

# Cabo Ligado Weekly: 15-21 February

*Published 23 February 2021*

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## By the Numbers: Cabo Delgado, October 2017-February 2021

- Total number of organized violence events: 807
- Total number of reported fatalities from organized violence: 2,614
- Total number of reported fatalities from civilian targeting: 1,312

All ACLED data are available for download via the [data export tool](#), and a curated Mozambique dataset is available on the Cabo Ligado [home page](#).

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## Situation Summary

The first reports of major insurgent resistance to the government's ongoing offensive came in last week, beginning with an insurgent attack on government forces in Roma, Mocimboa da Praia district, on 16 February. Sporadic shooting began early that morning, growing into a heavy firefight that continued until noon. A [video](#) purporting to be of the aftermath of the fight showed a Mozambican police Casspir armored personnel carrier that had taken significant small arms fire and been hit by a rocket propelled grenade round that failed to explode. Insurgents withdrew after looting part of the village. Many civilians living in the cropland to the west of Roma fled, fearing that insurgents would return. No casualty estimates for the battle are available.

Roma sits on the road between Mueda and Mocimboa da Praia town, close to the border of the two districts and west of the crucial road junction at Awasse. That insurgents struck Roma suggests that the government, despite its offensive, has not consolidated control over the routes through western Mocimboa da Praia district that government forces will need to travel in order to reach Mocimboa da Praia town over land.

Also on 16 February, insurgents [attacked](#) government forces in Xitaxi, Muidumbe district, stealing food and military supplies. No one was killed. One member of the government security forces was injured in the fighting.

On 19 February, insurgents attacked the village of Quionga in northern Palma district near the Tanzanian border. According to a source [quoted](#) by Pinnacle News, 30 insurgents were involved in

the attack and the raiders remained in the town until the next morning. Insurgents [killed](#) four people in Quionga, burned homes — including that of the head of the Quionga administrative post — and looted food in the village. Insurgents [returned](#) to Quionga the night of 20 February but were turned away by government security forces. According to one source, the insurgents withdrew north, toward the Tanzanian border.

Insurgents also released more hostages last week in an attempt to further reduce the strain on their food resources. In addition to the five girls who [arrived](#) in Macomia town two weeks ago, last week two young men arrived in Ibo district after having been prisoners of the insurgents for a long time, Pinnacle News [reported](#).

Food shortages continue to be a crisis in Palma, as the relief [convoy](#) missions of early February have not continued. There were over 50 trucks [waiting](#) in Nangade late last week, unable or unwilling to complete their trips to Palma due to security concerns and rain that has made the road treacherous. Troops and equipment that was being used earlier in the month to escort convoys to Palma have now apparently been diverted for use elsewhere in the conflict.

### **Incident Focus: Bertolino Capitine**

General Bertolino Capitine, the deputy chief of staff of Mozambique's military, began last week to appear in the media as a personality in his own right. Lusa [covered](#) his speech to soldiers deployed in Macomia, after which he told reporters that cooperation between security forces and Cabo Delgado civilians was a prerequisite for government victory. Then, on 19 February, Capitine's interview became part of a glossy [video](#) released by the military that introduced Capitine as a man of the people focused on winning the conflict in Cabo Delgado.

The press rollout for Capitine is notable because it comes at a time of confusion over who will lead the government security effort in Cabo Delgado going forward. In January, Mozambican president Filipe Nyusi shifted control of government forces in the province from the police, under police chief Bernardino Rafael, to the military. He appointed General Eugénio Mussa as both the new military chief of staff and commander of government forces in Mueda, making Mussa the de facto theater commander. Nyusi appointed Capitine as deputy chief of staff at the same time. Mussa, however, [died](#) in early February of an undisclosed illness. No replacement has been named.

Uniformed Mozambican security force leaders rarely speak to the press. Indeed, when Mussa's statements first appeared in the media in early January, before his new appointment had been announced, observers [interpreted](#) it as a sign that he was taking on an important new role in the Cabo Delgado conflict. Capitine's position is more complicated than Mussa's was, as he is a former Renamo guerilla and some members of Frelimo will likely be wary of turning significant de facto power over to someone of his background. However, it seems as though an effort is being made to position Capitine as a worthy successor to Mussa.

Both domestic and international audiences are closely following how the military succession will play out. With government forces in the midst of major offensive operations in Cabo Delgado, it is important that there is clarity about the structure atop the chain of command. If the government's goal is still to unify its police and military efforts under one military commander, it will have to be clear who that commander is. From an international perspective, Mussa was seen as a key figure in coordinating military cooperation between Mozambique and Portugal. With Mussa dead, some in the Portuguese military are reportedly uneasy about how a promised mission to train Mozambican soldiers in counterterrorism techniques will go forward. No final decision on the mission has been made yet, although technical teams are actively [working out](#) the details. If the question of military leadership is settled soon, it may help smooth the way for Portuguese military assistance.

