



CABO LIGADO

15 March 2021

Cabo Ligado Monthly: February 2021

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

VITAL STATS

- ACLED records 27 organized political violence events in Cabo Delgado in February, resulting in 30 fatalities
- Over half of the deaths from the violence took place in Nangade district, where insurgents carried out attacks along the R763 intended to isolate the district capital and further cut off Palma district from the rest of the province
- Other events took place in Macomia, Mocimboa da Praia, Muidumbe, and Palma districts

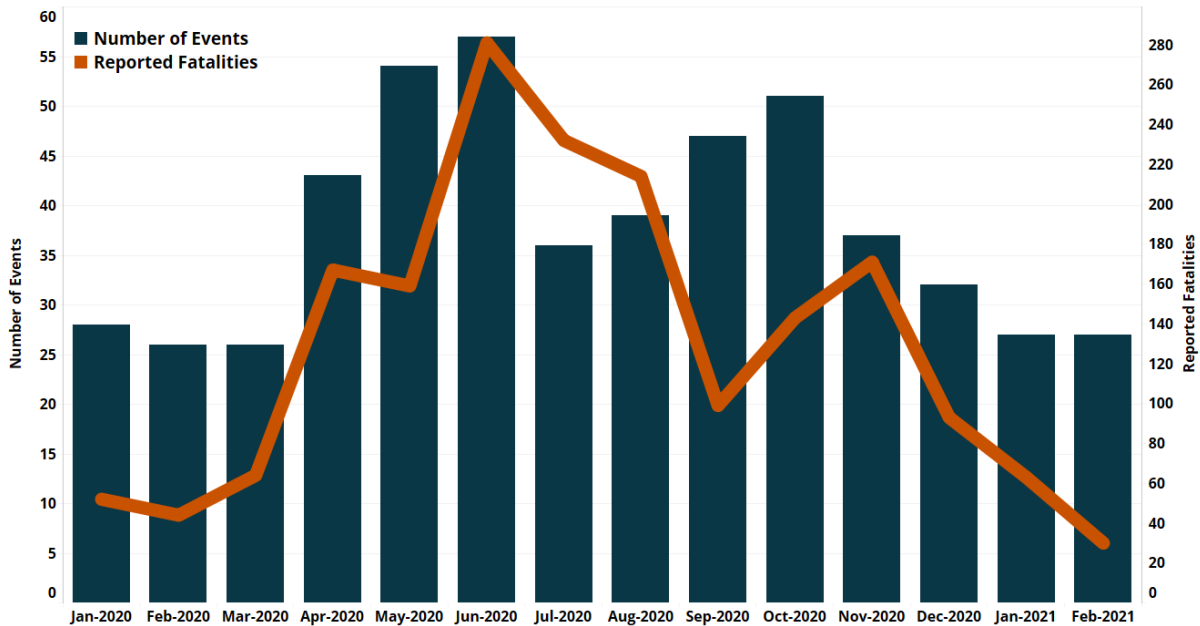
VITAL TRENDS

- With the rainy season still ongoing, event and fatality counts remain low relative to a few months ago, but in line with levels of violence observed in February 2020
- Government forces appeared to launch an offensive aimed at retaking Mocimboa da Praia, but were sidetracked by increasing insurgent operations in Nangade district
- There were fewer voices critical of the government’s approach to the conflict in Mozambique at the end of the month, with Catholic Bishop Luiz Fernando Lisboa and Zitamar News editor Tom Bowker leaving the country after politically motivated campaigns against them

IN THIS REPORT

- Evaluation of the Mozambican government’s claims to have made counterinsurgency strides during the rainy season
- Analysis of the feasibility of the 25 kilometer security cordon the Mozambican government has reportedly promised Total around the company’s Afungi facility
- A view of the Cabo Delgado conflict from the Tanzanian side of the border
- The latest on Mozambique’s negotiations to secure external support for its counterinsurgency effort

Armed, Organized Violent Events and Reported Fatalities in Cabo Delgado (Jan 2020 - Feb 2021)



FEBRUARY SITUATION SUMMARY

As in January 2021, fighting in Cabo Delgado was limited during February 2021. With many roads still difficult to navigate and resources thin on the ground, violent incidents were largely confined to the far north of the province. There, insurgents intensified and expanded their effort to isolate Palma town from the rest of Cabo Delgado by targeting the R763 road connecting it with Mueda via Nangade. Of the 30 fatalities ACLED records for the month, 27 occurred in Palma and Nangade districts.

