



21 August 2023

Cabo Ligado Monthly: July 2023

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

VITAL STATS

- ACLED records 14 political violence events in Cabo Delgado in July, resulting in at least 28 reported fatalities
- Political violence events were concentrated in Macomia district, where ACLED records nine events
- Other events took place in Mocímboa da Praia, Nangade, and Mueda districts

VITAL TRENDS

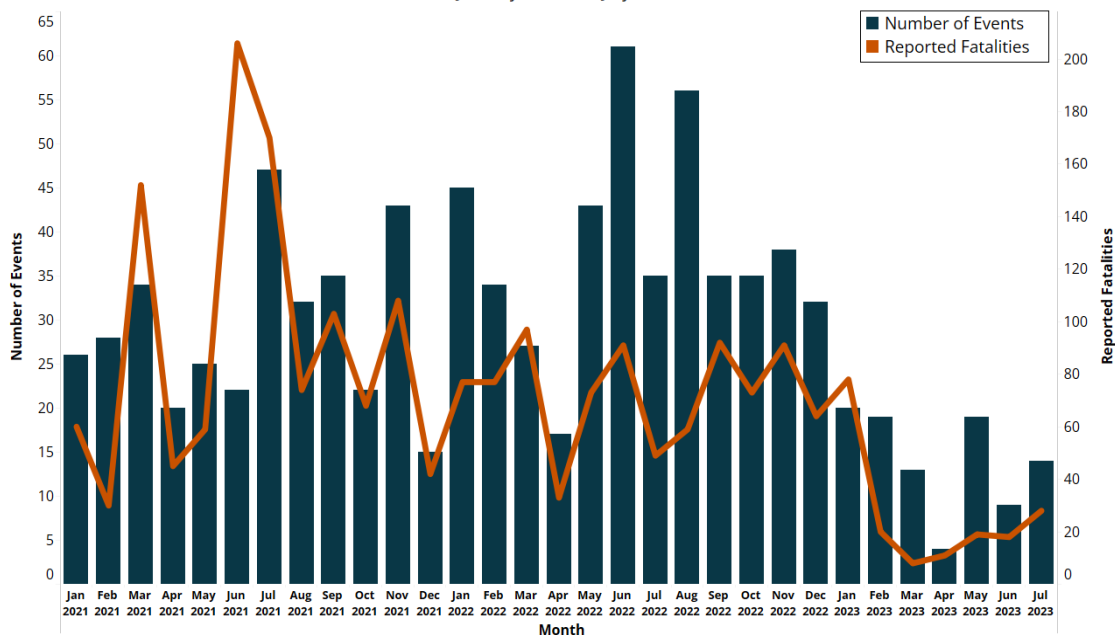
- Level of political violence increases
- Insurgents continue attacks in Macomia district
- SAMIM mandate extended for 12 months

IN THIS REPORT

- Mozambique’s list of designated terrorists and terrorist organizations
- A glance at the decree governing Local Forces
- Continuing violence keeps displaced people from returning home
- Understanding current Mozambique-Russia relations

