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**Hanns  
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# INSURGENCY, ILLICIT MARKETS AND CORRUPTION

The Cabo Delgado  
conflict and its  
regional implications

JULIA STANYARD | ALASTAIR NELSON | GREG ARDÉ | JULIAN RADEMEYER

FEBRUARY 2022





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February 2022

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Cover: A destroyed house in a village outside Macomia, Cabo Delgado, 24 August 2019. The village had been attacked by insurgents three weeks before. © Marco Longari/AFP via Getty Images

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A photograph showing several Mozambican soldiers in camouflage uniforms standing in a village that has been severely damaged. The ground is covered in rubble, including large logs and charred remains. In the background, there are several buildings with thatched roofs, some of which appear to be partially destroyed or under construction. Palm trees are visible, some with fronds that look like they have been damaged. The sky is clear and blue. The overall scene depicts the aftermath of a conflict.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS AND SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Mozambican soldiers at a building torched by insurgents, Naunde, Cabo Delgado, June 2018.

© Joaquim Nhamirre/AFP via Getty Images

## Key takeaways

- Trafficking routes through northern Mozambique are resilient and have adapted to the new security situation. This includes routes shifting away from areas where insurgents hold territory and conflict is most intense. For example, drug trafficking routes have moved south through southern Cabo Delgado and Nampula.
- The main sources of funding for the insurgency are local, primarily obtained from the support of local businesspeople, cash and goods seized during attacks, and looting. Involvement in the illicit economy remains a small proportion of their funding base, mostly through kidnap for ransom.
- The factors which helped create the insurgency – a breakdown in governance and delivery of government services, socio-economic exclusion, rampant corruption and organized crime, elite capture of resources, and ethnic and religious divides – still remain in Cabo Delgado and throughout northern Mozambique.
- The insurgency is evolving. While Rwandan and Southern African Development Community (SADC) intervention has helped Mozambican forces recapture territory, the conflict continues and has resurged in parts of Cabo Delgado and spread into other provinces. The insurgents have re-established their connection with Islamic State, as suggested by IS propaganda around recent attacks.
- Islamist extremist networks in South Africa are not widespread and do not appear to have many links to the insurgency in northern Mozambique. However, key institutions to monitor and prosecute extremism in South Africa are weak, which could be a problem if the regional threat changes.
- The relationship with ADF in Uganda is important to the insurgents for basic training, as a rear base, and more recently for shared specialist training in bomb-making.

## Summary recommendations

### For the Mozambican government:

- Ensure stability of local governance structures and tackle drivers of corruption.
- Improve trust between state and local populations, for example by bringing local civil society and community leaders into governance roles.
- Invest in the region to address economic inequality, in a way that is transparent and locally based.
- Professionalize law enforcement agencies into organizations that protect and serve all citizens of Mozambique. Reforms should focus on improving trust between the local population and the state.
- Use specialist prosecutorial and police teams in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula to tackle the illicit economies. This can be done with international partners.
- Report transparently about developments in Cabo Delgado and other provinces. Allow national, regional, and international press free and easy access.

### For SADC:

- Support key member states to collaborate on regional threats and improve intelligence-sharing.
- Support Mozambique to address the humanitarian crisis in the north and to promote transparency and unimpeded press access to the region.
- Support Mozambique to create the changes in security force culture and management recommended above, in order to improve security force relationships with local people.
- Act as a regional watchdog for human rights abuses, transparency and corruption.



### **For the international community:**

- Focus on supporting processes that strengthen local governance systems and build institutions that are more resilient to corruption, more transparent, and expose and prosecute all human rights abuses.
- As far as possible, provide direct international development support to northern Mozambique at the provincial and district level, rather than providing support via the federal government.
- Provide direct support to local non-government organizations and civil society groups.
- Embed bilateral and multilateral support to military and police training missions in a joint strategy with preconditions that the Mozambican security cluster is reformed to be more professional, effective and service oriented.

### **On behalf of civil society:**


- The critical role in conflict resolution and monitoring that Mozambican civil society organizations play should be recognized and supported by the Mozambican government and international community.
- The international community should provide direct support to Mozambican civil society.
- The Mozambican government should allow civil society organizations the freedom to operate.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

**A localized insurgency  
with regional implications**

Food packages are distributed by the World Food Programme to internally displaced persons fleeing violence in Cabo Delgado, February 2021. © Alfredo Zuniga/AFP via Getty Images



**T**he northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado has been dubbed *Cabo Esquecido* or the ‘forgotten cape’ because it has long been Mozambique’s poorest and most politically marginalized region despite its wealth of natural resources in rubies and natural gas.<sup>1</sup> The rise of an insurgent group, which has terrorized the population since 2017, means that eyes around the world are now focused on this formerly ‘forgotten’ region.

Yet the region has always been a key economic corridor in one sense, namely for illicit trafficking flows that traverse the East African coast. Drug trafficking (chiefly of heroin and, more recently, methamphetamines and cocaine), human smuggling, illicitly exported timber, illegal wildlife products, and smuggled gems and gold all pass from or through Cabo Delgado. The prevalence of organized crime has shaped the region’s political economy and contributed to the breakdown of governance in which the insurgency emerged.

As the conflict has worn on, the question of the insurgent group’s – known locally as al-Shabaab (though unrelated to al-Shabaab in Somalia) – involvement in or control of illicit economies has been the subject of intense speculation, politically driven allegations and, at times, outright disinformation.

This report aims to cut through this noise and provide the most detailed analysis available on al-Shabaab’s relationship to the illicit economy. The report draws on fieldwork the GI-TOC has been conducting in northern Mozambique since 2018 and finds that the involvement of the insurgent group in the illicit economy remains a small proportion of their funding base, mostly through kidnap for ransom. The main sources of funding for the insurgency are local, primarily through support from local business-people, and cash, weapons and goods seized during attacks.

Trafficking routes through northern Mozambique have been disrupted as criminal networks have sought alternative, more secure routes. These networks are, however, highly resilient and have adapted to the new security situation. For example, drug trafficking routes have moved south through southern Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces. Many of the illicit flows through Mozambique, such as drug trafficking, have not slowed. On the contrary, drug trafficking has grown and diversified while the insurgency has worn on. This means northern Mozambique continues to be a key illicit economic corridor to the wider region.



**FIGURE 1** Northern Mozambique.

The Cabo Delgado conflict has implications across the region. As international forces from Rwanda and the SADC have made inroads in recapturing insurgent-held territory since August 2021, there are fears that fighters could scatter to other regions of Mozambique and internationally. This is particularly because foreign fighters make up a significant proportion of al-Shabaab's fighting force, though the group remains majority Mozambican, and Mozambican led.<sup>2</sup> Attacks in the Niassa province – the first of the conflict – suggest this is already happening.<sup>3</sup> Niassa Province and Nampula Province, which borders Cabo Delgado to the south, have been key recruiting grounds for the insurgent group. The insurgency's connections to Islamic State have waxed and waned over the course of the conflict,

based on an analysis of the global Islamist group's propaganda channels. A spate of propaganda around recent attacks in Mozambique suggests the insurgents have re-established these connections recently. The loose affiliation is mutually opportunistic, offering the Cabo Delgado insurgents a global publicity platform and foreign fighters, and offering Islamic State a new frontier on which to fight the Islamist cause.

Islamic State issued a direct warning that if South Africa were to intervene militarily in Cabo Delgado, (as it has now done as part of the SADC force), it would retaliate with attacks in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> There are fears that insurgents linked to Islamic State in Mozambique could inspire Islamic State adherents elsewhere in the region to either stage attacks or

support the Mozambican group through manpower and finances. Our analysis of this regional threat therefore focused specifically on South Africa. The country has seen several Islamic State-linked incidents since 2015.<sup>5</sup> There are interconnections between the individuals involved in these cases and jihadists in other countries, including some connections to Mozambique. However, close analysis of these cases suggests Islamist extremist networks in South Africa are not widespread and links to the insurgency in northern Mozambique are infrequent.

In spite of the weak connections to insurgency in South Africa, key institutions to monitor and prosecute extremism in the country are weak, as evidenced by frequent delays and derailments of terrorism prosecutions. This is part of the wider deterioration of South Africa's security institutions in recent years due to widespread corruption, maladministration and the 'state capture' scandals that have dominated South Africa's political sphere. If the regional terrorism threat worsens, these institutions are not well prepared to respond.

The insurgency in Mozambique has been born out of deep-seated grievances over economic inequality and political exclusion. While local people in Cabo Delgado have borne decades of government neglect, extreme poverty and widespread corruption, they have seen elite politically connected groups seizing

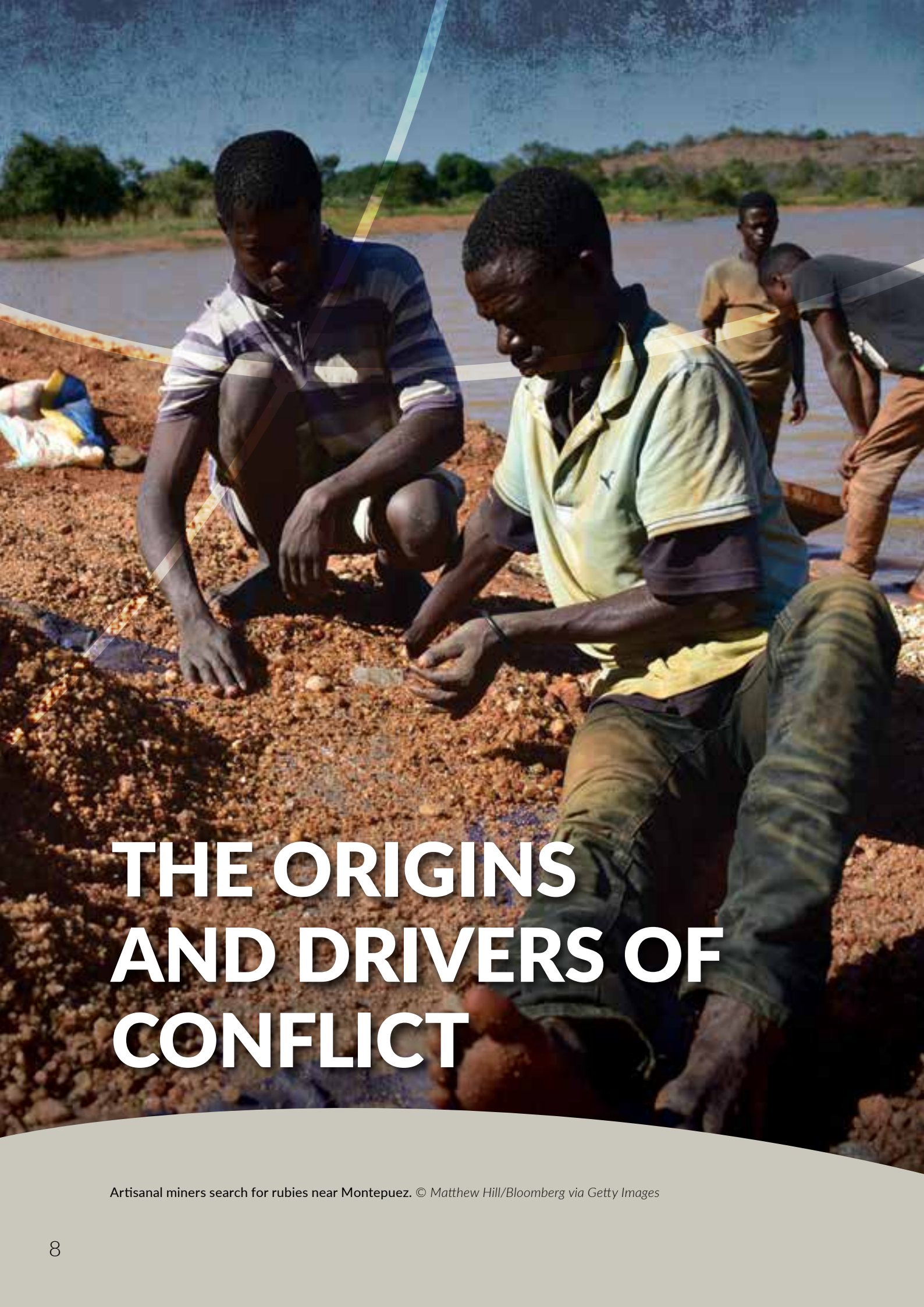
the benefits of the region's natural resources and profiteering from criminal markets. These inequalities have been drawn over ethnic and religious lines, between the politically dominant Christian-majority Makonde and the Muslim-majority Mwani and Makua ethnic groups. These political grievances have been channelled through religious extremism.