The insurgent blockade of Palma was successful for much of the month. Though supply convoys were able to travel from Mueda to Palma on the 2nd and 6th of the month, after that, all routes seemed closed. Frequent attacks on the R763, aided by ongoing insurgent control over the land route south leading to Mocimboa da Praia and the Tanzanian government's ban on food exports over the border to Palma district, kept food and other supplies from reaching the town overland. The situation grew quite dire, with prices for a kilogram of rice climbing to an astronomical MZN400 (\$5.44) at one point and multiple deaths from hunger reported. By the end of the month, however, the Cabo Delgado provincial government and Total had both begun cabotage service to Palma town, providing food and other necessities by barge. Supplies are still tight, but the shipments appear to have fended off starvation.

Mozambican security forces appeared to have begun another offensive on Mocimboa da Praia district in the middle of the month. Helicopter attacks were reported on insurgents in the Mbau administrative post, and clashes between insurgents and government forces took place on the N380 road connecting Mocimboa da Praia and Mueda. That offensive, however, seems to have sputtered out as insurgent attacks picked up in Nangade and Palma districts. This is an ongoing challenge for Mozambican forces — the government simply does not have enough troops to simultaneously maintain a major offensive and protect large areas against insurgent counterattack.

On the political front, the most important change in February was the departure of Dom Fernando Luis Lisboa, the Catholic Bishop of Pemba. Lisboa had been an outspoken critic of the government's approach to the conflict, and had come in for sharp criticism — some of it threatening — from Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi and other figures associated with Frelimo. The Vatican transferred him to a diocese in Brazil, which some see as a victory for Nyusi and his allies. Whatever the Vatican's intention, it is clear that public criticism of Nyusi is becoming more difficult in Mozambique. The politically motivated expulsion of Zitamar News editor Tom Bowker from the country in the same month underscores that fact.

government in its effort to return a semblance of normalcy to Cabo Delgado. Though insurgents still appear entrenched in Mocimboa da Praia district and have conducted operations throughout the northeast of the province during the rainy season, they have not exerted much public pressure on central or southern districts during this time. As a result, government attempts to encourage civilians to return to those districts have produced some results. Civilians have been returning to western Macomia district in particular. Macomia district administrator Tomas Badae told reporters that there have only been around 2,300 civilians returning to the district capital, but sources estimate that the number returning to the district as a whole is far higher — perhaps by an order of 10. The influx of civilians has also pushed some humanitarian groups to take a second look at the district. Médecins Sans Frontières, which left Macomia after its health center in Macomia town was destroyed by an insurgent attack in May 2020, has now [returned](#) and is offering much-needed medical services to civilians in the district.

Yet despite gains made during this lull in the violence, there is little to indicate that the insurgents' underlying strength has been significantly reduced. The freed hostages have understandably made headlines, but they hardly represent a mass exodus from insurgent encampments. In total, there have been fewer than 20 hostages reported freed by the insurgents during the rainy season. Often reports of insurgent kidnappings do not specify how many people were taken, but if the number freed is as low as reported, it is quite likely that there has actually been a net increase in the number of civilians insurgents are holding over the course of the rainy season.

Similarly, despite reports of strain within insurgent ranks, there have been no confirmed reports of insurgent defections during the rainy season. President Nyusi's repeated offer of [amnesty](#) for Mozambican insurgents is clearly directed at producing defections, but two months on from the initial offer, the government has little to show for the effort. This may be a show of insurgent strength, indicating that fighters do not wish to defect. As noted above, however, it may demonstrate that insurgent socialization has been so effective that even insurgents who wish to return home — a process that would likely involve accepting the amnesty offer — do not believe they can do so safely because their actions have so alienated them from their home communities.

As the rains lessen, crops begin to come in, and both travel and food acquisition become easier, it is likely that insurgent operations will follow the same pattern they followed in 2020: steady growth after a rainy season lull. It remains to be seen whether insurgents can reach the same heights they attained in 2020, but, with their base areas in Mocimboa da Praia district still relatively secure, it would be a mistake to bet against them.

PROSPECTS FOR AN AFUNGI SECURITY CORDON

With ExxonMobil continuing to delay work on its proposed natural gas play, the Mozambican government needs the Total project to come to fruition as soon as possible if it has any hope of realizing the natural resource revenues that promise to revolutionize the Mozambican economy. To that end, the Mozambican government has [promised](#) in its latest security agreement with the French energy major to maintain a 25 kilometer radius security cordon around the company's natural gas project site on the Afungi peninsula in Palma district, according to Total CEO Patrick Pouyanne. The agreement, concluded in late January, replaces and expands upon a deal signed in August 2020 that established a Joint Task Force of Mozambican troops to defend the project site. It also follows Total's suspension of work at the site after insurgent operations in early January threatened Quitunda, the resettlement village that the company built just outside its fenced-off project area. Maintaining the 25 kilometer cordon now seems to be a prerequisite for continued progress on the project.