Political Violence and Reported Fatalities in Cabo Delgado

1 January 2021 - 31 July 2023



JULY SITUATION SUMMARY

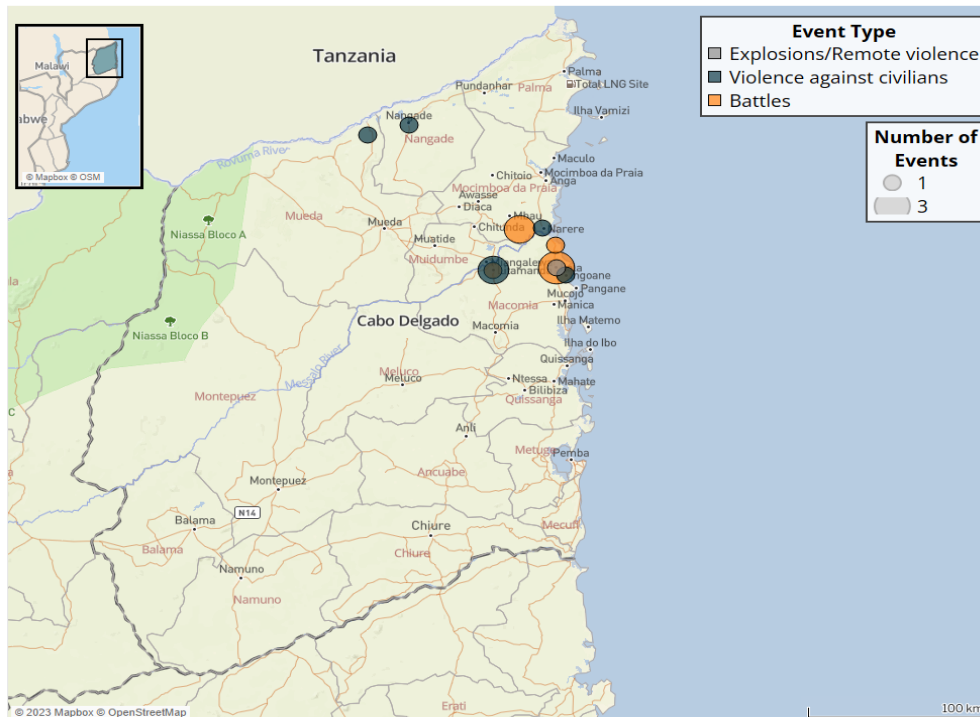
The level of political violence in Cabo Delgado province saw a noticeable increase in July, with an increase in both events and fatalities compared to June, and more fatalities than in May. Insurgents hit the Defense Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM) multiple times in the month. On 10 July, an outpost at Quiterajo in Macomia district was attacked. Islamic State (IS) reports claimed that three soldiers were killed, and showed weapons, and ammunition seized at the outpost. On 18 July, a [roadside IED](#) damaged a FADM armored personnel carrier in the Cobre/Ilala area of Macomia district. IS claimed one fatality, while local sources reported up to six. The IED was detonated by remote control, indicating increased sophistication compared to pressure plate devices that the insurgents have used in the past. The two attacks followed [clashes in the area](#) on 30 June and 1 July, and were in spite of FADM and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) intensifying patrols in the area.

There were six incidents of civilian targeting in the province in July. On 1 July, insurgents killed a woman in Calugo in Mocímboa da Praia district. Around 17 July, [two people were killed](#) by the group near Litamanda in northern Macomia district. There were also two recorded incidents involving security forces. On 24 July, a member of Mozambican forces allegedly raped a woman in Nangade town, and was later detained by police. There were also multiple reports that on 15 July, troops from the South African contingent of SAMIM shot and injured a man at Ingoane in Macomia. SAMIM [denied](#) the claims.

On 11 July, SADC [announced](#) that the SAMIM mission would continue for 12 months from 15 July 2023. According to an [internal report](#), troop numbers are to be reduced from December 2023, and the mission completed by July 2024.

Political Violence in Cabo Delgado

July 2023



MOZAMBIQUE'S LIST OF DESIGNATED TERRORISTS AND TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

By Peter Bofin, Cabo Ligado

On 12 July 2023, Mozambique's government gazette, the Boletim da República, published a dispatch from the attorney general's office [presenting](#) one list of 43 people designated as "terrorists," and another of three designated organizations. The designations were made under [Mozambique's Law No. 13/2022](#), which governs "the prevention, repression, and combat of terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." The list of individuals contained two, Bonomade Machude Omar and Abu Yasir Hassan, who remain free, and 41 others who have been tried, found guilty, and sentenced. Both Bonomade Machude Omar and Abu Yasir Hassan have been designated as "terrorists" by the [United States](#), and the [European Union](#). The lists highlight aspects of Mozambique's framework for counterterrorism, including the pace of legislative change, how minors are dealt with, and the importance or otherwise of "terrorist" designations. They are also a source of limited data on those involved in the conflict in its early days.