The drivers of extremism still remain in Cabo Delgado and throughout northern Mozambique. To create a sustainable peace in the region, the government needs to invest in local development and ensure that such investment is transparent to local communities, establish service-oriented and transparent local governance and address the drivers of corruption. Civil society must be afforded the freedom to play a meaningful role in conflict resolution, the press must be given unimpeded access to report openly and the international community must provide direct support to the region and play a watchdog role over human rights abuses perpetrated by police and military.

Currently, the prevailing view in Mozambique is that the government will prioritize security for gas developments in Cabo Delgado, rather than sustainable development for the local population and improved governance. This would create the risk of a resurgence of violence, making northern Mozambique a source of continuing instability that could have knock-on effects regionally.


## Methodology

This report draws on research conducted from September to November 2021. A team comprising researchers specializing in organized crime, investigative journalists and counterterrorism experts conducted over 100 interviews over three months in Cabo Delgado and Maputo in Mozambique, and Durban and Cape Town in South Africa. Interviewees included individuals involved in illicit economies in Cabo Delgado, people connected to the insurgency, other individuals working in business and security in Cabo Delgado, members of extremist networks in South Africa, prosecutors, security sources, government officials and regional security experts. We analyzed media and information released by the insurgents and by central Islamic State media via encrypted channels and court documents relating to counterterrorism prosecutions in South Africa. This study builds on extensive research into the illicit economies of northern Mozambique that the GI-TOC has been conducting since 2018.<sup>6</sup>



# THE ORIGINS AND DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

Artisanal miners search for rubies near Montpez. © Matthew Hill/Bloomberg via Getty Images



**T**he first inklings of sectarian strife in Mozambique, and the genesis of the group which would become al-Shabaab, were years in the making. Violence first emerged in October 2017 when insurgents led attacks on three police stations, resulting in 20 deaths, which were mostly members of the attacking group but also police officers and a civilian. Since these first attacks, al-Shabaab has evolved. Their attacks have grown in scale and sophistication, from early attacks on villages by small groups primarily armed with machetes, to more tactically complex attacks against larger targets with sophisticated weaponry.

They have claimed allegiance to Islamic State since 2019. In March 2021, al-Shabaab captured and held the regional port of Mocímboa da Praia for a year and launched a major attack on the town of Palma, the site of a large natural gas development project of the French energy giant Total Energies. The project was suspended in light of the security situation, though Total have stated they aim to restart work in 2022. Al-Shabaab have committed grave human rights abuses against the civilian population, including beheadings, kidnappings of young women and forcing recruits to join their ranks, and have caused more than 800 000 people to flee the area.

The genesis of the conflict, rooted as it is in the complex political landscape of Cabo Delgado, has been the subject of a great deal of analysis from academics and researchers as the conflict has worn on.<sup>7</sup> Three interlinked themes emerge as key to understanding what sparked and continues to drive the insurgency, namely socio-economic exclusion driven by political elites linked to the national government, the emergence of religious extremism, and tensions between Cabo Delgado's main ethnic groups. Experts disagree as to which of these is the most important factor, yet they are best understood as mutually reinforcing considering that economic, religious and ethnic divides have fractured communities along the same fault lines.

# Key developments in the insurgency in Cabo Delgado

**Early 2007**  
Mocímboa da Praia  
An emerging Islamist sect in Cabo Delgado is first reported, as some youth groups begin to challenge established Muslim religious authorities and espouse a more conservative form of Islam.<sup>8</sup> This sect is understood to have been the forerunner of the insurgent group.

**May 2009**  
Montepuez  
Large ruby deposit discovered in the region of Montepuez.<sup>9</sup> Today, Mozambique produces as much as 80% of the world's ruby supply.<sup>10</sup>

**18 February 2010**  
Rovuma Basin  
Huge reserves of natural gas discovered off the coast of northern Mozambique by Anadarko.<sup>11</sup> Other large-scale reserves in the same area were discovered in the following years.

**March 2012**  
Montepuez  
Montepuez Ruby Mining is granted a 25-year concession for ruby mining and prospecting in the region.<sup>12</sup> The company was formed in June 2011.<sup>13</sup>

**2012**  
Montepuez  
Allegations of human rights abuses and violence towards artisanal miners are levelled against security forces at the Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM) concession, from 2012 over several years.<sup>14</sup> In 2019, Gemfields (which part-owns MRM) agrees to pay US\$7.6 million compensation to a group of artisanal miners and residents.<sup>15</sup> The abuses fuel discontent in local communities.<sup>16</sup>

**2012**  
Mombasa, Kenya  
Radical Islamist cleric Aboud Rogo is shot and killed in Mombasa, Kenya, in a hit widely believed to have been carried out by Kenyan security forces.<sup>17</sup> Rogo was a hugely influential preacher and allegedly the key leader of Somali jihadist group al-Shabaab's operations in Kenya. His fundamentalist teachings, which called for the rejection of the state and the embrace of armed jihad, were influential on the emerging extremist movement in Mozambique.<sup>18</sup>

**2015–2016**  
Mocímboa da Praia  
Followers of the conservative Islamist group clash with police and mainstream Muslim groups in a series of incidents in 2015 and 2016.<sup>19</sup> The group was making demands for a more conservative social order, such as calling for alcohol bans and for children to be educated in madrasas, not secular schools.



Images circulated in 2016 allegedly show fighters loyal to Islamic State training in caves in north-east Tanzania. A crackdown by Tanzanian security forces is said to have caused fighters to flee into neighbouring Mozambique, joining the growing Islamist movement.

**8 November 2016**  
Palma  
The Mozambican government approves a community resettlement plan to make way for gas development near Palma.<sup>20</sup> A report from Anadarko said over 550 families would have to be relocated, 952 would lose access to farmland and 3000 would also lose access to fishing grounds.<sup>21</sup> Communities were angered at the reportedly insufficient compensation agreed.<sup>22</sup>

2015

2016

2017

**2017**  
Montepuez  
Thousands of artisanal miners are expelled from mine sites by security forces for unlicensed mining. Many were forced to return to home districts in Mozambique and southern Tanzania. Some of these miners reportedly join the growing extremist group, who are protesting against corrupt governance and elite control of resources.<sup>26</sup>

**2017**  
Southern Tanzania  
Splinter groups of other extremists move south from Tanzania, following a state crackdown on their activities. This helps shape the Cabo Delgado Islamist sect into a militarized group with an extremist ideology.<sup>27</sup>



One of the earliest known images of the al-Shabaab fighters, from Mocímboa da Praia in October 2017. Early attacks generally targeted government buildings and police stations.

**December 2017**  
The Mozambican government carries out a naval bombardment and helicopter raid on the village of Mitumbate in the Mocímboa de Praia district, believed to be al-Shabaab's stronghold, killing 50 people, including children, and detaining 200.<sup>30</sup>



Ivory that was being smuggled from Zanzibar to Pemba (en route to Asia) on a dhow that docked in Mocímboa da Praia late at night on 4 October 2017. The dhow was also carrying migrants from Somalia and Ethiopia en route to South Africa. The facilitator who arranged the transport was known to be a jihadist sympathizer. These illicit flows through Mocímboa da Praia have been disrupted during the conflict.

2018

**December 2018**  
Human Rights Watch estimates that by December 2018, about 300 suspected al-Shabaab members had been arrested by the defence and security forces, more than 400 houses had been burned, and about 10 000 people had been displaced and were receiving food aid from the World Food Programme.<sup>32</sup>

**January 2019**  
Residents in Palma protest increasing insurgent attacks and violent military responses. Among other grievances, protesters allege that the insurgents are funded by powerful political figures in Mozambique to get control of their land, which has been increasing in value due to foreign investment in Cabo Delgado for its resources.<sup>33</sup>

**29 January 2019**  
Three Ugandan nationals arrested in Cabo Delgado on suspicion of being involved in al-Shabaab attacks and leading 'training camps' for jihadists.<sup>34</sup>

**March 2018**  
Three Mozambican nationals are arrested in eastern DRC. They were reportedly receiving training at a jihadist base.<sup>31</sup>

**April 2018**  
Images are circulated online that show al-Shabaab members pledging allegiance to Islamic State.<sup>29</sup>



Insurgents pose around an Islamic State flag in an image shared on social media channels in June 2018. Two are allegedly South African nationals Renaldo Smith (second left, back row) and Mohammed Suliman (second right, back row).

2019

**25 April 2019**  
Pemba  
Cyclone Kenneth makes landfall, causing an estimated US\$100m in damage to homes, crops, infrastructure, boats and equipment,<sup>36</sup> worsening the humanitarian situation in Cabo Delgado.

**25 April 2019**  
DRC  
The first Islamic State publication on ISCAP, the Islamic State Central Africa Province, which would later come to include operations in both the DRC and Mozambique, is published.<sup>37</sup> A few days previously, Islamic State claimed its first attack in DRC.

**4 June 2019**  
Metobi  
Islamic State claims its first attack in Mozambique in the village of Metobi, where insurgents attacked Mozambican forces.<sup>38</sup> Since this attack Islamic State has claimed over 50 attacks in Mozambique, a small fraction of the total violence carried out by al-Shabaab in Cabo Delgado.<sup>39</sup>



The first Islamic State publication referring to attacks in Mozambique, 6 June 2019.

**23 March, 2019**  
Syria  
Baghuz, the last remaining territory of Islamic State in Syria, is recaptured by Syrian government forces.<sup>35</sup>





30 January 2020  
Islamic State claims the deaths of 22 Mozambican soldiers along with an attack in DRC.



An al-Shabaab leader makes a speech during an attack in Quissanga, 26 March 2020, brandishing an Islamic State flag.

April 2020  
South African private military company Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) deploys troops and helicopters in Cabo Delgado.<sup>47</sup> Insurgents shot down one of the DAG helicopters on 8 April 2020.<sup>48</sup>



Insurgents surround a downed helicopter belonging to private military company DAG on Quirimbas island, 8 April 2020. The footage was later shared via Islamic State channels.



An issue of Islamic State publication Al Nabā from 16 April 2020, in which they report attacking two towns in Cabo Delgado. The other branch of Islamic State Central Africa Province reports attacks in eastern DRC.



Al-Shabaab insurgents make a statement warning the Tanzanian government of their intention to overthrow the political order, before their first attack on Tanzanian soil in October 2020.

13 November 2019  
Ngongo, Rovuma River  
First reported attack in Tanzania by insurgents based in Mozambique takes place,<sup>41</sup> leaving six dead and seven injured.<sup>42</sup>

7 April 2020  
Al-Shabaab allegedly massacre 52 people who refuse to join the insurgency, beheading many victims.<sup>46</sup>

28 May 2020  
Macomia Town  
A group of 120–150 insurgents attack Macomia Town.<sup>49</sup> Government buildings are targeted and the black Islamic State flag is hoisted over the town centre, before insurgents withdraw.<sup>50</sup>

October 2020  
The number of people internally displaced by the insurgency reaches 500 000, according to UN estimates.<sup>53</sup>

23 November 2020  
Maputo  
Governments of Mozambique and Tanzania agree to joint operations against insurgents, with efforts to be focused on the Rovuma border.<sup>58</sup> Tanzania also deploys 516 suspected insurgents to Mozambique from its custody.

2020

September 2019  
200 troops from Russian private military company Wagner Group arrive in Mozambique.<sup>40</sup>

March 2020  
The number of people internally displaced by the insurgency reaches 100 000, according to UN estimates.<sup>45</sup>



23 March 2020  
A cache of weapons seized from government forces during an attack on Mocimboa da Praia, which insurgents triumphantly showed on social media.



9 April 2020  
Islamic State lays claim to an attack in Muidumbe, Cabo Delgado.



Islamic State reports that they shot down a Mozambican army helicopter (operated by DAG), 23 April 2020. Footage was released showing insurgents around the wreckage.



3 July 2020  
Islamic State threatened to attack gas projects in Mozambique and warned South Africa that, if it sent troops to Cabo Delgado, IS would 'open a fighting front within its borders'.