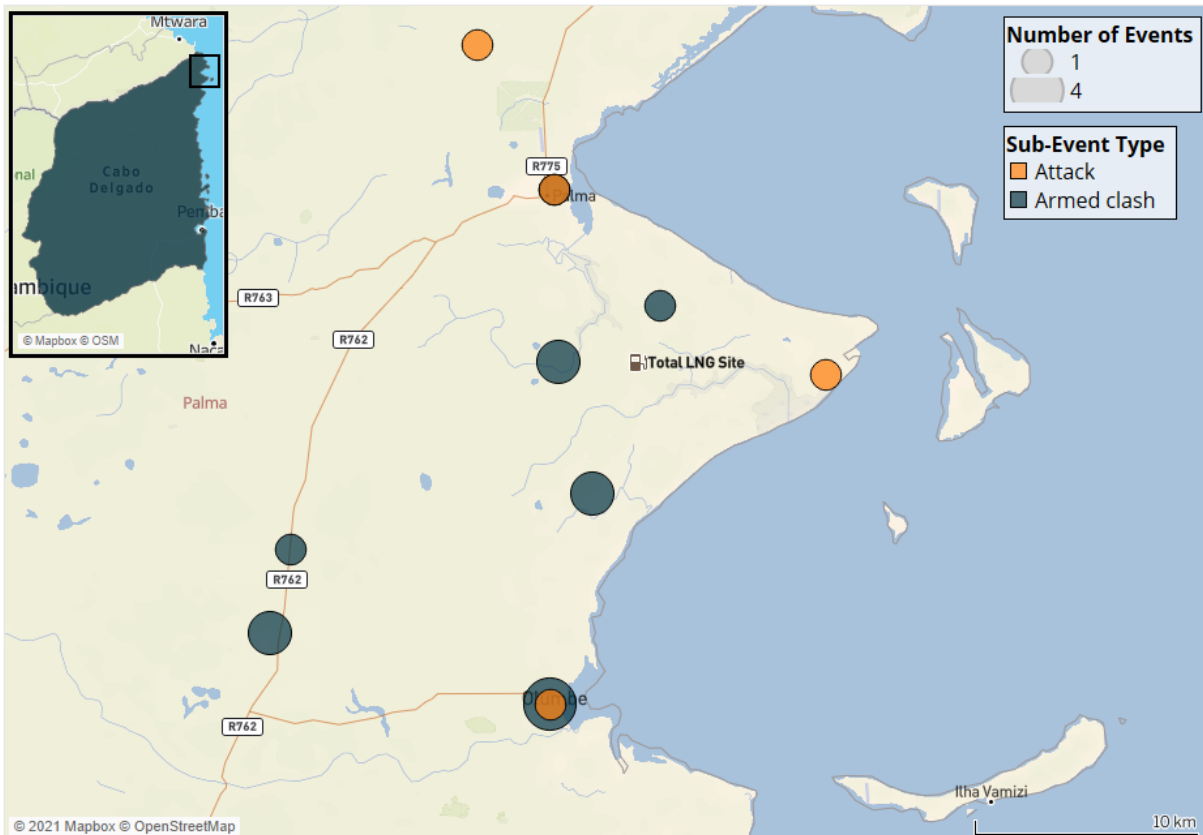
The promise of such a wide safety zone may have seemed simple to offer during negotiations in Maputo, but it will be difficult to deliver on the ground in Palma district. Between 24 August, 2020, when the initial security agreement between the Mozambican government and Total — which replaced an existing agreement between Maputo and Total's American predecessors in Cabo Delgado, Anadarko — was [reported](#) and the end of February, ACLED records 17 events involving insurgents within 25 kilometers of the Total site. That is, even with the Joint Task Force organized to Total's specifications, insurgents carried out violent operations in the new safety zone at the rate of just under three per month. Those incidents, which resulted in 25 fatalities, indicate the challenges the Joint Task Force faces in providing security over such a wide area.

The vectors of vulnerability for the security cordon are twofold: insurgent sanctuary in Mocimboa da Praia district and insurgent mobility over land and (to a lesser extent) sea. The first vector is arguably the greatest impediment to an effective cordon. Since insurgents began their occupation of Mocimboa da Praia district in August 2020, insurgents have

frequently operated along the ill-defined front line between insurgent and Joint Task Force control that cuts through the Olumbe administrative post of southern Palma district. Most of the insurgent related events recorded within the cordon in the Joint Task Force era took place south of the Total project site, nearly half within the Olumbe administrative post. Despite continued clashes in the area, the government has had little success pushing insurgents back in any durable way. Instead, insurgents have used their sanctuary in Mocimboa da Praia district to prepare operations that target villages along the road between Palma and Mocimboa da Praia and the road connecting the coastal town of Olumbe to the rest of Palma district.

