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Cabo Ligado Monthly: December 2023

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

VITAL STATS

- ACLED records seven political violence events involving ISM in Cabo Delgado in December, resulting in at least 21 reported fatalities.
- ACLED records eight fatalities in disturbances related to the ongoing cholera outbreak. Four fatalities were recorded in each of Montepuez and Chiure districts in the south of Cabo Delgado province

VITAL TRENDS

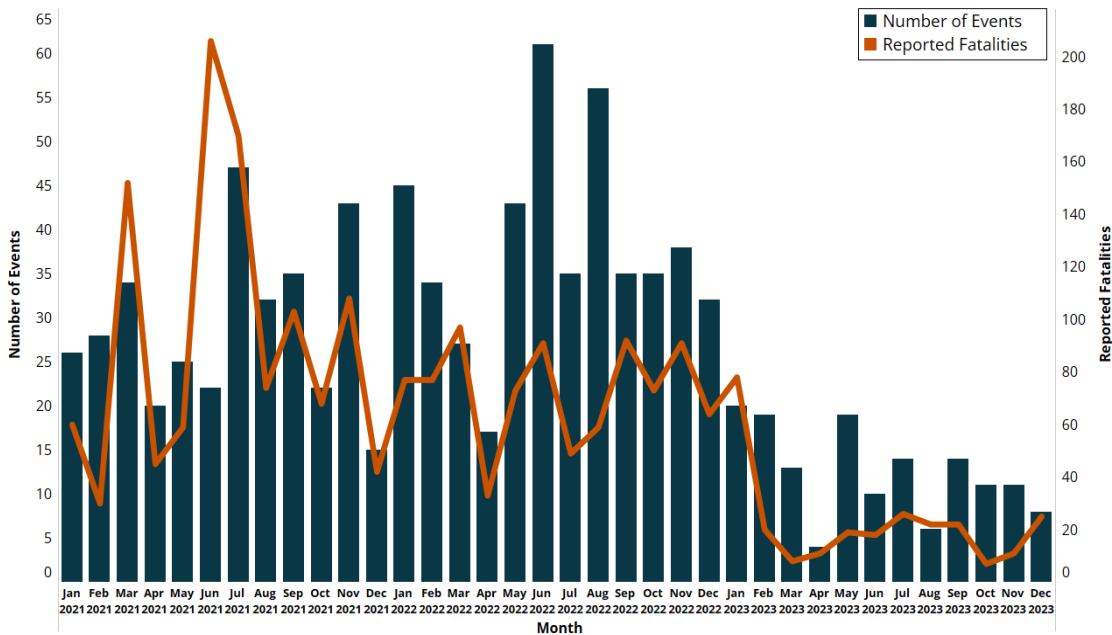
- Monthly fatalities for December were the highest since August 2023
- All ISM incidents occurred in either Macomia or Muidumbe districts
- Violence against state officials, related to the response to the cholera epidemic, re-emerges in the south of Cabo Delgado

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Political Violence and Reported Fatalities in Cabo Delgado