27 August 2020  
Islamic State claims the capture of Mocimboa da Praia in their publication Al Nabā.

November 2020–May 2021  
During this period there is almost no communication from Islamic State regarding operations in Mozambique, leading speculation that the Mozambican insurgents are no longer affiliated to Islamic State.<sup>57</sup>

14 October 2020  
Kitaya, Mtwara Region, Tanzania  
The second reported cross-border attack by insurgents from Mozambique,<sup>54</sup> leaving 20 reported killed.<sup>55</sup> Video surfaced of insurgents claiming that they intend to bring down Tanzanian president John Magufuli.<sup>56</sup> Islamic State claims the attack.

**April 2021**  
The number of people internally displaced by the insurgency reaches 700 000, according to UN estimates.<sup>65</sup>



Thousands of people are evacuated from Palma by boat following an insurgent attack in late March 2021.



**1 April 2021**  
Islamic State claims that 'caliphate soldiers storm Palma' and celebrates the fact that the event 'caused a stir on an international level'.

**6 April 2021**  
DAG's contract with the Mozambican government ends.<sup>67</sup>



**Approx. June 2021**  
Islamic State accuses 'unbelievers' in Western media of portraying the conflict as a 'war against gas' rather than (as they see it) a religious war of true Muslim believers against 'crusaders'.

**1 June 2021**  
Exiled Rwandan journalist and critic of President Paul Kagame's regime, Cassien Ntamuhanga, arrested in Mozambique on 23 May 2021, and handed over to the Rwandan embassy in Maputo on 1 June 2021.

**9 July 2021**  
Kigali, Rwanda  
The Rwandan government announces deployment of 1 000 soldiers from the Rwandan Defense Force to Mozambique.<sup>71</sup>

**21 July 2021**  
First SADC troops deployed to Mozambique.<sup>72</sup>



Images of an insurgent camp captured by Rwandan and Mozambican forces in October 2021. The images show the vehicles and equipment recaptured from the insurgents and the harsh forest conditions the fighters were living in.

**September 2021**  
Civilians begin to return to some areas previously controlled by the insurgents and recaptured by government forces.<sup>75</sup>

**5 October 2021**  
SADC extends troop deployment in Mozambique.<sup>78</sup>

**7 October 2021**  
Uganda  
First attack claimed by the Islamic State's Central Africa Province in Uganda, signalling an expansion of their sphere of operations from DRC.<sup>79</sup>

**November–December 2021**  
Niassa  
Insurgents stage several attacks in the Niassa province, an area which previously had not experienced violence related to the conflict.



A vehicle recovered in a raid on insurgent camps in Muera, south of Mbau, by SADC forces in August 2021.

**23 August 2021**  
Maputo  
The 'Hidden Debts' trial begins in Maputo. Nineteen people accused of blackmail, forgery, embezzlement and money laundering, including the son of former president Armando Guebuza, Ndambi Guebuza, are on trial.<sup>74</sup>

**20 September 2021**  
Palma  
Humanitarian aid reaches Palma for the first time in six months.<sup>76</sup>

**25 September 2021**  
Cabo Delgado  
Allied Rwandan, Mozambican and SADC forces kill alleged jihadist chief, Rajab Awadi Ndanjile, along with 18 other insurgents, in a joint operation.<sup>77</sup>



**11 November 2021**  
Islamic State reports they killed a 'spy of the Mozambican army' and that the 'media office' shared images of the attack. Islamic State claims of operations in Mozambique saw a resurgence in late 2021.

**2 March 2021**  
Amnesty International releases a report accusing government forces, DAG and the insurgents of war crimes.<sup>69</sup> DAG denies this accusation and fund an investigation into these claims.

**24 March 2021**  
Palma  
The town of Palma is attacked by insurgents, with a simultaneous attack occurring at Macomia,<sup>62</sup> leaving dozens dead, up to 30 000 displaced,<sup>63</sup> and buildings and infrastructure destroyed. 100-120 insurgent reinforcements allegedly crossed the border from Tanzania the day before to assist in the attack.<sup>64</sup> Islamic State later released footage of troops massing in Mocimboa da Praia before the attack.

**15 March 2021**  
US Special Forces begin a training programme for Mozambican troops to help fight the growing insurgency.<sup>61</sup>

**10 March 2021**  
US State Department designates the Mozambican insurgent group aligned to Islamic State as a terrorist organization.<sup>60</sup>



Insurgents gather before an attack outside Mocimboa da Praia, 29 March 2021, in footage shared by the Islamic State al-maq news agency.

**26 April 2021**  
Paris  
Total Energies declares force majeure on its LNG project in Mozambique based at Afungi, near Palma, following the attack on Palma.<sup>68</sup>

**23 June 2021**  
Johannesburg  
SADC approves military intervention in Mozambique.<sup>69</sup>

**23 June–29 July 2021**  
Islamic State claims of attacks in Mozambique increase significantly in frequency, with 15 attacks claimed in this period, perhaps as a means of projecting an active and strong image in the face of actual losses of territory on the ground.<sup>70</sup>

**8 August 2021**  
Mocimboa da Praia  
Rwandan military announces the recapture of the port city of Mocimboa da Praia with Mozambican troops.<sup>73</sup>



**15 July 2021**  
Islamic State claims an attack in Palma District – one of several attack claims made in during July 2021.

## Economic exclusion sparks resentment

The economic makeup of Cabo Delgado could scarcely be better designed to inspire a violent uprising. From the early days of Mozambique's independence, the region's politics and economy have been dominated by senior figures linked to the FRELIMO political party, often former generals.<sup>80</sup> These groups cultivate business interests in sectors involved in the exploitation of Cabo Delgado's wide range of natural resources, including mining, forestry and transport logistics.<sup>81</sup>

For decades, the financial gains of northern Mozambique's illicit economies, including drug trafficking and illegal logging,<sup>82</sup> have also accrued with many of the same senior Frelimo figures and local business elites.<sup>83</sup> Corruption is a characteristic feature of governance in the region, with one expert interviewed by the GI-TOC describing corruption as the single most important factor shaping Mozambique's economy.<sup>84</sup> Corrupt actors have been weakening institutions and rendering the divide between legal and illegal trade a largely academic distinction.<sup>85</sup>

The scale of corruption and elite control is matched only by Cabo Delgado's extreme levels of marginalization and poverty.<sup>86</sup> The province reports some of the highest levels of illiteracy and poverty in Mozambique. This chasm between rich and poor has continued to widen during the insurgency: while nearly a million people in northern Mozambique were classed by the UN as 'extremely food insecure' as of September 2021, research has found that influential people linked to Frelimo have gained more control over mining concessions in Cabo Delgado.<sup>87</sup>

The management of two of Cabo Delgado's most important natural resources fanned the flames of the conflict.<sup>88</sup> The discovery of some of Africa's largest-ever natural gas deposits off Cabo Delgado's northern coastline in the early 2010s led to an enormous wave of foreign investment – in fact, the largest-foreign investment on the continent.<sup>89</sup> The gas developments were initially led by Anadarko, which was later bought out by French energy giant Total Energies, and ENI, who are developing offshore infrastructure. To critical observers, the management

of the gas project fit the long-standing patterns of 'elite extractivism', where natural resources and wealth are bled from the region with little benefit to local people.<sup>90</sup> Compensation to communities forced to relocate for the gas project was judged to be insufficient, while few benefits emerged from promised job-creation programmes with the gas developments.<sup>91</sup>

Residents protested a lack of access to job opportunities for their communities, and that the benefits of Cabo Delgado's richest resource were being accorded to overseas companies and elites in Maputo and Pemba.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, top echelons of Mozambique's government used the prospective revenues of the gas to help secure US\$2 billion in illegal, secret loans, the fallout of which plunged the country's economy into crisis.<sup>93</sup>

Similarly, mining for gemstones and alluvial gold is a major economy in northern Mozambique, particularly after the discovery of some of the world's richest ruby fields in 2009 near Montepuez.<sup>94</sup> Many of these gems and much of the gold is extracted by artisanal and small-scale mining groups. Artisanal miners working illegally on private mining concessions have been treated brutally by police and mine security. In the case of Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM), which is majority owned by Gemfields in partnership with a retired FRELIMO general,<sup>95</sup> there have been allegations of human rights abuses, including shootings, beatings and rapes, by the mine's security forces and associated police units since 2012. Gemfields settled a case in 2019 by agreeing to pay US\$7.6 million in compensation to artisanal ruby miners and residents.<sup>96</sup> The company acknowledged the violence had taken place but did not admit liability.<sup>97</sup> A dispute over land ownership in MRM concessions also spurred discontent.

Both the gas and mining sector examples are characterized by the use of state institutions – principally the police – and the use of force to expel people from their homes and livelihoods in order to protect powerful interests.<sup>98</sup> This has played a pivotal role in the radicalization of young people in Cabo Delgado, who feel excluded by the national government operating from Maputo, which is heavily dominated by the Makonde ethnic group. Several



Al-Shabaab fighters in the district offices after overrunning the district capital of Quissanga, 26 March 2020. *Photo: Telegram*

research groups working in Cabo Delgado have found that former artisanal miners displaced by the 2017 expulsions joined the growing insurgency. MRM has refuted claims that its operations may have fed community feelings of exclusion that have led to the insurgency.<sup>99</sup>

The insurgents espouse a strong anti-state and anti-Frelimo narrative.<sup>100</sup> They lay claim to having greater legitimacy to rule than the democratic government, and that their aim to establish an 'Islamic State' will create a more socially just and equitable alternative to the status quo.<sup>101</sup> One key al-Shabaab leader, Maulana Ali Cassimo, had reportedly protested against the harsh treatment and detention of artisanal miners working in Niassa

Reserve in previous years, arguing that mining was one of the few economic options available to peasant farmers in the face of poor government service delivery.<sup>102</sup> Mozambican law enforcement have claimed that Cassimo was killed in Niassa Province in a counterinsurgency operation in late 2021.<sup>103</sup>

In Muidumbe in April 2020, insurgent leader Bonomado Omar, also known as 'Ibn Omar', addressed assembled residents in Swahili – the lingua franca of the East African coast – saying they occupied the village 'to show that the government of the day is unjust. It humiliates the poor and gives advantages to the rich. The people who are detained are from the lower classes and this is not just. Whether people like it or not, we are defending Islam.'<sup>104</sup>



**FIGURE 2** Generalized view of where the main local languages in Cabo Delgado are spoken – used as a proxy for ethnic distribution.