The first issue the document highlights is the change that the legislative framework has undergone since the start of the conflict. With no specific terrorism legislation in place, the country's first trials were held under the provision of the penal code. The first such trial held in 2018, Case No. 32/2018, had, according to the [US State Department of State](#), more than 189 defendants, and was held in an improvised court with no media access. Mozambique's first piece of counterterrorism legislation, Law No. 5/2018, was passed in August 2018. This was superseded just four years later by Law No. 13/2022. This increased the penalties greatly, and introduced the process for the designation of "terrorists," and "terrorist organizations."

Twenty of those listed last month as designated "terrorists" were convicted at the 2018 mass trial, Case No. 32/2018. Of the 21 others, 12 came from three cases that concluded in 2018, 2019, and 2023. The remainder are accounted for by four individual cases, and five seeming errors that preclude categorization.

The list of 41 does not, however, act as an indicator of the numbers convicted. According to a [spokesperson for the Tribunal for Justice of Cabo Delgado Province](#), Mozambique recorded 122 convictions by September 2020, and 130 people were acquitted. Many of those acquitted were from Case No. 32/2018. However, the distribution of the 41 cases across years suggests that the judicial process has slowed considerably. Whether this is due to limited numbers of arrests on the side of the police and the National Criminal Investigation Service, delays in prosecution on the part of the Director of Public Prosecutions, or limited court capacity cannot be ascertained.

Personal data of the 41 gives some interesting insights into the composition of the group, at least in its early days, in particular indicating a geographically broad recruitment network in the early days of the conflict. For each person, language and place of origin is given. Mwani, spoken in the province primarily on the coast, is the language given for 12 individuals, of whom nine come from Mocímboa da Praia, and the remainder from Palma or Macomia. A surprising feature is the 19 speakers of Macua, the language most widely spoken north of the Zambezi river. Of these, seven come from Macomia; of the remainder, five come from Nampula, and one from Niassa. Those from Nampula are listed as being from Mossuril (1), Nacala (2), and Memba (2). More [recent research](#) from Salvador Forquilha and João Pereira indicates that Nampula and Niassa remain areas at risk of experiencing recruitment. Within Cabo Delgado, other places of origin are Pemba, Montepuez, and Namuno in the south.

Six Tanzanians were also on the list, one with Mozambique and three with Mozambique/Tanzania listed as "permanent residence." This is no surprise. While the insurgency's connections to Tanzania are real,

Tanzanians are to be found in most sectors in Cabo Delgado, a [legacy](#) of generations of cross-border trade, and inter-marriage.

The age of those designated also raises the issue of the age of criminal responsibility. Assuming that the age given is their current age, up to five of those designated were under 18 when their trials began. Eighteen is widely assumed to be the internationally accepted age for one to be treated as an adult. However, under the [penal code of 2019](#), this remains 16 years in Mozambique. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child leaves this open to member states. In Tanzania, for example, it is set at 18 years of age.

Finally, the designations of Bonomade Machude Omar and Abu Yasir Hassan indicate a willingness on the part of the Mozambican authorities to follow the lead, and likely the urging, of the US and the EU. Both have designated these men as “terrorists,” though they remain undesignated by the UN. The same applies to IS Mozambique, designated by the US in [2021](#), and the EU in [2023](#), but not yet by the UN.

Law No 13/2022 gives the office of the attorney general the power to designate individuals or organizations that are believed to be involved in “terrorism” on Mozambique’s own account, in response to Security Council designations, or at the request of other jurisdictions. The lists issued last month only contain two significant figures, likely included at the urging of two foreign powers. The absence of any other significant figures suggests that either Mozambique’s intelligence is poor, or such designations are of limited practical value in the context of this conflict.

A GLANCE AT THE DECREE GOVERNING LOCAL FORCES

By Tomás Queface, Cabo Ligado

Decree [No. 15/2023 of 14 April](#), legalizing Local Forces operating in Cabo Delgado, was finally made public in July, having been initially [approved](#) at a session of the Mozambican Council of Ministers held on 4 and 5 April 2023. Prior to that, the National Assembly had, on 15 December 2022, [paved the way](#) for the revision of the act governing the Mozambican armed forces, the FADM Act, and the legitimization of the activities of Local Forces. The four-page decree, which contains 14 articles, clarifies relevant issues regarding the concept of Local Forces, their activation and deactivation, composition, forms of acquisition and loss of membership, as well as their rights and duties.