## **Government Response**

A new United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [report](#) put the number of people displaced in northern Mozambique at 668,000 as of the end of 2020. 68,000 people were displaced in the month of December alone. OCHA also estimates that, across Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Nampula provinces, 950,000 people are suffering severe food insecurity, 665,000 of them in Cabo Delgado itself. Since over 90% of displaced people (over 600,000) are staying in host communities rather than housed in resettlement centers, food and other resource pressures extend to host families as well as displaced people. Cholera cases are also on the rise, particularly among displaced people.

The massive mismatch between the number of displaced people and the government resources available to house and feed them drew harsh [criticism](#) of the government from civil society figures last week. Analysts with the Observatório do Meio Rural and Amnesty International decried the lack of resources being devoted to basic humanitarian relief, while sociologist Moisés Mabunda questioned the apparent lack of long-term planning for how displaced civilians might be resettled. Cabo Delgado provincial secretary of state Armindo Ngunga suggested that displaced people would likely drive long-term planning themselves, since he expects that most of them will not choose to return to the villages they fled but will instead become integrated into the communities in which they are now living.

Publishing criticism of government policies within Mozambique may become riskier going forward, as a proposed new media law would severely restrict press freedom. The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) has sounded the [alarm](#) about the proposed law, which would allow the government to prosecute journalists for defaming the president and would limit the number of Mozambicans that could work for foreign news outlets to two. The law would also ban foreign broadcast media, such as RTP and Deutsche Welle, from the country and prevent Mozambican media from reproducing foreign news content. MISA and other civil society advocates believe the law to be unconstitutional.

Whether or not the law comes into effect and passes judicial muster, the government is clearly intent on making foreign media coverage of Mozambique more difficult. Tom Bowker, editor of

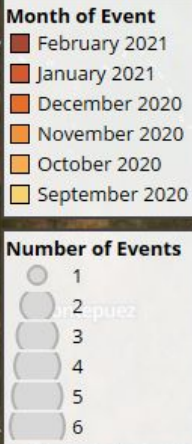
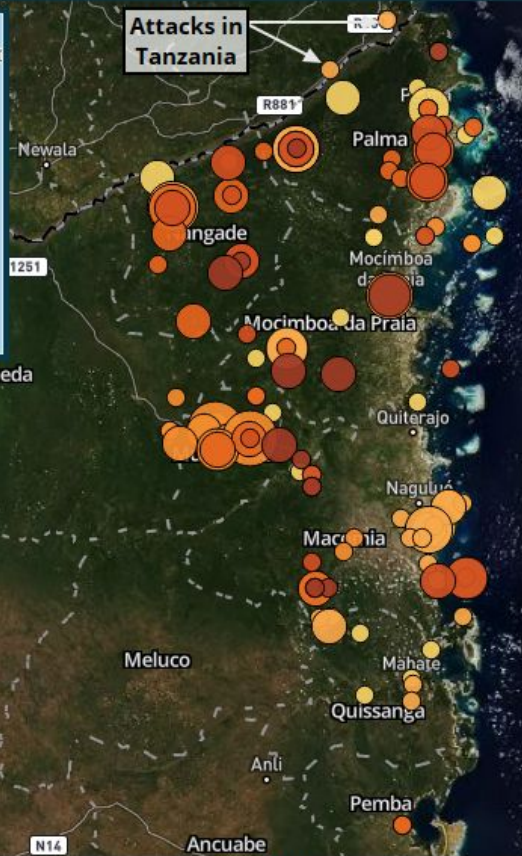
Cabo Ligado partner Zitamar News, was [expelled](#) from Mozambique last week and banned from the country for 10 years on the order of Interior Minister Amade Miquidade. Ostensibly the expulsion is punishment for lack of clarity about Zitamar's legal status, but Zitamar's well-established legal structure and the fact he was given no opportunity to appeal against the decision make clear that the expulsion had other motivations. Zitamar continues to operate, and remains a valuable partner in Cabo Ligado.

*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.*

# Ligado Weekly #38



## Attacks in Tanzania



## Insurgent Defense of Mocimboa da Praia

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## Military Succession

President Nyusi still has yet to announce a replacement for the late military chief of staff Eugénio Mussa, who died in early February. General Bertolino Capitine, Mussa's deputy, began last week to appear in the media as a personality in his own right, which could be an indication that he is being touted as Mussa's most likely successor. Both domestic and international audiences are closely following how the military succession will play out. With government forces in the midst of major offensive operations in Cabo Delgado, it is important that there is clarity about the structure atop the chain of command.

## Organized Political Violence in Cabo Delgado (1 JAN 2020 - 19 FEB 2021)