NOTE: Ethnologue, via Judd Devermont and Emilia Columbo, Northern Mozambique at a crossroads: Scenarios for violence in the resource-rich Cabo Delgado Province, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep22604.4>

## Ethnic tensions exacerbate divides

Cabo Delgado is deeply divided between the Muslim-majority Makua and Mwani populations, and the Christian-majority Makonde ethnic group, who hold the majority political and economic power.<sup>105</sup> The major Frelimo-linked figures in Cabo Delgado’s business and political spheres are largely drawn from the Makonde ethnic group and are a powerful political constituency. Makonde economic prominence in northern Mozambique grew following elections in 2014, in which Makonde scion Filipe Nyusi was elected president. This spurred perceptions of marginalization among Mwani-dominated communities along the Cabo Delgado coast.<sup>106</sup>

The fact that local state institutions, particularly police, in Cabo Delgado are largely Makonde dominated only served to inflame these conflicts further as communities of other ethnicities view the exercise of police powers as ethnically targeted. This was alleged to be a factor in preventing the Mozambican authorities from containing the conflict in its early stages.<sup>107</sup>

## Religious extremism provides a powerful narrative

Religious extremism has been described as the 'vector' through which social and economic grievances have been channelled in Cabo Delgado.<sup>108</sup> The insurgency has its roots in a group, known to be active in Cabo Delgado from as early as 2007, which broke away from the mainstream Muslim theologies dominant in the area.<sup>109</sup> This group has been described as an 'Islamist sect' in that its members advocated for the full application of sharia law and withdrew from society.<sup>110</sup> This 'al-Shabaab' sect, as it was known, was the forerunner of the insurgent group as we know it today. Although concentrated in Cabo Delgado, particularly the Mocímboa da Praia area,<sup>111</sup> the sect is also reported to have been successful in recruiting from the neighbouring Niassa and Nampula provinces.<sup>112</sup>

This group rose in popularity during a period of Wahhabi<sup>113</sup> expansion to East Africa and southern Africa, when Islamic charities made funds available to support the construction of new mosques with imams that preached a more conservative Islamic doctrine.<sup>114</sup> This expansion into Cabo Delgado began as early as the mid-1990s<sup>115</sup> and the doctrine was further spread by the return of young people who had received scholarships to study abroad in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Tanzania.<sup>116</sup> The influence of such scholarships in the formation of other extremist groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in DRC and Uganda has also been documented.<sup>117</sup> The al-Shabaab sect was centred around several key preachers in Mocímboa da Praia, Montepuez and Balama.<sup>118</sup>

The more radicalized ideology of the al-Shabaab sect was influenced by a preacher called Sualehe Rafayel (who returned to Mozambique from Tanzania in 2007), and a Tanzanian preacher, Abdul Shakulu, who

gained followers through radical preaching in this area in 2012.<sup>119</sup> These preachers were allied with Aboud Rogo, who was influential in shaping extremist ideologies across the East African coast, and was believed to have been a key figure in promoting the cause of al-Shabaab (Somalia) in Kenya before his death in Mombasa in 2012.<sup>120</sup> Funding was provided from the sect to support and recruit local tradesmen and small-business owners in and around Mocímboa da Praia.<sup>121</sup> The movement of splinter groups of other extremists from Tanzania to the south in 2016 and early 2017, following a state crackdown on their activities, was also reported as another factor in shaping the al-Shabaab sect into a militarized extremist force.<sup>122</sup>

The followers of the al-Shabaab sect – mainly young men from the Mwani and Makua ethnic groups – came to the attention of authorities in a series of clashes with police and mainstream Muslim groups in 2015 and 2016.<sup>123</sup> The sect sought to establish a more conservative social order, including by making demands to ban alcohol and blocking enrolment of children in government schools, rather than in religious schools called madrasas.<sup>124</sup> It was opposed by the mainstream Muslim authorities, such as the Islamic Council of Mozambique (CISLAMO).<sup>125</sup> The state's response to these early disturbances, which primarily consisted of mass arrests of members of the sect, is reported to have inflamed the already volatile situation.<sup>126</sup>

While foreign fighters and other influences have played an important role, the al-Shabaab sect remains Mozambican-led today.<sup>127</sup> Ibn Omar, who is recognized as the primary leader of the group, was reportedly born in Palma and grew up in Mocímboa da Praia.

## Financial support to the emerging insurgency

Financial support for the original Wahhabi expansion along the East African coast and into Cabo Delgado came from Islamic charities associated with Saudi Arabia and Qatar.<sup>128</sup> This funding was used to establish mosques and madrasas, fund scholarships to Islamic universities and to provide seed funding to adherents to set up or expand businesses in the region, which accelerated recruitment.<sup>129</sup> As outlined earlier, some of the business owners who benefitted from this seed funding, namely transport businesses and trade in everyday goods, continue to operate in neighbouring provinces. It appears that some of this funding was co-opted to help establish the al-Shabaab group. In the southern, government-controlled areas of Cabo Delgado, some of the traders who benefitted from this funding continue to support al-Shabaab financially and enable money flows in and out of the insurgent-controlled areas.

Several Mozambican analysts have speculated about the potential for there being two other local sources of support to al-Shabaab. First, political faction-fighting within Frelimo has led to two groups forming, one around current President Nyusi and the second around the former President Armando Guebuza. Former President Guebuza and his allies set to benefit from a network of companies established with the US\$2 billion 'secret loans' deal, which has now fallen apart. The current president, by contrast, was not caught up in the secret loans scandal despite playing a key decision-making role when it was unfolding and holds financial interests in other parts of Mozambique. However, the Cabo Delgado insurgency and the inability of the Mozambican Security Forces to

control it has undermined President Nyusi's status in the party. This may allow a Guebuza ally to come to power in the next election cycle, thus tipping power back to the Guebuza faction. Consequently, the Guebuza-aligned Frelimo faction has a vested interest in the disruption caused by the conflict.

Second, there is speculation that local Cabo Delgado businesspeople may have played an early role in supporting the insurgency. The thesis is that established local businesses, who have for decades monopolized the supply and service industries in the province, angered at having been excluded from supply contracts by the large multinational gas companies, supported the insurgency in order to upset the status quo and hope that once things settled, they would be on hand to win these supply contracts. This thesis has also emerged in GI-TOC interviews with a known Tanzanian network for drugs, ivory and human smuggling that has operated in Mocímboa da Praia and Pemba for many years. People associated with this network explained how the two leaders of the network, both originally from Zanzibar, were frustrated that their licit trucking and fuel supply businesses in Cabo Delgado had not won any of the Palma contracts and they may well have provided initial support to the insurgents in 2017 and 2018.<sup>130</sup> One of the leaders of this network was questioned by the police in 2018 over his alleged involvement with al-Shabaab and police intelligence that his vehicle had been used to transport recruits from Nampula.<sup>131</sup> He thereafter fled Mozambique for the United Arab Emirates and has not returned since.



Al-Shabaab fighters in Quissanga, March 2020. Photo: Telegram

## A composite movement

The conditions that allowed al-Shabaab to emerge are specific to Cabo Delgado: a breakdown in governance and trust in government resulting from elite capture of natural resource economies and compounded by an established and diverse set of illicit economies, which generally undermine rule of law.<sup>132</sup> The root causes are also specific to Cabo Delgado: inequality, abject poverty, elite capture of all economic opportunities (especially natural resource economies, which local people believe should be theirs as they come from their land), and exclusion from political opportunity and economic development based on ethnicity and religion.<sup>133</sup> These conditions and root causes have created the opportunity for a violent reactionary ideology to take hold among desperate youth who see few other opportunities for their futures.

'The government of the day is unjust. It humiliates the poor and gives advantages to the rich ... Whether people like it or not, we are defending Islam', said insurgent leader Ibn Omar, speaking in Muidumbe in April 2020.<sup>134</sup> This rhetoric is an example of how the religious and economic causes of the conflict reinforce one another. The extremist ideology provides a framework through which other grievances are articulated, allowing al-Shabaab to

imagine an alternative society to this 'unjust' status quo through imposing sharia law, and to justify violence and brutality in the guise of a holy war.<sup>135</sup>

Members of al-Shabaab are not a homogeneous group and have different motivations among themselves. Fighters include more ideologically driven religious zealots, young teenagers revolting against the harsh economic conditions they endure, poor people who joined for money, and child soldiers who, kidnapped and forced into violence, now see no alternative.<sup>136</sup> Resentment towards the state – in a country where the state has never exercised full control over the use of force – is manifested through violence.<sup>137</sup>

At this stage in the conflict, the attraction of the insurgency to youth in Cabo Delgado are threefold:


- Anger at the government and ruling elite (who have continued to wrest control of the region's natural resources during the conflict) and an opportunity for agency by attacking the state.<sup>138</sup>
- Opportunistic support of the insurgent group as the best option for security and protection in their areas.
- Financial reward from the insurgent groups for joining and participating in attacks.<sup>139</sup>





# INSURGENCY AND ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN CABO DELGADO

The crew of a dhow, suspected to be carrying heroin, are intercepted by Mozambican defence and security forces. The crew allegedly set the boat on fire to destroy the evidence. © *Web Mais*



Cabo Delgado has for decades been one of the most politically and economically marginalized regions of Mozambique. The economy in the region is characterized by forms of illegal trade, and monopolization of the region's natural resources by political and business elites and multinationals. From the smuggling of timber, rubies and ivory to the through-traffic of heroin, cocaine and, more recently, methamphetamines, illicit economies have historically held such sway in Cabo Delgado that the distinction between legal and illegal trade is largely academic.<sup>140</sup> The benefits of illicit trades, including drug trafficking, have been accrued by senior figures in the governing party, Frelimo, and local business elites.<sup>141</sup>

Starting in late 2017, al-Shabaab became operational in the area through which many of these trafficking routes historically flowed, with significant implications for illicit activity. The town of Mocímboa da Praia, for example, was long known as a smugglers' hub: a landing point for heroin trafficked down the East African coast, for people smugglers ferrying passengers along the 'southern route' of migration from the Horn of Africa towards southern Africa, and a transit point for flows of ivory poached in Niassa Special Reserve and other illicit goods.<sup>142</sup> In the early stages of the conflict it seemed that the insurgents' strategy was to capture territory that would allow them to control key trafficking routes and make money from the illicit economy.<sup>143</sup> However, by early 2021 several trafficking flows had instead shifted to new, safer routes.

The areas under the control of al-Shabaab and the highly militarized surrounding region became more difficult for trafficking networks to move contraband through. A combination of the heavy presence of government (and now regional) military forces and damaged infrastructure has caused trafficking networks and transporters of illicit goods to find alternative routes.<sup>144</sup> For example, the human smuggling route which previously followed the Cabo Delgado coast has now shifted far to the west, as more migrants now travel via Malawi and through Mozambique's Tete corridor. According to our finding, this has meant that illicit economies do not make up a significant funding base for al-Shabaab. This is contrary to claims made by the Mozambican and regional forces operating in Cabo Delgado, which publicly emphasize that the insurgents are involved in criminal markets, including drug trafficking.<sup>145</sup>

While the insurgency may have disrupted trafficking routes within northern Mozambique, this has not had a significant effect on these flows regionally. For example, drugs trafficked down the East African coast are simply brought to more southerly ports and landing sites, continuing to supply markets in southern Africa and beyond.



**FIGURE 3** Current illicit flows through northern Mozambique.

NOTE: Dashed arrows indicate flows that have been reported to the GI-TOC research team where precise geographical routes are unknown.

## Drugs

Northern Mozambique remains an epicentre for the arrival and distribution of drugs, chiefly heroin and methamphetamines. For many years, heroin has been transported to East Africa by vessels such as Jelbut dhows (large vessels capable of long-distance voyages) from the Makran coast of Pakistan and Iran, and container vessels mostly from ports in Pakistan.<sup>146</sup> In the past two years, methamphetamines produced in Afghanistan have also begun to be trafficked alongside heroin shipments, as evidenced by several major seizures in early 2021 of both heroin and methamphetamine.<sup>147</sup> Currently these shipments typically contain 50% heroin and 50% methamphetamines. Cocaine is transported to the region via container ships chiefly from Brazil.

Drug trafficking hotspots have changed over the last three years. Heroin and cocaine arriving by container are still arriving into the ports of Pemba and Nacala. However, heroin and methamphetamines arriving on Jelbut dhows from the Makran coast of Iran and Pakistan are now being offloaded further south. In the past, Pemba was the furthest south that these deliveries were made. The beaches, small ports and towns of Quissanga, Ilha do Ibo and Mocimboa da Praia were key hotspots for drugs trafficking activity prior to 2019. Now, Pemba is the most northerly drop-off point and drugs are landing on the coasts of

Nampula and Zambezia provinces, including in Nacala, Angoche and Quelimane.<sup>148</sup> International law enforcement sources and people involved in trafficking networks and local fishing communities report that drugs are still arriving at Pemba's port. Fishing vessels are often used to collect drugs shipments from larger vessels out at sea, before they are brought to port and warehoused before onward transit.<sup>149</sup>

The more southern landing sites are reportedly being used again during the current 'dhow-trafficking season', which starts when the northern monsoon season ends – usually in October – and runs throughout the southern summer. Current information suggests that dhow-based drug deliveries are occurring around Nacala and Quelimane again.<sup>150</sup> Reports also suggest that, from arrival into Nampula Province, heroin and cocaine are now also being transported overland west through Malawi, rather than exclusively southward to South Africa and Maputo.<sup>151</sup>

The drug trade in northern Mozambique has grown and diversified during the conflict. Traffickers from other sites on the East African coast, such as Zanzibar, have based themselves in Pemba to collect drug shipments coming in from the Makran coast.<sup>152</sup> The trade has diversified in terms of drug types, due to the rise of methamphetamines traffic, but it has also diversified in the types of traffickers involved. More

A shipment of heroin and methamphetamine seized in Nacala, 24 March 2021. © SERNIC





**FIGURE 4** Illicit flows through northern Mozambique, 2020.

NOTE: Compared to the map of illicit flows in early 2021 (see page 24), these were still routing through Mocimboa da Praia in early 2020. After being captured by al-Shabaab in August 2020 these routes changed.



