



CABO LIGADO

22 February 2024

Cabo Ligado Update: 5-18 February 2024

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

BY THE NUMBERS

Cabo Delgado, October 2017-February 2024

- Total number of political violence events: 1,747
- Total number of reported fatalities from political violence: 4,849
- Total number of reported fatalities from political violence targeting civilians: 2,078

All ACLED data are available for download via the [data export tool](#) and [curated data files](#).

SITUATION SUMMARY

The last two weeks have seen a massive escalation in insurgent violence in Cabo Delgado province, with attacks spread across the districts of Chiure in the south, Macomia, Meluco, and Quissanga in the province's center, and Mocímoba da Praia in the north. Insurgents targeted security forces and civilians, and made an unprecedented effort to burn down churches.

In Mucojo, Macomia, an insurgent force, which local sources claimed numbered more than 150 fighters, assaulted a security forces position on 9 February, killing at least 20 soldiers. Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) claimed to have killed 25 people, including 23 members of the army, one soldier in the Local Force, and a civilian. A report on the Mucojo attack in *Al Naba*, the IS newspaper, featured a picture of a pile of dead bodies in military uniform, at least two of whom were beheaded. This marks the security forces' largest loss of life in a single incident since the attack on Palma in March 2021. The Macomia district administrator, Tomás Bandae, confirmed the attack to [Zumbo FM](#) but did not specify the number of casualties.

A military helicopter was dispatched during the clash, a picture of which appeared in a photoset published on IS social media, but it withdrew when it came under fire. Security forces [returned briefly](#) two days later to collect the bodies but did not reestablish control over the village. Mucojo has been strongly contested by insurgents and security forces since December 2023 and has changed hands twice since 20 January. Cabo Ligado understands that as of 18 February, neither side was occupying Mucojo.

On the other side of the Catupa forest, other insurgent groups continued to operate in northern Macomia along the N380. Insurgents clashed with Local Forces in Litamanda on 10 February and killed at least one civilian in the village, prompting residents to [flee](#) to Chai, 3km to the south. Three days later, insurgents attacked Chai, killing at least one. IS claimed the victim was a member of the Local Forces.

As well as suffering from insurgent violence, civilians in Macomia district have also complained of abuse by security forces, according to [Carta de Moçambique](#). The alleged abuses included beatings, verbal harassment, and arbitrary arrests. Civilians in Macomia have even accused Mozambican marines of indiscriminate killings and abductions, according to a report by [Zitamar News](#). Security forces broadly suspect locals in Macomia, especially along the coast, of being insurgent sympathizers, according to the reports.

Another large contingent of insurgents, possibly numbering 200 or more, has wrought havoc in Chiure district. On 9 February, insurgents burned up to four churches and several homes in the village of Nacoja, on the bank of the Lúrio river, bordering Nampula province. [Voice of America](#) reported that five people were also kidnapped. On 12 February, ISM attacked Nacoja again, claiming to have burned another three churches, which has not been independently confirmed, before moving onto Mazeze 12km to the north later that day. There, IS claimed to have burned more than 130 homes and shops. [Lusa](#) reported that much of the village's infrastructure was destroyed.

Insurgents continued to maraud through Chiure on 16 February, attacking the village of Nguira where they burned another church, according to an IS statement. The [NASA Fire Information for Resource Management System](#) detected a fire in Nguira that day. One source told Cabo Ligado that insurgents were confronted by the [Naparama](#) militia and several were killed on both sides. The next day, insurgents entered Samuel Magaia village, where they beheaded at least four people and damaged several buildings. IS claimed responsibility.

Meanwhile, in Meluco, insurgents set up a roadblock on the N380 highway near Nguia on 8 February and demanded payment from all passing vehicles. The next day, insurgents fired on a minibus as it went past Nguia on the way to Meluco. On 11 February, insurgents stopped another minibus and demanded that the driver, who was from India, pay 50,000 meticaís (\$783). He could not provide the money and was taken away. His condition is currently unknown. Insurgents left behind a note in Portuguese and English calling on non-Muslims to pay a tax called 'jizya'. On 15 February, insurgents also set up a roadblock near Quissanga district headquarters on the road to Pemba, the provincial capital. A truck driver was stopped and forced to pay 150,000 meticaís (\$2,348), [O País reported](#).

Finally, some insurgents are evidently still operating in Mocímboa da Praia. A group entered the village of Nsangue, near the border of Palma district, on the night of 17 February, and stole food and fuel, before getting away by boat.