Part of the reason for the insurgents' continued capacity to carry those operations off is their local knowledge and infantry focus which allow them to travel off road to infiltrate villages or set up ambushes. Mozambican forces, including the Joint Task Force, are heavily mechanized in both their equipment and their training, limiting their patrols to roadways. This asymmetry prevents Mozambican forces from offering any truly comprehensive area defense, even in small areas like the Afungi peninsula. When the zone they are meant to protect expands to a 25 kilometer cordon, the problem is magnified. Insurgents' demonstrated ability to strike in the south of the cordon and just to its north, in the Quionga area – with nearly equal impunity – underlines the problems government forces will have preventing incursions. Insurgents also have a small maritime capability that they have used in the past to bypass government forces, which vastly increases the area government forces will need to patrol to prevent insurgent encroachment.

Organized Political Violence Involving Insurgents within 25km of the Total LNG Site (24 Aug 2020 - 28 Feb 2021)



Even if the cordon succeeds, however, it is not clear that it will have the effect the government hopes it will. To be effective, a security cordon would need to isolate the town on the government's terms, creating an island of reliable state sovereignty in a contested district. That would be enough for Total to continue its work, but it would also be a major propaganda victory for the insurgents. A cordon that secures the natural gas project but leaves the rest of Palma district with few resources for protection plays directly into the insurgent talking point that the government values the gas projects above the lives of citizens. In the long run, increased belief in that narrative among local civilians makes a major attack

against the gas projects more likely, regardless of the government's security measures.

VIEW FROM TANZANIA

Tanzania's Mtwara Region and Cabo Delgado are inextricably linked through ties of family, language, faith, and economy. An effectively open border is straddled by families rooted on either side. A common language, Swahili, binds communities, while shared faith too ignores borders. Economically, Cabo Delgado has relied on Tanzania as a market for agricultural produce and fish and a supplier of consumer goods, while Tanzanians have long leased and farmed plots on the Mozambican side of the Rovuma River. The killing of nine such farmers by insurgents from Cabo Delgado in June 2019 was the first high profile attack on Tanzanians during the conflict.

Attacks have continued intermittently each year since then. Incidents along the Tanzania-Mozambique border continued in February. On the Mozambican side, there have been repeated attacks on border posts in Palma and Nangade districts. In Tanzania, there was at least one incident on 17 February at Mahurunga in Kitaya Ward, across from Namoto border post in Palma District, and just 20 kilometers from Mtwara town. According to one source, a group moving to the Pundandar area from Tanzania clashed with Tanzanian security forces. Two other sources reported a village being attacked. This incident has not been reported in Tanzania media. A media blackout put in place by the state has been effective, with considerably less news coming out of Mtwara than Cabo Delgado.

Since 2018, Tanzanian authorities have sought to counter the insurgency by targeting recruitment, supply, and transit networks in Tanzania, and attempting to control cross border movement. Given repeated incidents along the border, the impact of the government's moves on the insurgency in Cabo Delgado and its support networks in Tanzania is unclear. The approach does, however, have immediate impacts on the livelihoods, and lives, of people on both sides of the border. The isolationist stance, typical of President John Pombe Magufuli's administration, will not help bring about moves towards a multilateral solution.

Mtwara Region itself, and to an extent neighbouring Ruvuma Region, has been under a security lockdown since 2018. In practice, the lockdown requires coordinated action by the Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF), the police's paramilitary Field Force Unit (FFU), as well as the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service (TISS). More than once, Tanzania's Inspector General of Police (IGP) Simon Sirro has said that anyone getting involved with the conflict in Cabo Delgado will be dealt with in the same way as those involved in the assassinations of police and local government officials in Pwani Region in 2015-2017. Those killings, conducted by a jihadist group, prompted a security operation in 2017 centred on Pwani's Kibiti District. 380 people disappeared as a result of the operation, opposition parliamentarians [alleged](#). Dozens of bodies [found](#) washed up on beaches in Dar es Salaam and as far north as Tanga in the second half of 2017 are presumed to have been victims of that operation. Others that escaped are understood to have fled south to Cabo Delgado, and north-west to Democratic Republic of Congo.