The late publication of the decree, three months after its approval, was no coincidence. During this period, the Mozambican government sought to complete the long process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of Renamo fighters in Solala, avoiding the contradiction of simultaneously disarming and arming the population. The last Renamo base was [closed](#) on 15 June. President Filipe Nyusi [said](#) at the time that the moment symbolized “a stepping stone on the road to lasting peace.”

A far cry from lasting peace is the province of Cabo Delgado, where Local Forces, made up of community members, are expected to be active in the ongoing counterinsurgency efforts. Prior to their legalization, Local Forces had been operating [unconstitutionally](#) since around 2018. The main purpose of their legalization is to allow them to operate within the law and to benefit from logistical support from the government. According to the decree, Local Forces will be incorporated into the structure of the FADM and will operate under its authority, but it will be up to the Ministry of Defense to activate and deactivate Local Forces and to decide on the number of their members, on the basis of a proposal from the FADM's general staff.

Any citizen of a given community where sovereignty is threatened can join Local Forces, provided he/she is known by the local authorities. Members may also leave Local Forces of their own will or through resignation, death, or deactivation of Local Forces. Regarding their duties, Local Forces will do no more than what they have already done: patrol, conduct surveillance, and neutralize enemy forces, all under close coordination with the Defense and Security Forces (FDS). The government provides Local Forces

with logistical support, uniforms, weapons, military equipment, allowances, medical assistance, funeral assistance, and disability pensions. After the deactivation of Local Forces, their members are to receive allowances for a period of 12 to 24 months, depending on the length of time they have been active.

The decree makes no provision for training or psychosocial screening of people who want to join Local Forces. This could be a problem in the future. Notably, most of those who make up the current Local Forces are war veterans and have some military experience. However, it is not known whether they are aware of the laws of war and the rules of accountability for their actions. The decree stipulates that Local Forces must act according to the Mozambican constitution and respect human rights, and will be subject to the same disciplinary procedures and regulations as the FADM. It remains to be seen, however, whether the Mozambican government will be able or willing to hold members of Local Forces accountable for cases of extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and ill-treatment of detainees.

Human Rights Watch [criticized](#) the government's decision to legalize "untrained and seemingly uncontrollable militias," and suggested that the regular armed forces focus on becoming more professional, and respecting human rights. Others have [suggested](#) that funds allocated to Local Forces would be better used to strengthen the logistics of the military.

By virtue of their incorporation into the FADM structure, Local Forces are nominally non-partisan. However, they are highly susceptible to partisan influence. Their headquarter is in the district of Mueda, a Frelimo stronghold, and most of them are veterans and members of the Association of Combatants of the National Liberation Struggle, a body within the Frelimo party.

Given the limited capacity of the military to provide security in the vast province of Cabo Delgado and the lack of professionalism within the military, Local Forces can be instrumental in the defense of communities while the regular forces carry out offensive operations against insurgent bases. However, if the state fails to maintain military, political, and social control over Local Forces, this ad hoc solution may lead to other unpredictable problems in the future.

CONTINUING VIOLENCE KEEPS DISPLACED PEOPLE FROM RETURNING HOME

By Armando Nhantumbo, Savana

The events of July have the potential to shake the return of people who had been displaced from Macomia district, and southern Mocímboa da Praia. Well-orchestrated attacks on FADM troops in Macomia district have demonstrated the power that the insurgency retains there, while their attacks on civilians in Mocímboa da Praia are a reminder of their ruthlessness.

The security forces, too, have been accused of incidents targeting civilians. On 24 July, a member of Mozambican forces allegedly raped a girl who was on her way home in Nangade district. On 15 July, South African troops shot a citizen in Ingoane, in Macomia district, according to sources, an incident [strongly denied](#) by SAMIM.

These incidents have implications for the return of displaced people on at least two levels. First, in the coastal part of Macomia, people who had returned to their villages had to abandon their homes again in search of safe places. Second, some displaced people still living outside the conflict zones will not return to their areas of origin, while incidents such as the ones in July continue to be reported. Meanwhile, those in the relatively quiet areas pray not to relive the hurts of the past.