FOCUS: FRIENDLY FORCES DISTRACTION BRINGS ISM'S SOUTHERLY EXPANSION

The rainy season usually leads to a decline in ISM actions. This year, however, the group has sustained activities through the rains of January and into February. ACLED records ISM involvement in 22 political violence events in January, with seven of them taking place in Pemba, Mecufi, and Metuge districts. This activity has been maintained through February. In the past fortnight, the group has struck as far south as Nacoja on the Lurio river bordering Nampula, and blocked traffic on significant trunk roads in both Meluco and Quissanga districts. Responding to this will depend on both the capacity of Mozambique's Defense and Security Forces (FDS) and the level of support it can "Mucojo, Pangane, and Quiterajo." According to sources, all residents between Quiterajo and Mucojo have expect from the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and the Rwanda Security Forces (RSF).

All three forces are under significant strain. While the FDS is significantly demoralized, the remaining two are distracted by a conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is arguably of greater importance to their interests.

Since December 2023, the FDS has suffered at least 46 fatalities in the conflict. At least 13 of these were in [three separate events in Mucojo](#) on 26 December, and at least a further 20 occurred in the 9 February clash, which saw ISM regain control of Mucojo. On 30 January, as part of the push south, eight were [killed in an ambush](#) on a mounted military patrol in Mecufi district. The impact of this on the morale of troops in the field is undoubtedly considerable.

SAMIM and the RSF are themselves under considerable political and logistical strain due to unfolding events in the DRC. The Southern African Development Community Mission in DRC (SAMIDRC) is mostly composed of troops from Tanzania and South Africa. Both South Africa and Tanzania are significant contributors to SAMIM. Yet as part of SAMIDRC, they are in direct conflict with the Rwanda-supported M23 Movement. One may expect that to affect levels of cooperation in Mozambique.

Logistically too, the DRC deployment greatly stretches the resources of the South Africa National Defence Force (SANDF). The South African contingent of SAMIDRC [is almost 3,000 troops](#). This is double the contingent deployed with SAMIM, from which South Africa has [reportedly](#) already withdrawn half of its deployed special forces. Tanzania is traditionally less open about military operations, but [footage](#) of what is thought to be Tanzanian troops shelling M23 positions in early February suggests their SAMIDRC deployment will consume far greater resources than in Mozambique.

Of Mozambique's "friendly forces," the RSF is best positioned to address ISM operations in the south. Since December 2022, there has been an RSF base at Niare, 14 kilometers southwest of Ancuabe district. But like their counterparts, developments in DRC are likely a distraction. In an 18 February statement, Rwanda claimed that DRC had threatened repeatedly to invade Rwanda and that Rwanda had ["adjusted its posture accordingly."](#) According to some reports, this includes [active fighting](#) in DRC.

ROUND-UP

Journalists under pressure as government tries to take control of communications

Elements in the Mozambican government have been increasing pressure on journalists over the last two weeks. The Mozambican military seems to have been particularly sensitive around reporting of their heavy losses in Mucojo — one result being a new push on the part of military spokespeople to make themselves available to talk to journalists, though providing any operational details remains out of bounds.

After Carta de Moçambique erroneously reported on 16 February that the town of Quissanga had been taken by insurgents, the administrator of Quissanga district lashed out at Maputo-based journalists in an interview with the Pemba-based Zumbo FM. However, he himself had already fled for fear of insurgent activities, a reliable source told Cabo Ligado. And the provincial governor, Valige Tauabo, made a vague statement on Saturday accusing some journalists of apparently working to support the insurgency — comments which drew condemnation from civil society commentators and in particular the media freedom organization Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA).

Government communications remain inconsistent and unclear. The website [Notícias de Defesa](#), a pro-government propaganda outlet with murky ties to the government and defense structures, published a pdf newsletter including an article signed by military spokesman Anselmo Chalanhane, warning about communications that are "subversive to the Defense Armed Forces of Mozambique", and pointing out that there are laws against defaming the armed forces.

France travel advisory provokes Nyusi reaction

France's Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs [said](#) it "strongly" advised against travel to the towns of Pemba, Palma, and Mocímboa da Praia due to terrorist activity. The statement attracted attention from the media, in the context of TotalEnergies' positive sounds about restarting its gas project in Palma district this year.

President Filipe Nyusi was asked about the advisory by journalists on his trip to the African Union headquarters in Ethiopia. He responded that he was surprised by the advisory, but said "every country has an agenda," and that "there must be some reason why an announcement was made."

SADC mulls continuity solution

SAMIM appointed a new commander, South African Major General Patrick Dube, who will oversee a drawdown of the deployments to Cabo Delgado, with the mission due to end in July. Zimbabwean president Emmerson Mnangagwa said after meeting Nyusi in Addis Ababa that Nyusi had told him that the SAMIM withdrawal was coming before the situation in Cabo Delgado had been "calmed", saying that he and Nyusi are therefore "discussing how we can deal with the situation." The Portugal-based publication Africa Monitor reported that SADC is considering retaining a presence in Pemba as a base for offensive operations while withdrawing its presence from districts elsewhere in Cabo Delgado.