2021 - 2023



DECEMBER SITUATION SUMMARY

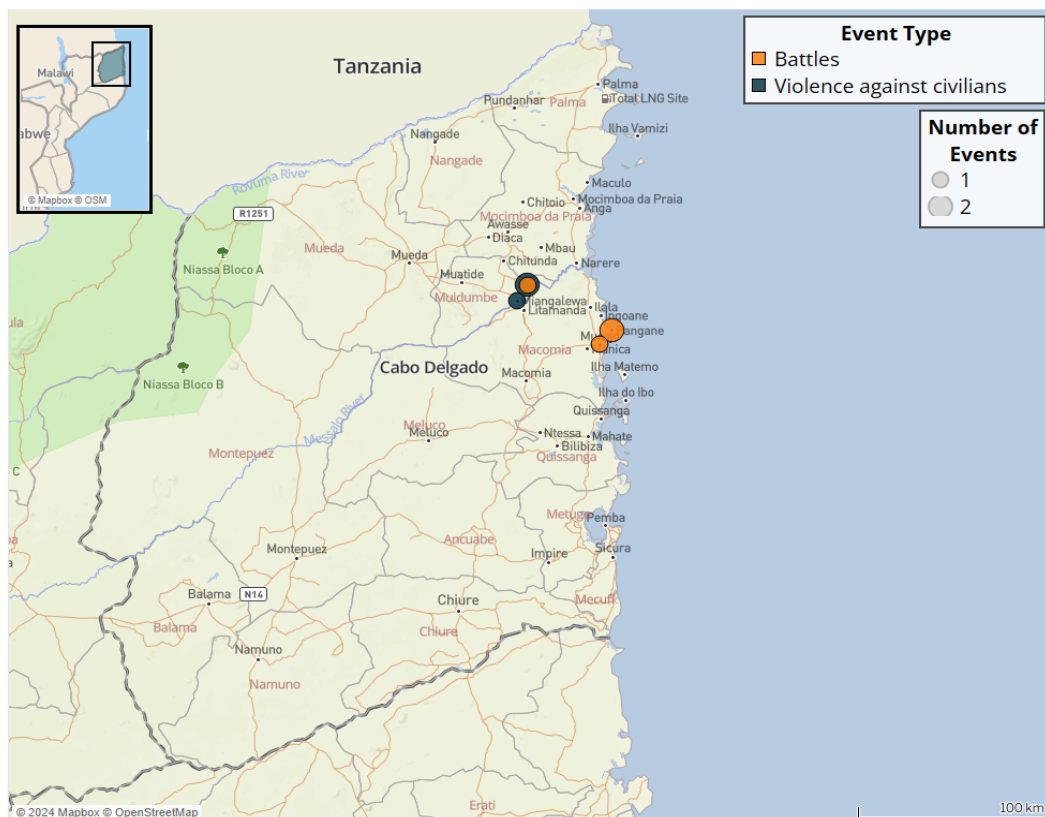
Political violence involving Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) was focused in Macomia and Muidumbe districts, resulting in significant fatalities for the Defense and Security Forces (FDS). Five troops were killed in an attack on one outpost near Lake Nguri in Muidumbe province on 6 December. On 26 December in Macomia district, 14 troops were killed in three separate coordinated attacks in the coastal villages of Mucojo and Pangane.

The Mucojo and Pangane attacks illustrate the imbalance between FDS and ISM in that part of Macomia. The attacks were carried out despite the deployment of FDS reinforcements from Macomia town. FDS deployments were later withdrawn from both Mucojo and Pangane villages.

Outside of the insurgency, events in the south of the province illustrated the delicate state of public institutions amid ongoing outbreaks of cholera that have triggered violent mobilization against local community leaders and officials. On 9 December in Chiure district, rioters destroyed the houses of community leaders, and killed four of them, believing that cholera victims were being deliberately killed through the mechanisms of the cholera response itself. Four more officials were killed when a demonstration on the same issue turned violent on 18 December in Montepuez district. This belief is not a new phenomenon and has [led to violence in the past](#).

Political Violence in Cabo Delgado

December 2023



ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2024

By Peter Bofin, Cabo Ligado

Recent developments in Cabo Delgado province illustrate the issues to be faced in northern Mozambique in 2024. Firstly, the attacks in Macomia and Muidumbe districts signaled the resilience of ISM in those areas and the FDS's inability to control territory in those parts of the province. Secondly, the attacks highlighted the security vacuum that may arise if the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) pulls out in July 2024. Finally, the cholera-related disturbances in the south of the province illustrate the challenge that the state faces in building people's trust in it.

ISM has been moving freely in parts of Muidumbe district, and on the coastal strip of Macomia district for some time. The two areas present different security challenges in 2024. In Muidumbe, ISM operates from camps on the Messalo river and has an antagonistic relationship with the local population. For 2023, ACLED records ISM involvement in 15 incidents targeting civilians, killing 18 people. In locations on the Macomia coast, on the other hand, ACLED records just seven such incidents, with only one fatality.

This is a serious challenge for FDS. Nationwide they are hampered in the first instance by capacity. Troops in the field are ill-equipped, [ill-fed](#), and at times [paid late](#). Lack of local knowledge in Cabo Delgado in particular hampers operations. In Muidumbe, this has led to reliance on the newly formed [Local Force](#) in Muidumbe. This force has developed in areas where Frelimo is strong. In contrast, Frelimo has limited support in the coastal areas of Macomia and so the local knowledge that such forces can bring is lacking. This leaves FDS exposed to the type of attacks seen on [26 December](#) in Muchojo and Pangane villages.