"People had started to return to their homes, but they left because they saw that things were not good.

They began to return, one by one, to the main town [of Macomia]. Some are already making little houses here," a resident of the Anga A neighborhood in Macomia town, told us.

He was even more concerned about reports of casualties in the FDS. "If our forces are suffering, sooner or later, we too will suffer," he warned. Even residing in the main town, where, in recent months, there has been no record of attacks, he expressed concern about the recent wave of attacks. "The situation on the coast is scary, but we can't do anything," he said, talking about people who, even in the face of insecurity, try to fish to guarantee their survival.

He also pointed to the ease with which the insurgents circulated along the coast, to the point of purchasing products from the population. "That is not good because if we let them buy things, we are creating them. When we sell food, we are giving more strength to them. For this reason, the FDS must do everything to ensure that the insurgents do not reach society because when the people are in distress, they receive anyone," he said.

Another resident of Macomia town's Anga B neighborhood also spoke of displaced people who had returned, after abandoning their homes on the coast once again. "When there were those attacks, they fled from there to here," he explained. He said villages between Mucojo, Pequeue, and Quiterajo are practically depopulated, except for soldiers and "those thieves," as he called the insurgents.

Some people have already started returning to the coast, he said, not so much because they feel safe, but because of the difficulties of living far from their areas of origin. "Some started to return to look for food," he said. Even living in the main town, he expressed fear. "Of course, these attacks are frightening, but what can you do?"

The news about the attacks in July in Cabo Delgado also complicated the calculations of those who were considering returning home one day from their refuges outside of the conflict zone. A former trader from the town of Mocímboa da Praia, now residing in the city of Nampula, confirmed that these incidents have killed the desire of many to return home. "I and my family, for example, are trying to forget and see if we can settle down right here," he explained. But why forget a land that is your home, we asked him. "The situation is still not good there and, for those who felt it in their skin, like me, I can't guarantee you that I'll be back in the next three or five years," he said.

Another former resident of the town of Mocímboa da Praia, now also living in Nampula city, expressed discomfort with the actions of the Mozambican troops. "Unlike the Rwandans, our military does not handle us well. Even at the meetings, the population says that the day the Rwandans leave, we will also leave because our forces have no love for the population. The population is afraid," he said, in a complaint that has become recurrent among the Cabo Delgado population.

UNDERSTANDING CURRENT MOZAMBIQUE-RUSSIA RELATIONS

By Fernando Lima, Cabo Ligado

The presidency of Filipe Nyusi had transformed relations with Russia even before the war in Ukraine began. Now Mozambique is taking advantage of Russia's international isolation to win further concessions and support — including, perhaps, weapons that Western donors are reluctant to supply.

Mozambique's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, including abstaining in votes at the UN, is improving relations with Russia, according to senior diplomats in Maputo. Mozambique has abstained

three times in New York from condemning Russia, and President Nyusi was one of 17 heads of state [attending](#) the Russia-Africa Summit in Saint Petersburg last month. But, according to one of his advisors, his decision to attend was made at the last minute, in the face of strong pressure from Western allies who are supporting Mozambique's counterinsurgency effort in Cabo Delgado.

While describing political and diplomatic relations with Russia as "excellent," Mozambican diplomats believe they have also managed to exploit the international isolation of Vladimir Putin, opening up new areas of cooperation that had not made it off the page and into practice for years.

Mozambique and Moscow were once close allies, but that cooled to indifference after the end of the Soviet Union, and the adoption of market economy policies in both Mozambique and Russia in the 1990s. While both countries went through painful changes, the Russian Federation insisted on the repayment of a huge military debt related to decades of assistance fending off threats from Rhodesia, South Africa, and later Renamo, a senior diplomatic source told Cabo Ligado. The Mozambican government maintained that military assistance was not a commercial issue but a heritage of the Cold War era in which both countries were part of the same political block. According to Cabo Ligado sources within Mozambique's Foreign Ministry, there were also diplomatic problems caused by a former ambassador in Moscow, Bernardo Chirindza, who ended up in court in Maputo accused of embezzling funds.

