

Cabo Ligado Weekly: 17-23 August

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[Cabo Ligado](#) — or ‘connected cape’ — is a new conflict observatory monitoring political violence in Mozambique, launched in partnership with Zitamar News, Mediafax, and the International Crisis Group.

Situation Summary

The fundamentals of the Cabo Delgado conflict remained unchanged last week. Government forces are not yet back in Mocimboa da Praia, and the road between Palma and Mocimboa da Praia remains unsafe. There were no confirmed attacks by insurgents in the province last week, but the conflict continues to impact civilians.

On 21 August, the bodies of a 50-year-old woman and her 12-year-old granddaughter were discovered in Nawamba, on the outskirts of Macomia town. The two were living with family in Macomia as refugees, having been displaced from their home by the violence in Nagulue, Mucojo district. The day before their bodies were found, they told relatives that they were going to the forest to gather cassava leaves for food. When they did not return, the family worried that they had gotten lost as they did not know the area well. The identity of their killers is unknown, but their story highlights the vulnerability of tens of thousands of displaced civilians in Cabo Delgado: living in an unfamiliar place, under pressure to find food, and subject to the whims of violent groups that act largely with impunity.

Reports also came through last week of alarming abuses by government forces that had not been previously reported. On 13 August, government troops intercepted and sank a boat carrying refugees to Nhongue island from Nkomangano, Mocimboa da Praia district. The refugees had explained to the soldiers who they were and where they were going, but the government patrol ship fired on them anyway. Over 40 civilians lost their lives in the incident. The survivors had to turn back and travel overland to Palma to escape Mocimboa da Praia.

Members of security forces also reportedly raped two women in Macomia district during the weekend of 15-16 August. One woman was attacked by seven soldiers on her way from Macomia town to her home in Machova, two kilometers to the southeast along the N380. Another was attacked in a bar in the Macomia neighborhood of Nanga A. The Macomia district administrator had been working from Pemba since fleeing when the district capital was occupied in late May, but he returned to the district on 20 August after Macomia residents traveled to Pemba to plead with him to return and bring the behavior of state security forces under control. Upon arrival, he urged civilians not to leave the town and said that the government would protect the town from insurgent attacks.

Reports also came out this week attempting to establish casualty numbers in the early August battle for Mocímboa da Praia. Independent estimates put government fatalities between 60 and 90, with over a hundred wounded in the battle and up to 40 still missing. The numbers remain difficult to verify, given the government's reticence to share casualty counts.

Incident Focus: Progress in Quissanga

This week's Incident Focus examines the reasons for a significant and sustained decrease of political violence in Quissanga district. Quissanga was recently a hotbed of insurgent activity, with ACLED recording 34 total events in the district, resulting in 80 fatalities this year up until 6 May. On 25 March, insurgents began occupying Quissanga town for an extended period. On 6 May, government forces re-occupied the district capital, and around 20 May, they took an insurgent base at Cagembe. Since then, up until 1 August, ACLED has only recorded seven instances of organized political violence in the district, resulting in five fatalities. The most recent event recorded, an attempted abduction in the village of 19 de Outubro, was 1 July.

The government has made military progress in the conflict before only to see it reversed, most recently in Mocimboa da Praia district. What makes the extended lull in attacks in Quissanga district remarkable is that it has been accompanied by displaced civilians returning to their homes, at least in some parts of the district. In Bilibiza, a town that was attacked multiple times by insurgents, farmers have returned to their fields. Residents of Cagembe, Tororo, Tapara, Bem-vindo, and Ntessa have largely come back to their homes. People report being able to walk and drive through the ADPP junction, the busiest crossroads in the district, which had once been tightly controlled by insurgents. That local civilians, who likely have better information about the level of insurgent activity in the area than either the government or analysts, have chosen to return home and resume long-term economic activities like farming is a very positive sign for peace in the district.

Of course, not all is back to normal. Quissanga town is still largely empty, and not many have come back to nearby Mahate and Tandanhague. Among those who have not returned to Quissanga town is the district administrator, who remains in Metuge district working with Quissanga residents who have been displaced. Insurgents appear to have established strong networks in Quissanga town, having stayed there much longer than in other district capitals they occupied and remaining on largely civil terms with the population. That may be a deterrent for civilians who might want to return to Quissanga town, since any future insurgent incursions might be blamed on them.

