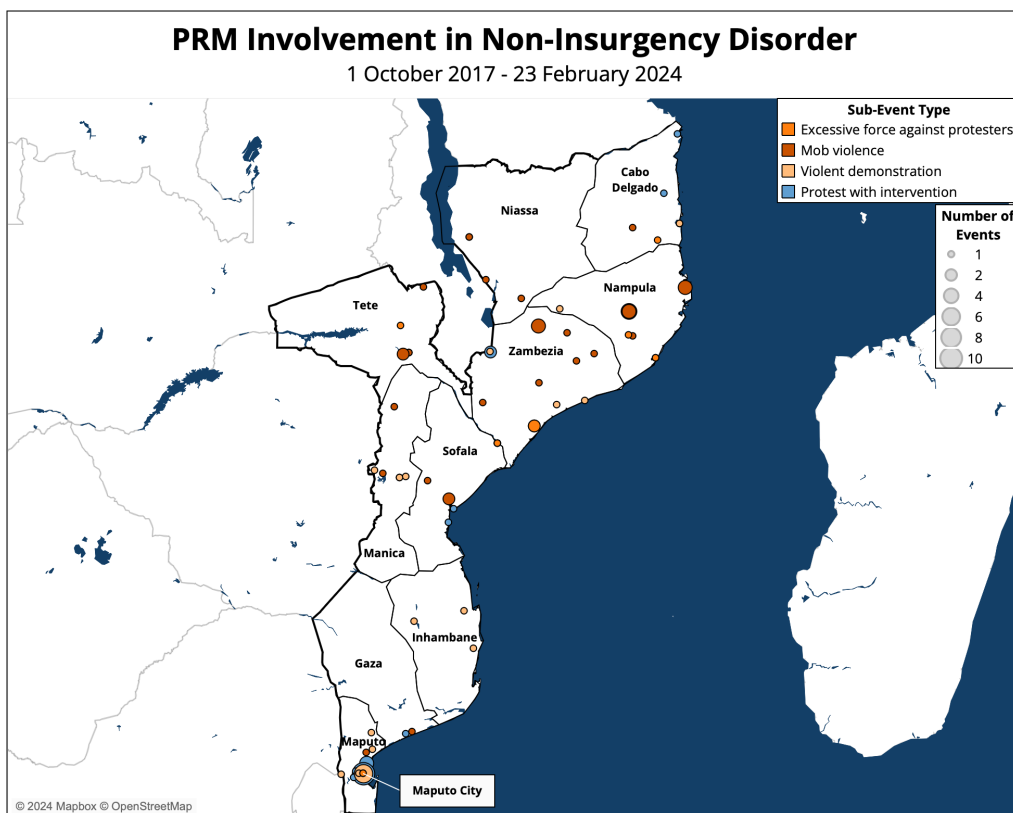
14 'Moçambique suspende formação básica de polícias durante três anos,' RTP Noticias, 18 May 2023

The low number of events in which PRM involvement has been recorded makes it difficult to make inferences about its approach to the conflict. Within Cabo Delgado, its operations have expanded and contracted geographically in line with the insurgents' expansion of their operations. From 2018 to 2020, its involvement in political violence was concentrated in Mocímboa da Praia, Palma, and Macomia districts. Between 2021 and 2022, they were active in eight districts across the province. This reflected the insurgency's tactical choice to operate over a wider area and in smaller groups.¹⁵

However, data suggest that even the PRM's paramilitary UIR is unwilling or ill-equipped to adequately engage with the insurgents and plays a much less important role than FADM in the conflict. For example, in 2022, insurgents attacked UIR posts in Nangade district at least three times. In each incident, there were no reported fatalities, and sources indicated that troops fled under attack. These are the only political violence events involving any police units in Nangade district that ACLED records for that year. By contrast, ACLED records FADM as being involved in 26 political violence events that year in Nangade.

In contrast to the limited PRM activity fighting the Cabo Delgado insurgency, PRM has been notably active in responding to wider disorder in Mozambique, particularly related to opposition political protest. The PRM's closeness to the state is clearly seen in data for its involvement in policing protests, demonstrations, and incidents of mob violence, and in the geographic spread of such events.

ACLED records a significant spike in these incidents in 2023, coinciding with municipal elections, with more than twice the number of such events involving the PRM since the previous high in 2019. Approximately three-quarters of such events took place in areas where the opposition party Renamo is currently strong politically, such as Nampula and Maputo, and where it was historically strong in the civil war, such as Zambezia, and Sofala provinces (see map below).



15 [ACLED, 'Actor Profile: Islamic State Mozambique,' 30 October, 2023](#)

Additionally, an unmistakable element of policing in Mozambique is the extent of civilian targeting. For political violence events involving the police, civilian targeting has never been less than 22% nationwide over the years 2017-23. Such incidents saw a significant spike in the final quarter of 2023, driven by violence related to the 12 October 2023 elections.¹⁶ These incidents were concentrated in those same Renamo-supporting provinces.

PROSPECTS IN AN ELECTION YEAR

In Cabo Delgado, PRM involvement in the kinetic response to the insurgency is likely to remain in the shadow of the FADM and foreign intervention forces. Some uncertainty, though, remains about the position of intervention forces. SAMIM is set to withdraw in July 2024, which may affect the posture of other forces, including PRM.

On the other hand, with general elections due in October 2024, the PRM's involvement in policing the political sphere will be more prominent than in the recent past. Demonstrations are more likely to see violent intervention by the PRM, given what is at stake. The likelihood of significant civilian targeting, particularly in Renamo-supporting areas, may destabilize the electoral process with unpredictable consequences.

16 [Tomás Queface and René Levanchy, 'Vote rigging and violence mar Mozambique's repeated local elections,' Zitamar News, 11 December 2023](#)