**FIGURE 5** Illicit flows through northern Mozambique, early 2021.

entrepreneurial traffickers, who often previously worked as drug mules or transporters of some form, have been buying smaller loads which they collect from the dhows and then arrange to ship onward to markets. This reflects the ability of smaller-scale traffickers to use cell phone technology and banking to make contact and corrupt payments to lower-level law enforcement officials along the trafficking routes.<sup>153</sup> This negates the competitive advantage held by the higher-volume traffickers who rely on corrupt relationships with senior government or party officials.

Our research and interviews have found no current connection between drugs trafficking and al-Shabaab. When the conflict broke out, traffickers based in Mocímboa da Praia shifted their operations to the south, away from the conflict's epicentre. Although regional forces have recaptured territory from the insurgents, traffickers have yet to return to their former northern bases. However, the seizure of 28 kilograms of heroin in Mocímboa da Praia in early October 2021 has raised several questions.

The drugs were found in a complex owned by a local businessman, a location known to be used by al-Shabaab during their occupation of the town. Mozambican and regional authorities have pointed to the seizure as proof that the insurgents are involved in drug trafficking without sharing any direct evidence.<sup>154</sup> However, if the insurgents really were facilitating drugs shipments into Mocímboa da Praia,

then the volume of drugs could be expected to be far higher, as the Jelbut dhows used for these lengthy journeys can carry several hundred kilograms of drugs cargo. At the time of the seizure, the season for dhows transiting this route south to Mozambique had not yet begun and law enforcement sources confirmed to the GI-TOC that vessel monitoring technologies had not identified suspect dhows travelling as far south as Mozambique when the seizure happened. Thus, if this heroin really belonged to the insurgents, it would have to have been in their possession for perhaps three or four months. It is not clear why this would be the case. This suggests an alternative explanation is possible, and that the 28 kilograms of heroin had, in fact, been stored by someone else before the insurgents captured Mocímboa da Praia, who then abandoned it in an urgent escape. This alternative explanation fits with other evidence that heroin was still being trafficked through Mocímboa da Praia until it was captured by the insurgents in August 2020.

This single seizure is not definitive proof that al-Shabaab are involved in the drugs trade, especially given that all other sources, seizures and interviewees considered in this study suggest the vast bulk of the trade is now transited through Pemba, Nacala and areas south. The question of whether the insurgents have been or could become involved in drug trafficking cannot be conclusively answered. However, the bulk of available evidence points away from it.

**This fishing dhow in Pemba is reportedly one of the local vessels used to land drug shipments.** *Photo supplied*





A sample of crystal meth on sale in Cape Town. Shipments are transported to South Africa via Mozambique. © GI-TOC

## Impact on drug markets in South Africa

Mozambique is a key corridor for drug flows into South Africa. South Africa is the largest consumer market for heroin in East and southern Africa, as well as a key transit point onward to Europe and the United States, for which the overland route from Mozambique is the main supply gateway.<sup>155</sup> Since late 2019, methamphetamines have also been trafficked along the same transit route as heroin, often in shipments of both drugs together.<sup>156</sup> This serves South Africa's major methamphetamines consumer market.<sup>157</sup> Mozambique also remains a key node in a 'southern route' for cocaine trafficking, shifting cocaine from Brazil to markets in South Africa and possibly onwards to Australia.<sup>158</sup> This primarily takes place via container shipments to Mozambican ports, including Pemba as well as other ports further south.<sup>159</sup>

As outlined above, our research in Mozambique has found that the al-Shabaab insurgency has caused drug trafficking routes through northern Mozambique to shift, southwards, into the southern part of Cabo Delgado and into Nampula Province. These shifts are significant for the region, as drug trafficking networks operating in new regions will have an impact on the local political economy and on governance. However, these localized shifts have not translated into large-scale disruption of the overall drug trafficking flows via Mozambique into South Africa. GI-TOC interviews with members of drug trafficking networks in Cape

Town supported this finding, as the disruption due to conflict in northern Mozambique was not perceived as an issue impeding drug supply from Mozambique to South Africa.<sup>160</sup>

Significant changes in drug supply from Mozambique to South Africa are currently taking place. However these are not linked to the northern Mozambique conflict. For example, whereas in previous years Tanzanian and Nigerian groups have controlled the bulk of import and wholesale distribution for the heroin market in South Africa (with South African gangs controlling street-level distribution)<sup>161</sup> their dominance is now being rivalled by Pakistani networks.<sup>162</sup> These groups, importing drugs via Mozambique, have reportedly been able to make inroads in this market offering drugs at lower price and higher quality to South African gangs than their Nigerian and Tanzanian rivals. These networks have been using remote crossing-points at the Mozambique border to transport drugs to major South African cities. Interviewees also reported that smuggling drugs over the Mozambican land border had become more difficult in recent months, as evidenced by several major seizures of heroin and methamphetamines reported by law enforcement along the border.<sup>163</sup> Drug trafficking networks are reportedly looking for alternative routes, for example shifting smaller quantities via post, and sea and air routes.



## Kidnap for ransom and human trafficking

Kidnapping of individuals in towns and villages under attack is a well-documented strategy of al-Shabaab. People who have been kidnapped and subsequently escaped report that skilled workers are particularly sought after. This includes doctors, nurses and other medical workers, mechanics and electricians. Al-Shabaab offers to spare these people's lives and provide them safety and, in some cases, significant financial rewards to work with the insurgents.<sup>164</sup> Other people who are captured and cannot offer these skills or are suspected of having links with the Mozambican state are then killed.

One former employee of a company working with Total Energies who had first-aid qualifications reported that insurgents had offered to spare his life and a monthly salary of 150 000–200 000 meticals, which is comparable to a legitimate salary at a multinational like Total.<sup>165</sup> The insurgents claimed that the employee would also need to travel internationally. Offers such as these, along with the discovery of non-functioning vehicles and equipment in insurgent bases captured by Mozambican and Rwandan military, suggest the group has a shortage of many key skills and capacities.<sup>166</sup>

Many young girls and women have also been kidnapped.<sup>167</sup> Human Rights Watch estimated in December 2021 that more than 600 women and girls have been kidnapped by the insurgents since 2018, and documented the traumatic abuse that they have been subject to.<sup>168</sup> Once inside the insurgent bases, these young women are reportedly given instruction on how to worship and behave as part of al-Shabaab's Islamist social order, and are forced into 'marriages' to al-Shabaab fighters.<sup>169</sup> Other young children are also kidnapped and trained as fighters. The main role of these young fighters is reportedly to follow on behind the main fighting force to kill and loot from those remaining in attacked villages. It should also be noted that since the insurgents have been dispersed from their bases by the combined Mozambican, Rwandan and SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) forces, there have been reports of significant numbers of child soldiers being used in offensive roles in subsequent attacks.<sup>170</sup>

Kidnap for ransom is a source of income for al-Shabaab. Interviews with relatives and friends of kidnapped people – both Mozambican nationals and from other countries such as Zimbabwe and India – report that MZN1 million (US\$16 000) is a standard opening ransom demand from the insurgents, though the final ransom amounts after negotiations are unknown.<sup>171</sup> Details have been shared with the GI-TOC of phone numbers of al-Shabaab sympathizers, reportedly based in Paquitequete in Pemba, which have been used to receive ransom payments on behalf of the insurgents. Until significant territory was recaptured by regional and government forces in late 2021 and services restored, phone and internet communications were reportedly a challenge for the insurgents trying to negotiate ransom settlements. Al-Shabaab negotiators reportedly had to travel to the Tanzanian border for cell reception to negotiate payments. In the case of two nuns from Brazil, who were held for three weeks in Mocimboa da Praia by insurgents before their release in September 2020, insurgents used the nuns' own satellite phone to negotiate a payment from their Catholic diocese.<sup>172</sup>

Some of the many women kidnapped by al-Shabaab are 'traded' internally between fighters in exchange for money or assets such as motorcycles.<sup>173</sup> It is suspected that select groups of younger women are then trafficked by the insurgents. João Feijó, a researcher at the Mozambican think tank OMR who has conducted detailed interviews with women who were kidnapped by the insurgents, reports that some interviewees say that some kidnapped women 'selected' to go to Tanzania and study English.<sup>174</sup> Sources suggest that these girls and women are, in fact, trafficked overland from the insurgent-controlled areas to Mtwara and Tanga in southern Tanzania by a network involving Mozambican nationals, Tanzanians, Kenyans and Somali people.<sup>175</sup> The subsequent fate of these girls remains unknown.

Further, there are initial reports that young men and boys are trafficked overland to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to work in informal mining to generate money for the insurgency.<sup>176</sup> Apparently, foreign labour is sought after in these mines as the young men and boys are less likely to abscond.



Mozambican authorities seize 82 containers of illegally felled timber bound for China at the port of Pemba, August 2020.  
© ANAC

## Timber

Trafficking of illegal timber from northern Mozambique has been occurring for decades.<sup>177</sup> The current scale of this trade from Cabo Delgado was demonstrated dramatically in August 2020, when Mozambican authorities seized 82 containers of illegally harvested logs bound for China and held them at the port of Pemba. Those containers were later smuggled out from police custody and exported in December 2020.<sup>178</sup> Following investigations, 66 of the containers were recovered en route to China.<sup>179</sup> In mid November 2021, a further seven containers were recovered.<sup>180</sup>

Chinese logging companies dominate the Cabo Delgado logging industry.<sup>181</sup> These companies are currently most active along the corridor between Montepuez and Mueda and are often found operating illegally within the eastern boundary of the Niassa Special Reserve.<sup>182</sup> This area, to the west of the main area of insurgent activity, has been secure from al-Shabaab attacks, enabling these companies to operate. The road from Montepuez to Mueda was the only open transport route in the region. Meanwhile, Mueda, with its important military base, was well protected by the Mozambican military

during the time when al-Shabaab had its largest geographic footprint. While logging had been prominent in this region for many years, it intensified during the conflict and there were reports of military checkpoints extracting rent payments from logging trucks moving on this road.<sup>183</sup>

Within al-Shabaab territory, logging activity has reportedly continued, though less intensively than in Mozambican military-controlled areas. Loggers with licenses to harvest trees around Mocimboa da Praia and Macomia, who recently returned after the government recaptured these areas, reported that trees had been felled in these areas.<sup>184</sup> It seems that smaller-scale logging operations run by local residents were able to operate under insurgent control as they may have better connections and family ties within al-Shabaab and so were better able to navigate the volatile security environment.<sup>185</sup> However, it is unclear if and how these logs may have been exported out of the areas of insurgent activity. There are no reports suggesting that al-Shabaab has been either involved in the logging trade directly or 'taxing' the trade systematically as a means of funding.