How to secure the Macomia coast will be a significant issue in 2024. The district falls within SAMIM's area of responsibility, and is primarily served by the South African contingent based at Macomia town. Yet even with that support, FDS has been unable to secure the coastal strip. This is particularly concerning with the decision for SAMIM forces to pull out by July 2024 reiterated by [President Mokgweetsi Masisi](#) of Botswana during his visit in December to the province. A complete withdrawal will likely lead to either ISM developing a more permanent presence in coastal Macomia, or the expansion of the Rwandan Security Forces (RSF) mandate to the area. The latter is quite possible. RSF has often been deployed to northern Macomia district and was recently [engaged in joint operations](#) with FDS and SAMIM in Catupa forest.

Continuing capacity issues, the ISM threat, and the likelihood of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) project resuming also mean that external support from foreign powers is likely to continue. This includes support to the Defense Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM) from the [European Union](#), the [United States](#), and China. Coordinating this support in a way that allows a consistent military doctrine to develop will continue to be a challenge for FADM and for its partners.

Last month's [killings](#) of [officials](#) working on the response to the cholera outbreaks in Chiure and Montepuez districts suggest that the greatest issue in 2024 will remain people's trust in government. The killings, and destruction of health facilities, are driven by enduring distrust of elites manifested as a belief that elites want to kill ordinary people and that they use the mechanisms of the cholera response to do so. The phenomenon predates the insurgency, having previously occurred during cholera outbreaks in [1999](#), [2001](#), [2009](#), [2019](#), and [2020](#). It will take significant time and investment to build weakened state structures across the north. The emergence of TotalEnergies as a [proxy state of sorts](#) underlines how much TotalEnergies decision to resume the LNG or not matters, and the range of impacts that may have on the province.

VIOLENCE IN SOUTHERN CABO DELGADO

By Tomás Queface, Cabo Ligado

In the south of Cabo Delgado province, violence in December was [characterized](#) by violence against state and private entities. These acts of violence were related to community perception of the government's response to the ongoing cholera outbreak and illegal ruby mining. This follows violence related to the October municipal elections, which in Cabo Delgado was confined to Chiure district headquarters. While the most recent action by ISM in the province's southern districts was in March 2023, in Ancuabe district, the reemergence of violence related to cholera responses and informal mining in December, and the election-related violence that preceded it, underscores the governance challenge across the province.

The municipal elections on 11 October demonstrated the first basic governance challenge facing the state across Mozambique, including in Cabo Delgado. In the province, deadly violence related to the election was recorded in Chiure Municipality, where on 12 October 2023, one person was [killed](#) by police as opposition Renamo supporters declared victory. The Constitutional Council [agreed with them](#) the following month, declaring Renamo the legitimate victor in the municipality. Opposition protests, in which protestors were killed, [also occurred](#) in the neighboring Nampula province. Police General Commander Bernardino Rafael, on 27 December 2023, [apologized](#) for this death and many others across the country as a result of police brutality. He chose Chiure in which to make these remarks.

Violence continued in November after authorities [declared](#) a cholera outbreak in Cabo Delgado on 11 November. By late November, 743 cholera cases had been [reported](#): 91 cases in Balama, 232 cases in Chiúre, and 420 cases and one death in Montepuez. Cholera is linked to poor sanitation and the consumption of unsafe water and is exacerbated by the rainy season. However, it is widely believed that health and government authorities are responsible for spreading the disease. This wave of misinformation has led to a series of violent demonstrations and the persecution of local government and health staff.

Chiure was the site of one of the first incidents of cholera-related violence, which took place on 27 November, when a group of people set fire to a local hospital in Namogelia village. In the first week of December, [people](#) killed a community leader in the village of Mavale, Mirate Administrative Post, in the district of Montepuez, and set fire to a house. Also in Mirate, on 9 October, another group of people attacked community leaders, [killing](#) at least four of them and destroying several community leaders' houses in Nacuca village. The police were called to respond. On 18 December, another violent demonstration in Namogelia, Chiure, resulted in the deaths of at least [four community leaders](#) and attacks on health workers and police.