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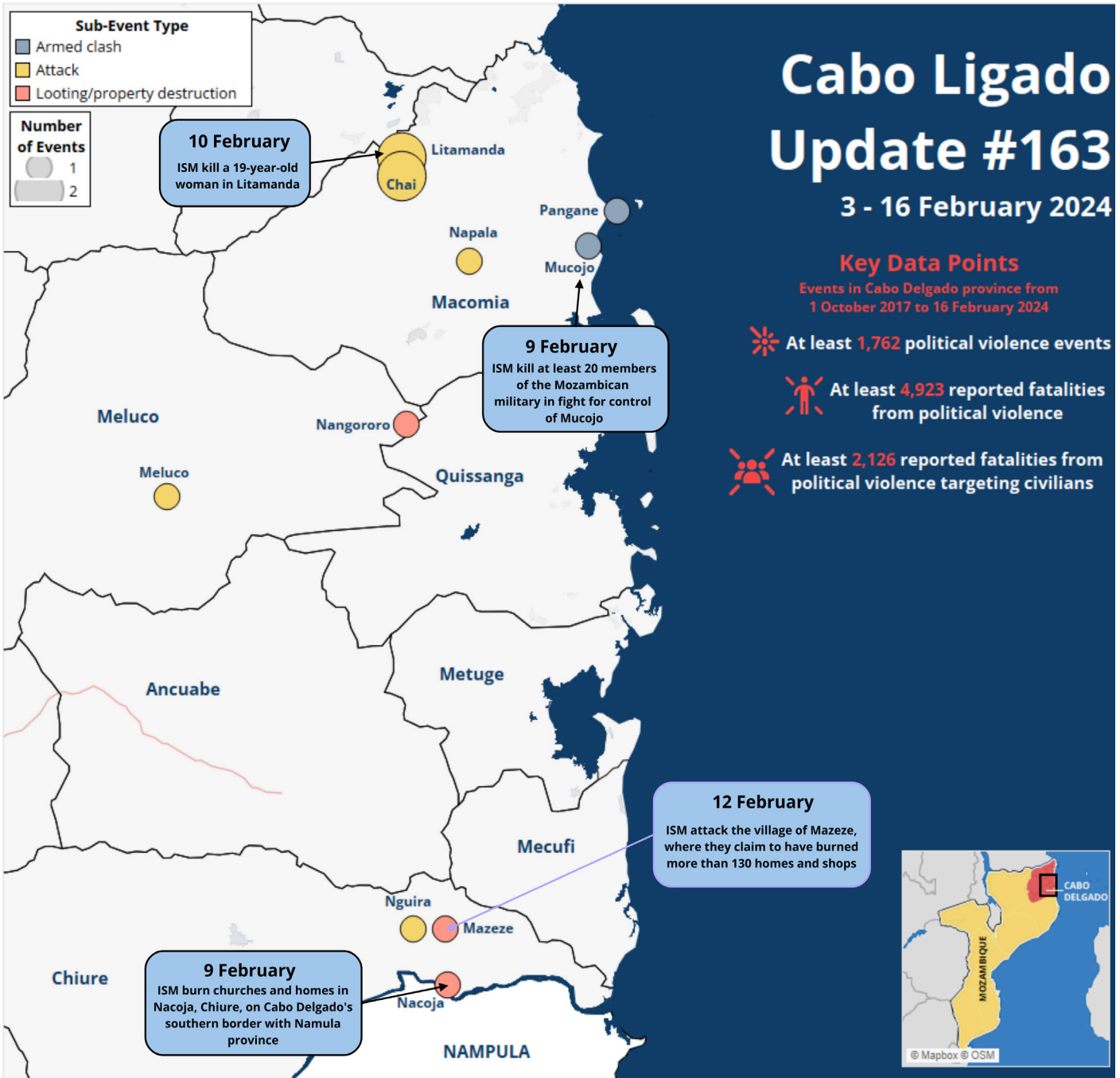
Key Data Points

Events in Cabo Delgado province from 1 October 2017 to 16 February 2024

✦ At least 1,762 political violence events

👤 At least 4,923 reported fatalities from political violence

✦ At least 2,126 reported fatalities from political violence targeting civilians



NOTE: This map displays political violence events that have taken place in Cabo Delgado province from 20 January - 16 February 2024. Some events from this coverage period may be included in the next infographic due to reporting delays. ACLED is a living dataset and figures are subject to change as new information becomes available.