Montepuez is home to the world's biggest known ruby deposit. © Matthew Hill/Bloomberg via Getty Images

## Gemstones and gold

As with timber, the activity for artisanal and small-scale mining as well as illicit trade in gold and gemstones in Cabo Delgado has been concentrated outside of al-Shabaab-controlled areas. This is, in part, because the largest sources of gemstones and gold are in other regions of Cabo Delgado and neighbouring provinces. The major deposits of gemstones (including rubies) are located at Namanhumbir near Montepuez and at Msawise in the Niassa Special Reserve. Gemstones illegally mined from these areas are then traded and smuggled out of Mozambique, largely destined for Asia.<sup>186</sup>

There are longstanding links between artisanal miners of both gems and gold, and the insurgents. Several different researchers have reported that insurgents have concentrated their recruitment efforts on *garimpeiros*, as the informal miners are known, by

exploiting local grievances over economic marginalization,<sup>187</sup> or in some cases tempting recruits with promises of employment in Cabo Delgado mining sectors.<sup>188</sup> This includes recruiting *garimpeiros* working in Niassa Special Reserve.<sup>189</sup> During GI-TOC research in early 2021, we received reports that some artisanal miners were sympathetic to al-Shabaab, had family members within the insurgency and could have been supporting them financially with their earnings from mining.<sup>190</sup> A prominent leader of al-Shabaab, named Maulana Ali Cassimo, is known to have demonstrated publicly against the attitude of authorities to artisanal miners and poachers in Niassa Reserve before the insurgency.<sup>191</sup>

There are reports that some insurgents have been involved in gemstone mining and that some illicit gemstone trading has been used to finance

al-Shabaab.<sup>192</sup> During an interview in Montepuez, some al-Shabaab members described how insurgents disguised as internally displaced people move around to areas such as Montepuez to work in mining and earn funds for the insurgency.<sup>193</sup>

The GI-TOC received reports that some businesspeople based in towns such as Montepuez and Pemba are involved in funding the insurgency and enabling them to move money and make payments to people.<sup>194</sup> These businesspeople smuggle gold and precious gems and also run other legitimate businesses in the region. They also seem to have been connected to al-Shabaab for several years, perhaps pre-dating the insurgency. The early funding that flowed to the mosques associated with the Islamist group that preceded al-Shabaab also provided grants to adherents to set up businesses. Over time, the people who controlled this initial funding, as well as the businesspeople who received some of this funding, may have evolved to become financial facilitators for the al-Shabaab sect, and ultimately the insurgency. Abdala Likonga is alleged to have been one of these facilitators.<sup>195</sup>

A Pemba-based businessman, Likonga was identified as one of the founding leaders of al-Shabaab by Mozambican news outlets in 2020.<sup>196</sup> Despite being identified by security forces in 2017, he continued to travel freely in and out of Pemba, and operate his businesses transporting goods along the Mozambique–Tanzania corridor. These businesses include legal goods such as cashew nuts and fish, as well as smuggling of gems and gold, reportedly smuggled over the border with the assistance of allies in the security forces. Likonga reportedly also had business connections with other financiers of the insurgency.<sup>197</sup>

Another businessman, who holds properties in Montepuez, Pemba, Palma and Nampula, allegedly plays a similar role. This individual's legitimate Montepuez-based businesses, in public transport and goods trade, are reportedly used to launder profits from gold and gems smuggling. Suspicions arose around his involvement with the insurgents in mid 2021 after business competitors noticed that his transports of goods along key routes were not ambushed by insurgents as others' had been. Sources report that this businessman has played a key role in managing payments to families of al-Shabaab fighters and making deposits on behalf of the insurgents in banks outside of their area of control. Since these allegations have surfaced, he has reportedly disappeared from Montepuez, leaving his business in the hands of his family.<sup>198</sup> Other individuals play this same role in other locations in Cabo Delgado Province, Nampula and Maputo.

Another trader, who specializes in black-market ruby trading, is also allegedly a financier of al-Shabaab. His business, which trades gemstones abundant in Mocímboa da Praia and other areas under insurgent control, points to sources of gems within the insurgent group. This businessman reportedly shares the profits of gem trading with al-Shabaab and has been central to moving cash and internally displaced people in and out of the insurgents' areas, under the guise of doing legitimate business in a high-risk area.<sup>199</sup>

Collectively, these traders allegedly provide a financial network to shift cash, gemstones, gold, people and goods over the boundary lines of the conflict, launder funds through legitimate business, and deposit payments on behalf of the insurgents. Illicit trade of gems and gold forms one part of this financial system.



Members of al-Shabaab gather before an attack outside Mocimboa da Praia, in footage shared by the Islamic State al-Amaq news agency on 29 March 2021. Photo: Telegram

## Far-fetched reports of human organ trade?

Several claims were made during the October and November 2021 interviews that insurgents are involved in harvesting organs from victims of attacks in order to traffic human organs internationally to destinations such as Malawi and Tanzania, and possibly beyond.<sup>200</sup> Similar claims have been reported in the media, although these reports may relate more to ritualized behaviour among al-Shabaab members – to harvest organs for use in traditional practices – rather than for trafficking of the organs.<sup>201</sup> However, getting definitive details of any organ trade has proven difficult and there are several reasons to doubt it is actually taking place.

First, a level of medical expertise and specialist equipment would be needed to maintain viable organs and transport them. As al-Shabaab insurgents have focused on recruiting medical professionals among their kidnap victims, this skill seems to be lacking within their ranks. Further, power has been largely non-existent in the areas under insurgent control since 2019 and at several points in the past

months, there seems to have been a lack of fundamental resources including working vehicles and food, again suggesting that a sophisticated organ trade is far-fetched. Second, trade in organs for traditional practices – such as *muti* in South Africa and in particular the targeting of albino people for body parts – is documented in the region. It is possible that reports could be conflated in the confused and often opaque reporting from the conflict zone. Finally, there are also reports that the insurgents force new recruits, including child soldiers, to consume human organs. These may be used to brutalize new recruits into feeling unable to leave and return to normal society. These reports are frequent but remain unsubstantiated.

Such reports should be seen as a cautionary tale in how disinformation can arise in conflict zones, where accusations around illicit trades – particularly one as brutal as organ trafficking – and the use of human organs for ritualistic practices, can serve a political agenda.

## Arms flows to al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab's military capacity has become more sophisticated over time. Early attacks in 2017 were carried out with a mixture of machetes, which are widely available from agricultural use in the region, and firearms. The first images of the insurgents shared on social media reflect this, showing AK-47s along with more rudimentary weapons.<sup>202</sup> In the early days of the conflict, insurgents may well have tapped into pre-existing sources and illicit flows of weapons in the region. In the lead-up to the insurgency in late 2017, AK-47s were available in northern Mozambique from multiple sources.

First, older weapons from the civil war remained in places where they were not surrendered during the demobilization process, especially places where there had been RENAMO (or just general anti-Frelimo/anti-government) sympathies.

Second, AK-47s in particular were smuggled from the Lakes region (Burundi and DRC in particular) to northern Mozambique to supply a demand among ivory poachers operating in the Niassa Reserve and the Quirimbas National Park during the peak years of Mozambique's elephant poaching crisis.<sup>203</sup> As poaching rates of elephants collapsed in northern Mozambique in 2018/2019, this is no longer an active source of demand.<sup>204</sup> However, they may have served al-Shabaab in the early days of their formation, particularly given reports of al-Shabaab recruitment among certain key groups in the Niassa Reserve.

Finally, weapons from government sources have also regularly found their way into criminal hands, both for elephant poaching and for general banditry.<sup>205</sup> Banditry had been an endemic issue in northern Mozambique for many years before the insurgency, and illicit weapons were circulated for use by these bandits.

In the first attack claimed on Islamic State channels in Mozambique in June 2019, insurgents displayed weapons captured from the Mozambican military. This has been the main way in which the insurgents have armed themselves. *Photo: Telegram*



Over time the insurgents' armouries have grown significantly. The bulk of this weaponry comes directly from Mozambican military sources, including weapons captured from security force camps, border posts and police armouries in towns and villages overrun by the insurgents and abandoned by Mozambican security forces in retreat.<sup>206</sup> Footage shared by insurgents from the attack on Mocímboa da Praia in March 2020 shows a cache of weapons seized from an armoury in the town. This attack was a significant turning point in the scale of the conflict: an attack on a major town by the insurgents which gave them access to a large number of weapons and looted cash. In September 2021, reports emerged that al-Shabaab had used a landmine/IED, which targeted SADC forces.<sup>207</sup> The landmine, which formed the basis for this explosive device, may have been looted from the Namoto border post armoury in 2020, where apparently some very old land mines and mortar rounds had remained.<sup>208</sup> There have also been reports of test explosions at insurgent field bases and one report of an insurgent death during IED testing.

Sources connected to the insurgent group report that some soldiers in the Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique (FADM) have been providing weapons to al-Shabaab for money, particularly in 2018 and 2019 before the group had grown to become a major threat. This could take place by staging an ambush in which the military detachment would flee, leaving equipment behind, making the loss of weapons, vehicles and other equipment appear accidental. A few of the insurgents had reportedly served in the Mozambican military in the conscription system (including senior al-Shabaab leader Ibn Omar) and used former contacts in the military to arrange these transfers in exchange for payment.<sup>209</sup> Some reports allege that groups of soldiers formed by demobilized government forces or deserters trained al-Shabaab members in exchange for money in the early days of the insurgency when they were not considered a major threat. There are also reports of military supplies sent to military outposts being redirected to the insurgents.

While the bulk of weapons used by al-Shabaab clearly come from Mozambican sources,<sup>210</sup> there are persistent reports that the insurgents allegedly also sourced weapons internationally from Tanzania, DRC, Kenya and Somalia.<sup>211</sup> GI-TOC investigated these reports. Three routes for weapons smuggling have been suggested.

First, and most surprisingly, sources in Niassa linked to the insurgency reported that during the al-Shabaab occupation of Mocímboa da Praia weapons and logistics were flown into the town using fixed-wing aircraft.<sup>212</sup> Other sources also reported that aircraft had been flying into insurgent-occupied Mocímboa da Praia, suggesting that this route was used to bring foreign fighters from Somalia and other countries for strategic discussions with the Mozambican insurgents. Despite there being multiple separate reports of aircraft landing in Mocímboa da Praia, it has not been possible for the GI-TOC to conclusively confirm these reports. Logistically speaking, small fixed-wing aircraft are widely used along the East African coast, and with a willing pilot and a false flight plan it could be possible to travel to Mocímboa da Praia. The kind of radar systems required to identify small, low-flying aircraft do not exist in northern Cabo Delgado. However, it is hard to imagine that this would have gone unnoticed, either in pilot circles or from the ground. It is also possible that this narrative is being used to distract from other trafficking routes.



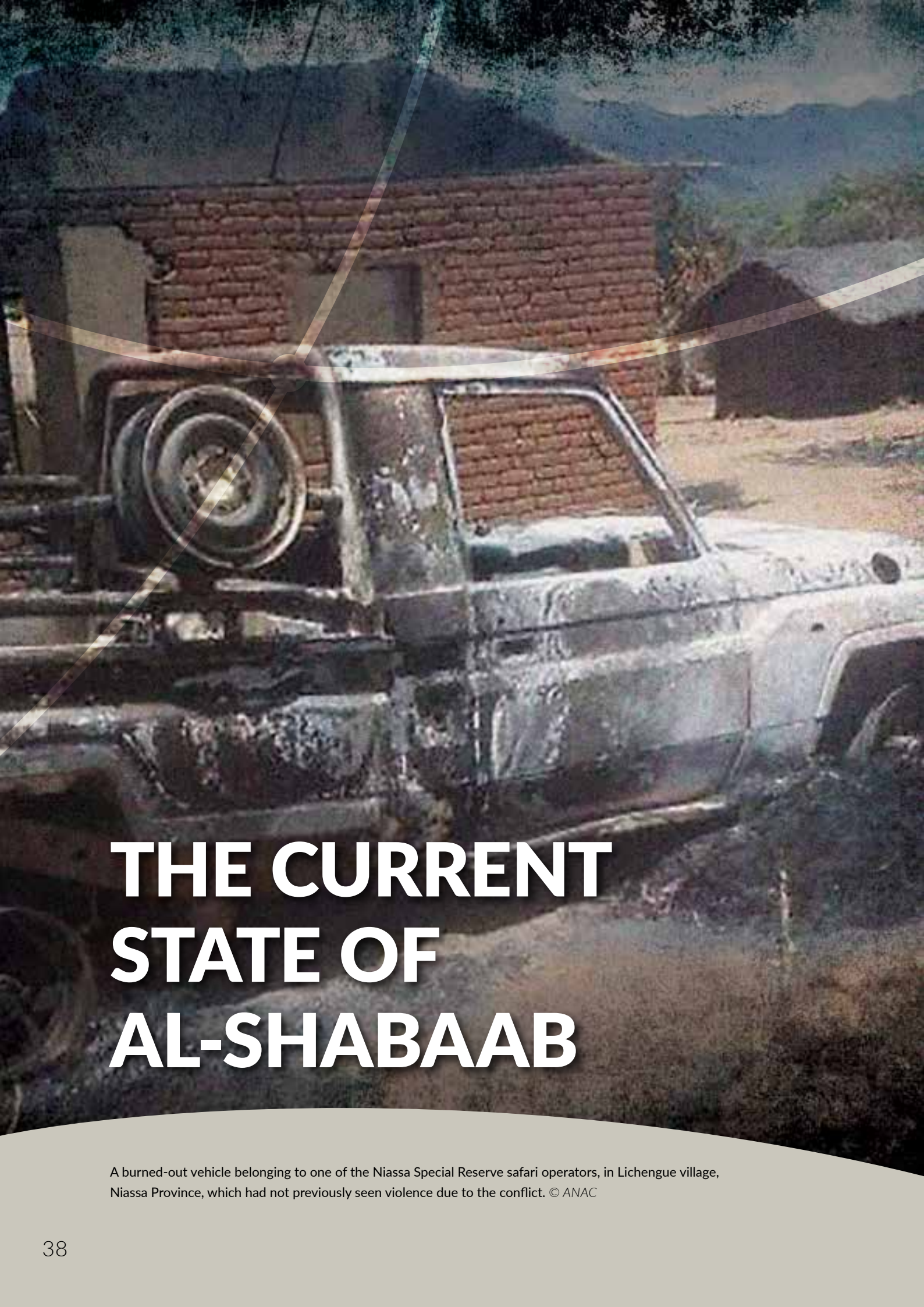
Weapons recovered from insurgents by Rwandan soldiers in Mocímboa da Praia, 22 September 2021.

