

Cabo Ligado Weekly: 3-9 August

Published 11 August 2020

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 major news from Cabo Delgado last week was the ongoing fighting in and around Mocimboa da Praia town. The sequence of attacks there will be covered in depth in this week’s Incident Focus (below). Insurgents and government security forces have been in more or less constant running battles in the area since the evening of 5 August. Reliable casualty reports have not yet come through, but they are expected to be significant. At the end of last week, insurgents were in control of the crucial N380 crossroads town of Awasse, in western Mocimboa da Praia district, and parts of Mocimboa da Praia town, although government forces in the town were still receiving supplies through the port there.

Elsewhere in the province, an insurgent attack on 8 August on Litamanda, Macomia district, left five civilians dead and seven homes burned to the ground. Five insurgents carried out the raid, dressed in uniforms similar to the ones worn by the Mozambican military. Other sources reported a funeral procession being attacked, resulting in an unknown number of kidnappings. Many villagers in Litamanda and nearby Novo Cabo Delgado, which was attacked most recently on 26 July, have made their way to Muidumbe district in hopes of avoiding further violence. The Litamanda attack, coming in the midst of the ongoing fighting in Mocimboa da Praia, demonstrates that insurgents currently in Macomia district are operationally independent from those currently in Mocimboa da Praia district.

A report also came through last week of an earlier incident, from the week of 13 July, in which Mozambican security forces surprised six insurgents who were picking oranges at a grove in Ntessa, Quissanga district. The insurgents were armed, but their weapons were not loaded, and the government troops were able to kill four of them and capture the other two. When the captured insurgents were asked to show the location of their base, they took their captors to the area near Cagembe where Mozambican forces had destroyed an insurgent camp days earlier.

Incident Focus: Mocimboa da Praia

Insurgents began their renewed offensive in Mocimboa da Praia on the evening of 5 August, with an attack on the village of Anga, situated near the coast about 10km southeast of Mocimboa da Praia town. Homes were looted and burned down, and residents kidnapped, but numbers of each are not yet known. Over the course of that night, insurgents also struck 1 de Maio and Awasse, before beginning an assault on outlying sections of Mocimboa da Praia town around 4am.

Dyck Advisory Group helicopters joined the fight shortly thereafter, and security forces and insurgents clashed sporadically over the course of the next two days. By 8 August, security analyst Johann Smith was [calling](#) the fighting in Mocimboa da Praia “intense” and reporting that insurgents were targeting Chinese-owned businesses — and sawmills in particular — in their attacks. Also on 8 August, government troops pulled out of Ntotue, a village on the N380 between Mocimboa da Praia and Awasse, sending them to Mueda. The same day, fighting began to include Mocimboa da Praia town’s northeastern suburbs, with insurgents attacking Nkomangano.

By 9 August, insurgents were reportedly in control of Awasse and parts of Mocimboa da Praia town. The major roads out of the town — west to Awasse and north to Palma — were closed and insurgent attacks continued in Milamba and Mocimboa Velha. Fighting is still ongoing at time of writing.

Reliable casualty reports from the fighting have been hard to come by, but propagandistic casualty reports proliferated quickly. After five weeks in which the Islamic State (IS) made no claims to attacks in Mozambique, the group claimed on 6 August to have attacked two Mozambican army barracks in Mocimboa da Praia, killing or wounding 50 Mozambican soldiers, and making off with a significant stash of weapons and ammunition. There has been no confirmation of the details of the IS claim, but it did come with a new [photograph](#) of fighters with small arms ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, and AKM assault rifles.

The mysterious but decidedly pro-government DefesaMoz website, conversely, claimed a government victory in Mocimboa da Praia on 6 August, saying that security forces turned back two insurgent attacks and killed 16 insurgents. No evidence was provided to back up the assertion, nor has the government corroborated it through any official channels.

Part of what is preventing the gathering of casualty reports is the lack of electricity and cellular service in Mocimboa da Praia. From the start of this round of attacks through at least 8 August, electricity has been out and Movitel and Tmcel cellular services have been non-functional. The outages are thought to be the result of insurgent attacks on infrastructure, as cellular and electrical facilities have been insurgent targets in the past. The outages have extended north into Palma district as well. As connections come back online and more information becomes available, ACLED data will be updated accordingly.

Government Response

In Cabo Delgado, it was reported last week that members of the military were accused in July of raping six teenage girls who were living on Ibo island after their families had been displaced by the conflict. The soldiers were then transferred away from the area where the alleged rapes occurred. Security forces’ frequent, violent rejection of their ostensible responsibility to protect civilians has long been a theme of the conflict. These latest reports are further evidence of how difficult it will be to establish a truly cooperative relationship between Cabo Delgado civilians and government troops.