A similar incident was reported in [Nampula](#) province in December, and Zambézia police chief Rafael also reported an [occurrence in Zambézia province](#). Some 69 people, half of them in Cabo Delgado, have been arrested on charges of spreading disinformation [according](#) to the police. There were 13 cases of [cholera-related violent incidents](#) in the districts of Chiure, Montepuez, and Namuno according to Rafael, though he gave no details of the specific events. It is interesting to note that the community militia Naparama, which has been involved in counter-insurgency operations in Cabo Delgado, took part in these riots. The authorities [accuse](#) the Naparama of mobilizing people to revolt against the state and create instability in the region.

Tensions between gold miners and the police also contributed to the specter of violence in the south of the province in December. Around 100 gold miners [attempted](#) to invade the Montepuez Ruby Mining concession on 9 December. Eight MRM security guards and one policeman were injured in the incident. Later that day, 22 miners invaded the concession. The police responded with live bullets, injuring three miners.

These incidents of violence could increase instability in Cabo Delgado province and further undermine the

progress made in restoring peace. They also reflect the need for the state to get closer to the concerns of the communities, whether to address the grievances of the population or to respond to the economic needs of those demanding a share of the province's vast wealth. If these issues are not properly addressed, the potential for violence could worsen in the near future.

ISM SPOILS RWANDAN MEDIA CAMPAIGN

By Fernando Lima, Cabo Ligado

Prospects for an imminent announcement of the lifting of force majeure status for the gas project at Afungi, in the district of Palma, prompted a joint Mozambican and Rwandan media effort in Palma and neighboring Mocímboa da Praia in December, trying to show that “everything is ready for the restart.” The company [declared force majeure](#) in April 2021.

The RSF brought reporters and social media influencers from [Kenya](#), [Uganda](#), and [Rwanda](#) to its operational area in Cabo Delgado to demonstrate the improved security situation. Ronald Rwivanga, a spokesperson for the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF), escorted the journalists to Palma to tour the rehabilitated port and airport of Mocímboa da Praia town.

“What I can say to all investors, TotalEnergies and any other investors, the situation is now normal, particularly Palma and Mocímboa da Praia”, [Rwivanga said](#) in mid-December. “We can assure them the situation is under control and they can invest in their enterprises.”

For his part, the head of the Mozambican army, Tiago Nampele, [told journalists](#) on 19 December that “the forces on the ground can guarantee that companies can return, especially Total”, adding that “security has been re-established in 90% of the territory”.

However, just a few days later on 26 December, insurgents launched [attacks](#) on Mozambican military positions in Mucojo and Pangane in the coastal area described by Nampele as a resupply zone for the insurgency. At least 13 soldiers were killed. In early January, seven attacks were claimed by ISM, mostly against civilians. On 5 January, insurgents killed four civilians at Chimbanga village, in the vicinity of Mocímboa da Praia, causing panic in the population recently resettled there. RSF and FDS forces on 8 January [uncovered an arms cache](#), as well as some goods looted in Chimbanga in follow-up operations

ISM’s response to the media campaign and the centering of TotalEnergies security within it, is not without precedent: most notably, it carried out its [most high profile attack to date](#) on Palma town in March 2021, just after TotalEnergies and the Mozambican government [announced](#) the restart of work on the gas project. These latest attacks fell under the banner of Islamic State’s (IS) global “[kill them wherever you find them](#)” campaign, which IS says is in support of Palestine — ironically a cause also supported by the Mozambican government, in its current position as a non-permanent member of UN Security Council.

Despite the moderate and non-alarmist reactions from the security forces and the companies operating in the Afungi peninsula, the violent actions in three different districts – Macomia, Muidumbe, and Mocímboa – undermine confidence in the earlier statements made by the security forces of Mozambique and Rwanda.

Civil society representatives who attended meetings in January with Jean-Christophe Rufin, the humanitarian advisor employed by TotalEnergies, took away the impression that he is now more pragmatic than in his first visits to Mozambique, suggesting that security concerns should be focused on where the gas project is being developed.

The decision to restart the project will also confront the scenario of the withdrawal of the SADC force in July and concerns surrounding the capability of the Mozambican military to fill the gap. The RSF, according to major-general Rwinvanga, is “open to considering the possibility to expand its operations in Mozambique” as it happened last year when a new operational area was established in Ancuabe, to prevent IS militias from moving into the mining areas of southern Cabo Delgado.



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