© Simon Wohlfahrt/AFP via Getty Images

The second possibility is for weapons to be smuggled overland, via Malawi or over the more remote border posts into Niassa. This could include weapons sourced in conflict areas in eastern DRC, transported via Lake Tanganyika, which is known as an active smuggling route for a variety of goods, including ivory and weapons.<sup>213</sup> This would replicate suspected weapon-smuggling routes during the height of elephant poaching in Niassa reserve.<sup>214</sup> Border posts along these land borders are known for extracting corrupt payments to move goods such as gems, gold, timber, bushmeat and, in the past, ivory. However, it has not been possible to independently confirm that this route has been used to smuggle weapons to al-Shabaab.


Third, weapons may have been moved south via seagoing dhows from Tanzania to insurgent-held territory along the Mozambican coast. In late 2020 and early 2021, basic supplies such as food were being transported into Mocímboa da Praia from southern Tanzania (around Mtwara) at night to avoid helicopter fire from Dyck Advisory Group (DAG), the South African private military company contracted by the Mozambican government at the time.<sup>215</sup> This may also have been used as an arms-smuggling route, as reported in GI-TOC interviews in 2020.<sup>216</sup> However, it has not been possible to confirm that weapons moved on this route.





# THE CURRENT STATE OF AL-SHABAAB

A burned-out vehicle belonging to one of the Niassa Special Reserve safari operators, in Lichengue village, Niassa Province, which had not previously seen violence due to the conflict. © ANAC

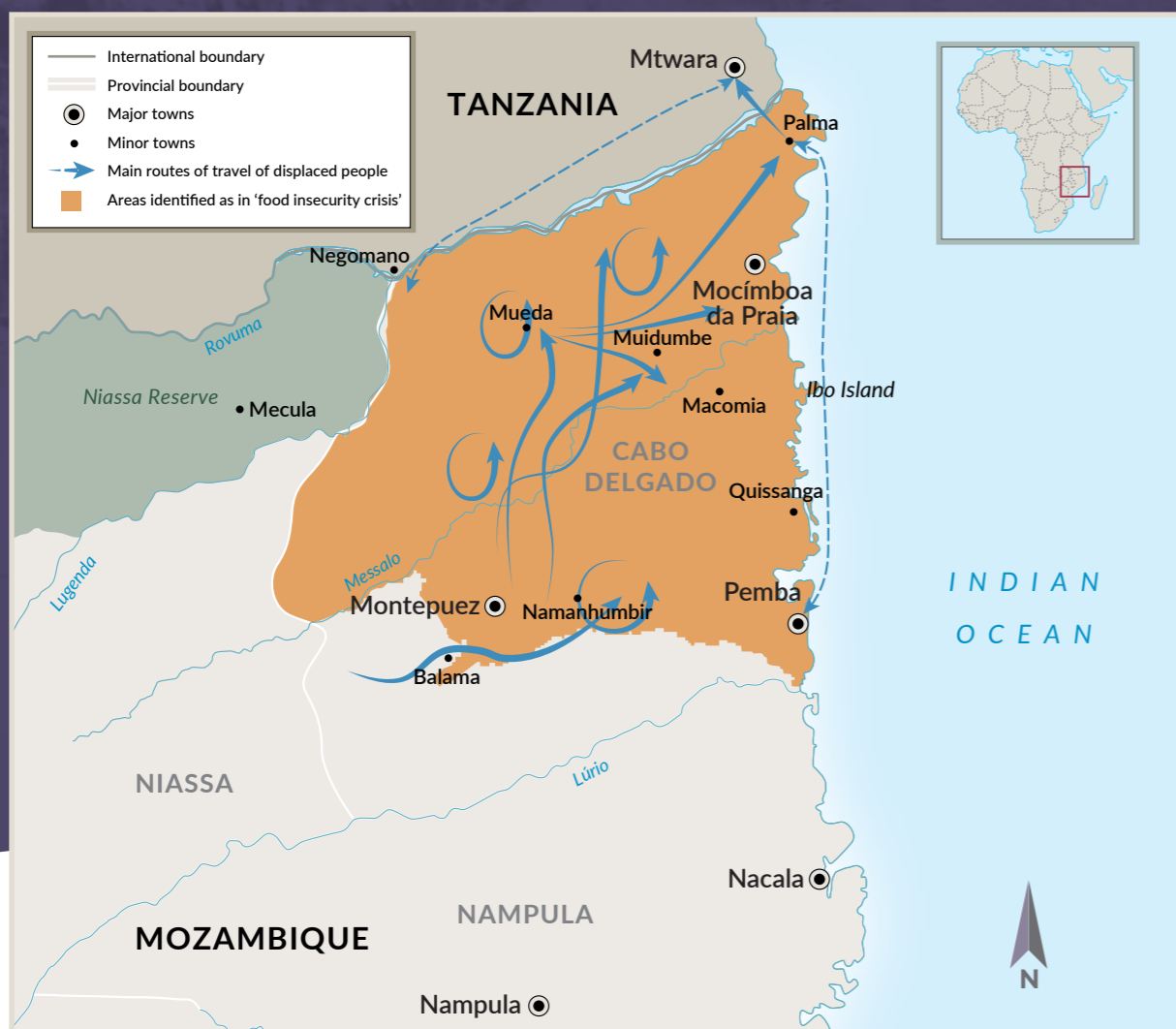


Since August 2021, interventions from Rwandan and SAMIM forces in support of the Mozambican military tipped the scales of the conflict away from al-Shabaab's favour.<sup>217</sup> These forces rapidly recaptured territory from the beginning of their deployment, including the recapture of Mocímboa da Praia, which had been in insurgent control for almost a year.<sup>218</sup> By October 2021, allied forces were working to consolidate these gains and reopen areas of the conflict zones to civilians.<sup>219</sup> This reportedly slowed al-Shabaab recruitment: whereas previously some joined the insurgents out of self-preservation, this became a less appealing option when residents saw the allied forces providing viable security.<sup>220</sup> Insurgents are facing severe supply shortages, leading some fighters to surrender.<sup>221</sup>

Yet the situation remains volatile.<sup>222</sup> From November and December 2021 through to mid January 2022 (at the time this report was being finalized), a spate of attacks have targeted villages in Cabo Delgado, including in Mueda and Macomia districts.<sup>223</sup> Al-Shabaab groups – including child soldiers between 10 and 15 years old – continued to target and ransack villages.<sup>224</sup> Late November and early December also saw the first attacks in the Niassa Province, as groups of insurgents originally from Mecula District in Niassa Province returned there to recruit, get supplies and scout for possible bases. This foiled the attempts of the Mozambican and foreign forces to cordon off the conflict to the north-eastern part of Cabo Delgado.<sup>225</sup>

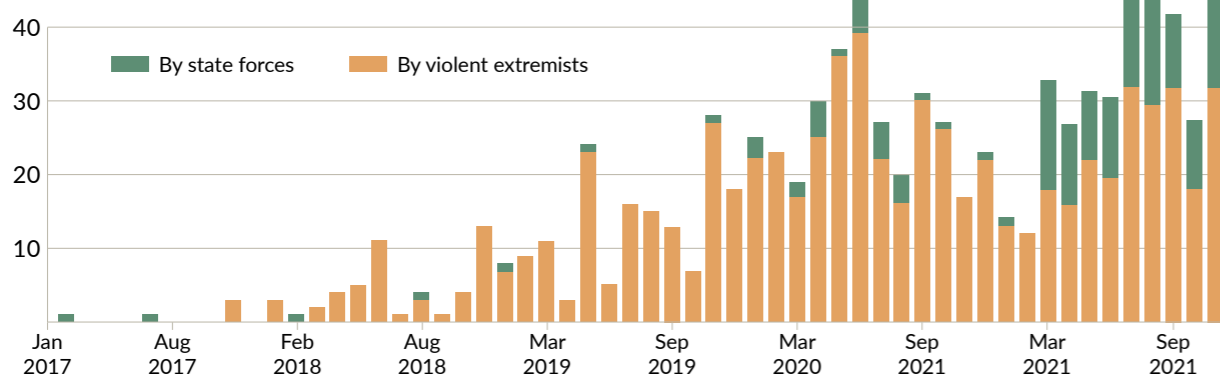
Reports have emerged that insurgents captured in early January 2022 have told authorities that their senior leaders and core fighters had retreated to remote bases in Macomia District<sup>226</sup> and southern Tanzania.<sup>227</sup> As these now come under pressure from government-aligned forces we might see more al-Shabaab fighters appear in parts of Niassa and Nampula provinces, and ADF bases in eastern DRC (as a group allied to al-Shabaab as part of the Islamic State's Central Africa Province, see discussion below) may be used as a fallback rear base for leadership to recoup and develop new strategies and approaches.

The parties to the conflict are also vying for control of the narrative. Regional forces express their confidence that regional intervention will 'save Cabo Delgado',<sup>228</sup> and emphasize that insurgents have been 'dislodged' into the forests.<sup>229</sup> Yet it is understood that the insurgents' main strategic and logistical bases have always been in more remote areas along the Messalo river and elsewhere, rather than in captured towns and villages. At the same time, Islamic State propaganda has boasted of how 'the coalition forces



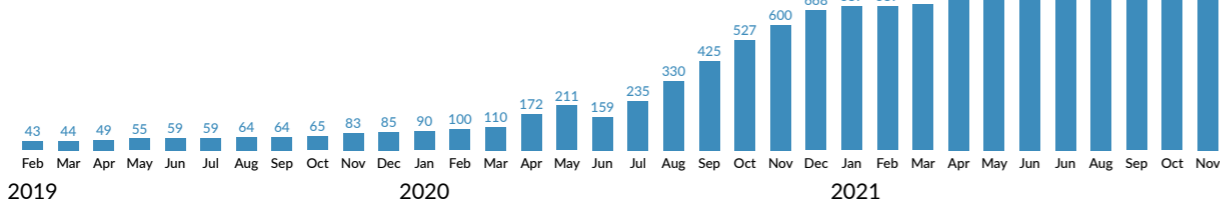
**FIGURE 6** Humanitarian situation in Cabo Delgado, as of November 2021.