Government gains in Quissanga are as reversible as they have been elsewhere, but civilian confidence in the district's security is encouraging. If effective and respectful government forces on the ground and air assets close by in Pemba can maintain security in Quissanga, it may point a way forward for the government's approach in other areas of the conflict zone.

Government Response

The biggest story in Mozambique last week was the arson [attack](#) on the offices of the independent newspapers Canal de Mocambique and CanalMoz. The papers' Maputo office was hit with molotov cocktails the night of 23 August, destroying equipment and rendering the office unusable. The assailants are unknown, but the attack was quickly classified by journalists and civil society members as an attack on press freedom in Mozambique, an issue that is closely tied to the Cabo Delgado conflict. Canal had angered the government with its coverage of Cabo Delgado, to the point where its editor, Matias Guente, was recently prosecuted for publishing reporting on security arrangements between energy companies and security forces in the province. MISA Mozambique, the Mozambican branch of the Southern African Social Communications Institute and a prominent pro-journalism NGO, which had on 18 August [called](#) on the Mozambican government to allow journalists to safely cover the conflict, immediately condemned the attack as part of an attempt to "reverse the democratic process in Mozambique."

Some potential international partners also expressed their concern, with the US and Canadian governments calling for a criminal investigation. Mozambican president Filipe Nyusi, whose government's actions have precipitated many of the calls to protect journalists in Mozambique, also condemned the attack, saying it was carried out by "strangers" and that press freedom is crucial to democracy. He promised a full investigation. Canal will continue to cover the Cabo Delgado conflict, working out of offices lent by other media outlets.

The security arrangements for natural gas exploitation in Cabo Delgado, reporting on which led to Matias Guente's prosecution, got a makeover last week. French energy major Total [signed](#) a memorandum of understanding with the Mozambican government regarding their joint approach to securing Total facilities on the Afungi peninsula. Total inherited an earlier agreement from Anadarko when they bought the American company's operations in Mozambique. The new agreement clarifies Total's role going forward. Under the memorandum, Total will assist the government's Joint Task Force -- a unit, drawn from the various segments of the Mozambican security forces, dedicated to protecting liquified natural gas infrastructure -- with logistics as the task force works to secure both Afungi and other areas where Total operates. The agreement also includes a commitment that the Joint Task Force will adhere to the [Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights](#), which establishes guidelines for interaction between private companies and public and private security providers.

Regionally, President Nyusi [gave](#) his inaugural speech as chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 17 August. In the speech, he urged regional cooperation against terrorism. He emphasized, however, that the 40th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government he was closing had focused on "preventing and combating cross-border crime, with an emphasis on terrorism." Couching counterterrorism support as preventing "cross-border" actions is in line with Nyusi's contention that the Cabo Delgado insurgency draws much of its strength from abroad. It also emphasizes the Mozambican government's position that regional support should come in the

form of border security and other indirect assistance, rather than a regional force entering Cabo Delgado.