President Nyusi decided to pay a state visit to Russia [in August 2019](#), the first such trip since President Joaquim Chissano visited Russia in 1987, before the Soviet Union was dismantled in 1991. The insurgency in Cabo Delgado was having a terrible impact on the development of gas projects in the Rovuma basin, and Western donors had frozen assistance to the Mozambican state budget after the "hidden debt" scandal was [uncovered in 2016](#).

Nyusi managed to solve the debt pending since the Soviet era, announcing the pardon of 95% of the stock outstanding. It was [agreed](#) to transform the debt into projects such as building schools and hospitals, with the participation of Russian companies. One such project is the rehabilitation of José Macamo hospital, on the outskirts of Maputo.

The month after, in September 2019, a 200-man contingent arrived in Nacala to be dispatched to Cabo Delgado and fight the Islamist insurgency there, apparently as part of an understanding made with Vladimir Putin. The contingent came from the Wagner Group of Yevgeny Prigozhin, who also advised Frelimo on its general election campaign that year in Mozambique. Wagner beat off competition from other private military companies that had offered their services to the Mozambican government to fight the insurgency in Cabo Delgado.

But Wagner's counterinsurgency operation faced several problems, including bad coordination with the Mozambican army, which ended up in casualties caused by 'friendly fire.' But Western diplomats also told Cabo Ligado that, at the time, it was inconceivable to implement formal military cooperation with Mozambique while a mercenary force was present in Cabo Delgado. That equally would have applied to the presence later on of the Dyck Advisory Group from South Africa, recruited after a series of major attacks by the insurgents in early 2020, which saw them take the district capitals of Quissanga, Macomia, Muidumbe, and Mocímboa da Praia.

Mozambican diplomats admit that bringing in the Wagner Group was an error, but point out that another South African company, True North, has been working with the gas industry in Cabo Delgado following the attack on Palma in March 2021. Formally the company provides maintenance to Area 1 premises while the 'force majeure' situation prevails, but within its ranks, there are several South African military personnel with experience in assignments in hot spots such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is not known if lethal assistance was discussed during Nyusi's trip to Saint Petersburg in July this year, since, aside from formal delegation meetings on bilateral cooperation, there was a 'tête à tête' between the two presidents alone. Mozambique insists it needs weapons to fight the insurgency since training and logistics are not enough. It was also mentioned that military and security issues were touched upon while Nikolai Patrushev [was in Maputo](#) in July, meeting Interior Minister Arsénia Massingue and State Intelligence and Security Service Director Bernardo Lidimba. Patrushev is the Secretary of the Russian Security Council.

On the gas front, Rosneft and Gazprom promised last month to get strongly involved in Mozambique, despite some skepticism from the Mozambican side after the same promises were made in 2019. Even a proposal to provide the equipment for the controversial Renaissance north-south gas pipeline was presented. Mozambican diplomacy is more hopeful that a solution can be found regarding the 545 million US dollars debt to VTB bank, borrowed by state-owned company MAM as part of the "hidden debts" saga. In 2018, VTB CEO Andrey Kostin [called for more negotiations](#), but VTB has since taken Mozambique to court in London, claiming it is owed at least US\$817.5m.

Mozambique believes it has greater diplomatic leverage now, "because they [Russia] are isolated, and they realize they are isolated, and they need to move ahead with the countries they consider friendly, especially in Africa," a Mozambican diplomat involved in the talks said. Another diplomat suggested there is a growing sense within the African continent that "what Russia did was an invasion of a sovereign country," and that Russia "cannot bring Africa for their own problems just because they are offering a few thousand tons of cereals." "In private, we did not reach the point of calling the Russian action an invasion, but we told them we are friends with both sides of the conflict and that they should look for a negotiated settlement," said a source present at talks in Saint Petersburg.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was in Maputo [in May](#), where he said he would establish a permanent embassy, after talks with President Nyusi. But Mozambique is not ready yet to stop playing both sides, as its diplomats believe there is more to come from Russia. "They [Russia] think big, they want to come back, they want win-win cooperation, they like to think in geostrategic projects," a source involved in the most recent talks said.