Some areas of government performance did improve last week, however. At long last, a government medical team reached Pangane, Macomia district, where they immediately set to treating cholera

victims. The disease has been spreading rapidly since 3 July, particularly among displaced people, killing 79. Deaths from the disease have ceased since the medical team's arrival. This news, along with improving reports from Palma, suggest that the cholera crisis is getting under control on the mainland, although new outbreaks were reported on the islands of Vamizi, Tambuzi, and Nhonge, and in Olumbe, Palma district. A new outbreak on Ilha Matemo, however, is reportedly under control.

Internationally, there was little movement last week. The head of United States (US) special operations forces in Africa [told](#) reporters that, while he is concerned about the escalation of the Cabo Delgado conflict, he wishes to avoid ever deploying US troops on the ground there. The war, he suggested, would be won by regional cooperation and economic and social investment more than by brute government force.

Prospects for regional cooperation leading to direct military support remain dim, both because Mozambique is [reportedly](#) resisting action by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the conflict in favor of seeking direct support from Zimbabwe, and because the SADC countries do not have excess budget and military capacity to send Mozambique's way. SADC's 40th Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government starts this week, during which Mozambique will be taking over as chair of the organization from Tanzania.

Finally, Savana ran a feature last week that gets at an undercovered issue in the Cabo Delgado conflict: the political cost of the conflict in Mozambique's central and southern provinces. The story recounted the lives and deaths of young soldiers who have been killed in the conflict. In both of the cases Savana profiled, the government gave the soldiers' families no information about how their sons had died, nor were the families allowed to see the bodies before the burial. The state's refusal to acknowledge the human cost of the conflict, even to those who feel it most acutely, is not the sign of a government confident in popular support for its strategy.

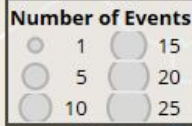
Erratum: A previous edition of the Cabo Ligado Weekly stated that an insurgent attack on Mucojo, Macomia district took place on 23 July. That attack took place on 21 July.

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 Violence Events Involving Islamist Insurgents (1 Jan - 1 Aug 2020)



Mocimboa da Praia (25 events)

Mocimboa da Praia represents a high-value target for the insurgency due to it being the seat of the district government, and because of its use as a port for the Afungi LNG site.

Miangalewa (8 events)

Miangalewa sits on the route between Quissanga and Nangade districts, yet again showing the importance of linking corridors from the sea with inland areas.

Macomia (10 events)

Macomia is a strategic location, connecting northern and southern Cabo Delgado. If insurgents can control the access routes, creating an ungovernable area, it allows for easy movement from north to south.

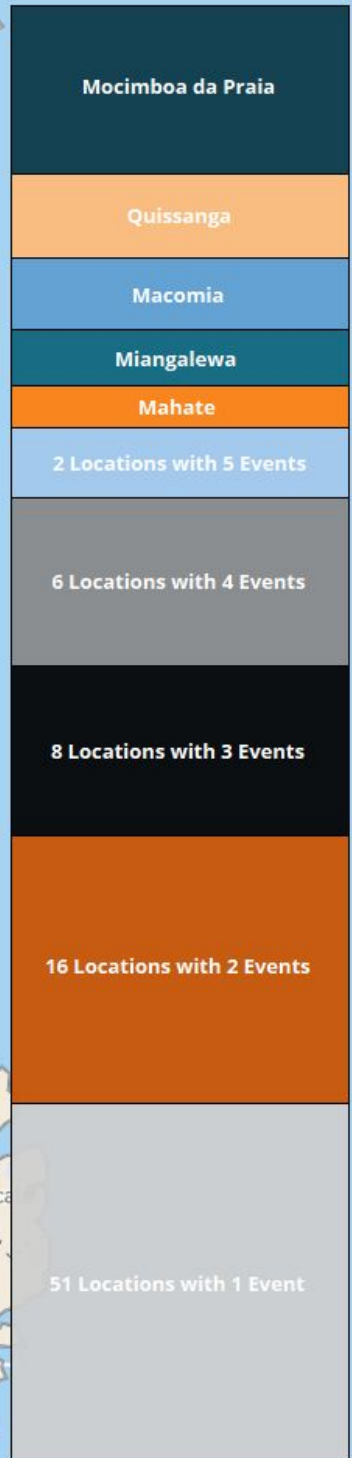
Quissanga (12 events) & Mahate (6 events)

Repeated attacks on Quissanga and Mahate may be explained by the insurgency's desire to control access routes in the region and corridors along the coast.

Repeated and Isolated Attacks

Islamist insurgents have carried out both isolated attacks as well as repeated attacks on key locations in Cabo Delgado. Insurgents remain focused on exerting control over towns and villages for short periods of time, continuously conveying a message of undeterred presence and capacity. This is achieved through repeated attacks on locations such as Mocimboa da Praia, and in one-off attacks along supply routes. Insurgent groups are reliant on locals for food supplies, and have often targeted areas where food is available. 43% of events involving insurgents have been at locations only targeted once or twice, often taking the form of ambushes along roads. As the insurgency continues, so too will both isolated and repeated attacks aimed at creating corridors of control and killing those suspected of supporting government forces.

Number of Events by Location



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