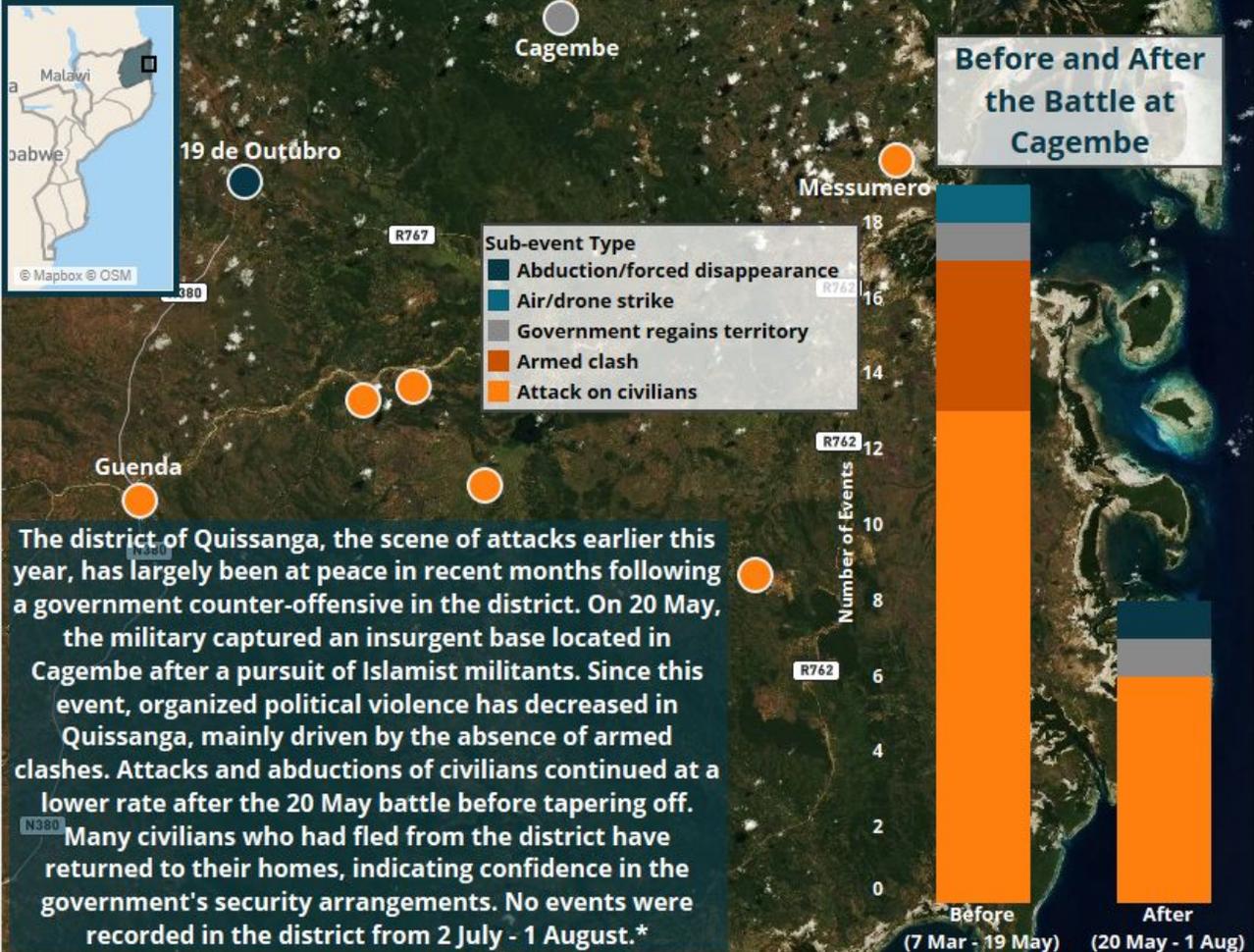
A communique released after the summit contained few specifics on how SADC might aid Mozambique in Cabo Delgado, but did request an action plan on regional security issues. It expressed SADC's solidarity with Mozambique in its ongoing struggle against terrorism, saying the "Summit welcomed the decision by the Government of the Republic of Mozambique to bring to the attention of SADC the violent attacks situation in the country, and commended the country for its continued efforts towards combating terrorism and violent attacks."

Note: There is often a lack of consensus over the spellings of place names in Mozambique. We endeavor to be consistent within Cabo Ligado publications, but be aware that alternative spellings exist and may appear in other publications.

ACLED's real-time data updates are currently paused through August 2020. Data for 2 August to 5 September will be released on 7 September.

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Organized Political Violence in Quissanga (20 May - 1 Aug 2020)



The district of Quissanga, the scene of attacks earlier this year, has largely been at peace in recent months following a government counter-offensive in the district. On 20 May, the military captured an insurgent base located in Cagembe after a pursuit of Islamist militants. Since this event, organized political violence has decreased in Quissanga, mainly driven by the absence of armed clashes. Attacks and abductions of civilians continued at a lower rate after the 20 May battle before tapering off. Many civilians who had fled from the district have returned to their homes, indicating confidence in the government's security arrangements. No events were recorded in the district from 2 July - 1 August.*

Organized Political Violence: Quissanga vs. Cabo Delgado (29 Dec 2019 - 1 Aug 2020)



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