The lack of accountability for the Kibiti operation may have emboldened the security forces, which in turn may have alienated local communities. IGP Sirro has admitted that many of those involved in attacks in Mtwara come from the region, and are known to their communities. Following the 28 October attack on Michenjele, he appealed directly to parents in the village to divert their children from becoming involved, and said in a TV broadcast to those that might join the insurgents, "you know what we'll do with you." Yet three years of security operations did not prevent the largest insurgent attack in Tanzania, in Kitaya in October 2020.

Tanzanian forces have for the most part resisted entering the conflict in an offensive capacity, though in the days after the 28 October attacks in Tandahimba District, people in Mozambique's Nangade and Palma Districts alleged shelling by Tanzanian security forces that injured at least 12 people.

Instead, the Tanzanian government has focused primarily on trying to close the border with Mozambique as much as possible, which has produced some problematic outcomes. The ban on cross border trade has contributed to the rise in basic food prices in Palma in recent weeks. The forced return of refugees in late September, and a refusal to allow international agencies to assess the problem, shuts off one escape route for a threatened population, forcing people, particularly in Palma District, to take longer riskier routes south.

Just meters across the Rovuma from Cabo Delgado, with its own people deeply affected by the conflict, Tanzania will

need to be part of any solution to Mozambique's northern insurgency. Tanzania has thus far preferred to deal directly with Mozambique on the conflict rather than through any multilateral institutions. Progress on cooperation has been slow. However, Tanzanian support for any solution that involves Western intervention in Cabo Delgado is unlikely. Even Covid-19 vaccines are regarded as neo-colonialist in Dar es Salaam. Humanitarian relief will also remain blocked on the Tanzanian side for the foreseeable future, due to Tanzania's determination to avoid having a permanent refugee population in its south like there is in the country's northwest. Logistical support via Mtwara to future humanitarian operations in Cabo Delgado remains unlikely.

INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS

Efforts to put in place an international support package to expedite military assistance for Mozambique continue to be frustrated by Maputo's ongoing delay in developing a clear wish list for assistance needs. Nevertheless, as the most active members of the European Union (EU) on the Cabo Delgado file, France and Portugal pushed forward this month with their effort in this regard. [According](#) to Africa Intelligence, renewed efforts by the French government to craft a security support package followed a meeting between the head of the Africa Section at the General Directorate of International Relations and Strategy of the Ministry of Defense, Colonel Bruno Pithois, and executives of the oil giant Total in late January on the deteriorating security situation. This followed an insurgent incursion close to the liquified natural gas (LNG) site on the Afungi peninsula earlier that month. France has been looking to help Maputo with maritime security for some time now, but, like many other international players offering assistance, has been held at bay by a paucity of clear direction from the Mozambicans. The Afungi alert, however, has provided an opportunity for France to step up the pressure, building on Total's demands for enhanced protection of the LNG development.

Meanwhile, Portugal's Foreign Minister, Augusto Santos Silva, has [urged](#) the EU to accelerate efforts to provide security assistance to Mozambique. Portugal, which currently holds the six-month rotating EU presidency, is using its time in the president's chair to press home its support for Maputo. Importantly, Silva also emphasised the importance of the EU working in "close cooperation" with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which seems to have been pushed to one side for the moment by Mozambique. A communique from Mozambique's foreign ministry on 12 February declared that the dedicated SADC Summit that had been scheduled in January and then postponed at the last moment would convene either in May or June, depending on the COVID-19 situation. This move has reinforced perceptions that Maputo has a limited interest in SADC involvement, although this does not exclude a continued interest in exploring options for bilateral support from some neighboring states, including Zimbabwe and South Africa, according to Cabo Ligado sources.

Also in early February, Portugal's Defence Minister, João Cravinho, [confirmed](#) a technical mission had been in Mozambique in January to help design a bilateral training support programme to develop counterinsurgency capacity with special operations and marine units of the Mozambican military. Portugal will be deploying a team of sixty trainers and other support staff that could be in place by April. This would be complemented with logistical support and equipment tied to the training program and could be amplified within a wider EU support program that has yet to be fleshed out on the basis of the envisaged Mozambican roadmap of needs. While Mozambique will be keen to secure this support, it is likely to be less enthusiastic about the suggestion that the support may be accompanied by pressure to strengthen political dialogue as envisaged in the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy.

As part of a continental tour to boost support for Nigeria's candidacy to the African Union's Peace and Security Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs Geoffrey Onyeama [visited](#) Mozambique in January 2021, where he met with Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosário, and offered to share Nigeria's lengthy experience of fighting Islamist insurgency, as well as support to Maputo's counter-terrorism efforts.