SOURCE: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



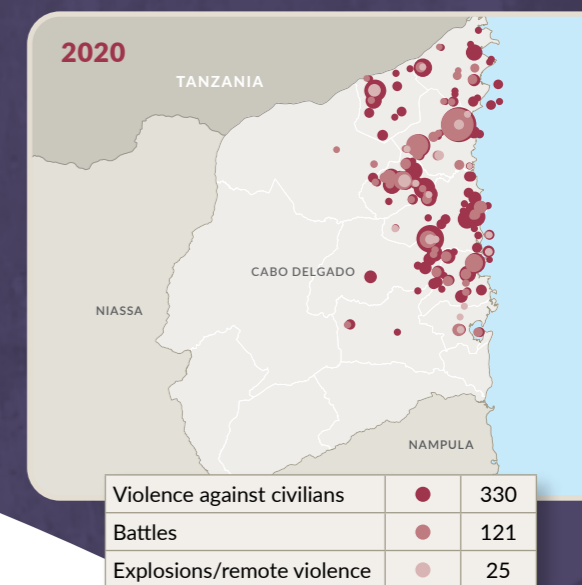
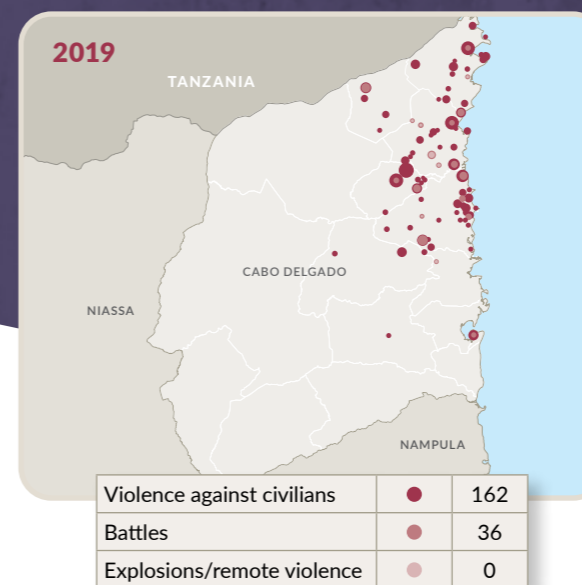
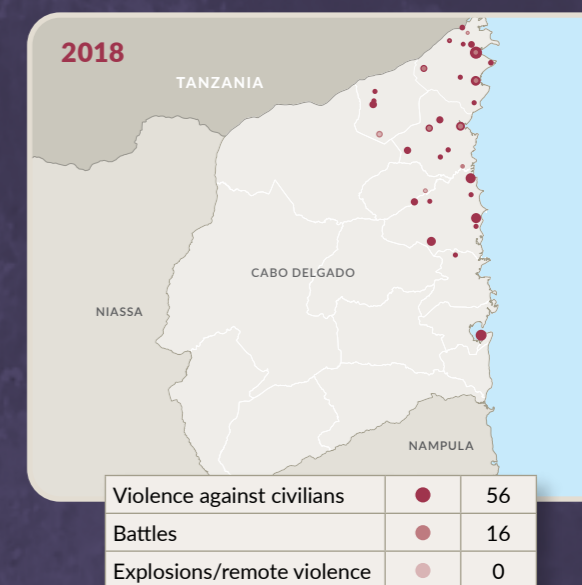
**FIGURE 7** Number of violent incidents in northern Mozambique (2017–2021).

SOURCE: ACLED



**FIGURE 8** Displacement trend, February 2019–September 2021 (in 1 000s).

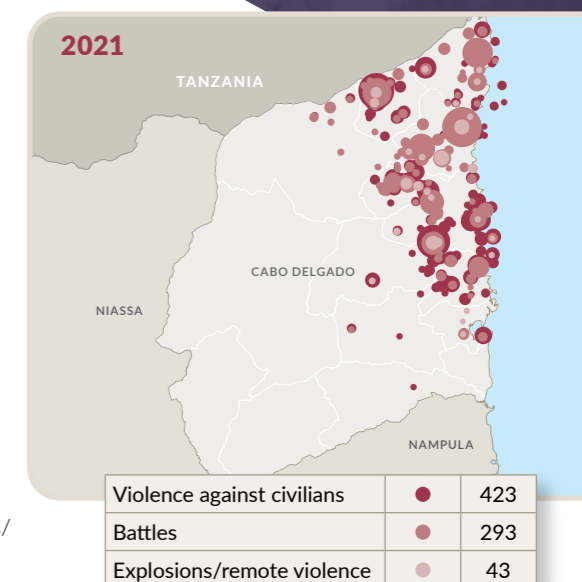
SOURCE: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



**734 000**  
DISPLACED PEOPLE  
Figure as of end of November 2021.

**1.11million**  
FOOD-INSECURE PEOPLE  
Figure as of end of November 2021.

**3 627**  
LATEST TOTAL FOR FATALITIES  
To 9 January 2022, via ACLED.



**FIGURE 9** Humanitarian situation, Cabo Delgado.

SOURCES: OCHA, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/>; ACLED, <https://www.cabodelgado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-13-december-2021-9-january-2022>

suffered heavy losses'.<sup>230</sup> The SAMIM and the Rwandan Defence Force, in turn, have released details of their own gains in recapturing insurgent bases and weaponry, giving the impression of confidence that regional forces have the upper hand.<sup>231</sup>

Al-Shabaab's main financial resources are thought to derive from the looting of banks in towns where attacks have been staged. In particular, the March 2021 attack on Palma was reportedly staged after a large volume of cash arrived in the town to pay humanitarian workers.<sup>232</sup> Naturally, the insurgents also loot valuable supplies, including food, fuel, vehicles and other vital supplies, during attacks.<sup>233</sup> Ultimately, the means of funding the insurgency do not seem to be very sophisticated. As discussed above, insurgent rent-seeking or active involvement in illicit economies is less significant than was suspected in the early stages of the conflict. While much about their funding remains unknown, it is thought that the insurgents currently have few financial backers within Mozambique and abroad, and do not have sophisticated funding mechanisms.<sup>234</sup>

Al-Shabaab pays its fighters as reward for carrying out attacks.<sup>235</sup> Although it is difficult to obtain definitive measures of how much the fighters are paid, it is estimated that at their height, the insurgents were able to offer significantly better compensation than the Mozambican defence forces. This led to a wave of defections from the Mozambican army.<sup>236</sup> There are reports that following the Palma attack in March 2021, regular foot-soldiers were paid an estimated 30 000–60 000 meticals (US\$465–930), and the senior leaders were paid in the region of 150 000–200 000 meticals (US\$2 325–3 100).<sup>237</sup>

**The burned-out remains of Nangololo Catholic Mission, Muidumbe, 9 April 2020.**

*Photo: Adriano Nuvunga on Twitter, 11 April 2020*





A view of the Niassa Reserve. The reserve's communities, biodiversity and conservation management system are threatened by the insurgency. © John Guernier

## Impact of the insurgency in Niassa and Nampula

The impacts of the insurgency in Cabo Delgado are being keenly felt in the neighbouring Nampula and Niassa provinces. Insurgents have been operating in Niassa Province since 24 November 2021 with a series of attacks marking the first incursions of violence into the region from Cabo Delgado.<sup>238</sup> Hundreds of people were displaced as four villages were attacked and burned in the Mecula District within the Niassa Special Reserve in late November to early December.<sup>239</sup> Since the attacks have been moving ever closer to Mecula, the district capital, many residents fled the town.<sup>240</sup> However, nearly 4 000 people from villages further north have fled to Mecula town and are camped out, hoping for protection from the Mozambican security forces.<sup>241</sup>

Both provinces have also reportedly been rich sites of recruitment for the Cabo Delgado insurgents. Islamic fundamentalist groups of the kind that evolved into militarized insurgency in Cabo Delgado, are said to have been present in Niassa and Nampula before the conflict broke out.<sup>242</sup> Before the conflict, many young men from the Nampula coast would migrate north to Cabo Delgado for fishing, where some were kidnapped and forced to join al-Shabaab.<sup>243</sup> There are also reports of significant recruitment from conservative Islamic communities in Nampula Province.<sup>244</sup> The group of insurgents operating in Niassa are reported to be made up of recruits originally from the local area, who have left Cabo Delgado

under pressure from the international military forces and returned to home territory to gather more recruits, get supplies and scout for possible bases.<sup>245</sup>

Recruitment from rural communities in Niassa Province, especially from the artisanal mining communities in Niassa Special Reserve has also been reported. A local imam in the Niassa Reserve was known to be delivering fiery sermons preaching jihadi rhetoric during 2013 and 2014. He was forced out of the area and moved to Pemba, where he reportedly joined the insurgency in its early days. Other senior Muslim figures in the Niassa Reserve and Lichinga are known to have paid for young men to travel to join the fighting.<sup>246</sup>

However, state security presence in Niassa has been tightened since 2019.<sup>247</sup> This includes specific deployments of State Security agents (Mozambique State Security and Intelligence Service – SISE), the Police Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR), the regular district police (PRM), the environmental police (PPNRMA) and the Guarda Fronteira, who maintain three border posts along the river. Informant recruits of SISE have reportedly set up small businesses at villages within the reserve to collect and transmit information to SISE.<sup>248</sup> However, this increased security presence in the Niassa Reserve has had negative consequences.

There have been reports of disappearances of local people who are suspected of joining the insurgency or related to known insurgents.<sup>249</sup> Police are also accused of extorting money from the artisanal miners operating illegally in the reserve, and corruption at the border among the Guarda Fronteira is allegedly rife. The back-and-forth movement of illegal miners, and poachers from Tanzania bribing border officials, allows insurgents crossing the border to blend in and cross easily.

As outlined above, coastal sites in the Nampula province such as Nacala have become major landing sites for drug trafficking as criminal networks have shifted south. The impact of illicit economies, in spurring the breakdown of governance and driving corruption, helped set the scene for the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. The increased activities of organized criminal networks in Nampula Province could also help fuel volatility in this region in future.

## Foreign fighters in al-Shabaab

Foreign fighters play a significant role in al-Shabaab and can be categorized in two main groups. First are experienced fighters who have played a role in other insurgencies in East Africa, mainly from Tanzania, Uganda, eastern DRC and Somalia.<sup>250</sup> These fighters often share some commonalities with the Mozambican majority of al-Shabaab fighters, including a common language in Swahili, the lingua franca of East Africa.<sup>251</sup> In the case of fighters from southern Tanzania, these fighters are part of the same communities found in coastal Cabo Delgado on both sides of the Rovuma river, which forms the Mozambique–Tanzania border.<sup>252</sup>

Other fighters come from further afield. There are reports of fighters arriving in Mozambique from the Syrian conflict (particularly during 2020),<sup>253</sup> Afghan fighters,<sup>254</sup> and several Chechen fighters arriving

while Russia's Wagner mercenaries were fighting in the region.<sup>255</sup> Released kidnap victims from al-Shabaab have reported 'white' fighters among the insurgents – noting that this could mean light-skinned people from the Swahili Coast, the Middle East, or people of Caucasian origin.<sup>256</sup> While it is difficult to identify which nationalities are being referred to, these fighters include English speakers and possibly Arabic speakers.

It is reported that this latter group of fighters are not permanently based in Cabo Delgado, in the harsh forest-camp conditions endured by the Mozambican and regional fighters. These foreign reinforcements travel into Mozambique for specific attacks and training, advising Mozambican units on strategy and possibly managing communications.<sup>257</sup> Periods where more consistent and sophisticated communications

Images circulated in 2016 allegedly show fighters loyal to Islamic State training in Tanzania. A crackdown by Tanzanian security forces is said to have caused fighters to flee into Mozambique, joining the al-Shabaab movement.

*Photo: Site Intel Group*



have emerged from the insurgents, including via Islamic State channels, may be related to the presence of key foreign fighters in Cabo Delgado.<sup>258</sup> For example, a key leader from Somalia reportedly worked with al-Shabaab during the early stages of the conflict, advising on strategy, training and recruitment. This individual moved freely around Pemba and was later identified and arrested (or killed) by security forces.<sup>259</sup>

The number of South African nationals reported among the insurgents is small, with security sources suggesting that seven individuals fighting in Cabo Delgado identified as South Africans.<sup>260</sup> Other sources in South African law enforcement suggest that a larger number of individuals have travelled, with an estimate of 30 to 40.<sup>261</sup> South African fighter Mohammed Suliman, who was photographed in Mozambique in 2018, reportedly travelled as part of a group of 16 fighters.<sup>262</sup> However, many of these individuals may have been killed or else not remained in Cabo Delgado long term.

Insurgents enter Cabo Delgado primarily via overland routes, reportedly along the Tanzanian border at points on the Rovuma river and in Niassa Province.<sup>263</sup> These remote border posts are reported to be unable to control migration effectively and are known to be corrupt.<sup>264</sup> While in Tanzania, al-Shabaab insurgents reportedly liaise with sympathetic groups and are supported by Tanzanian contacts.<sup>265</sup>

Some sources reported that foreign fighters, specifically from Somalia, had entered Cabo Delgado during the occupation of Mocímboa da Praia via helicopter,

possibly for meetings with senior leadership.<sup>266</sup> While this is possible, it is unlikely. Logistically, routing a helicopter to insurgent-controlled territory would be difficult to do undetected, partly because such aircraft are rarely used in the region and so would attract attention. It is possible that these were Dyck Advisory Group helicopters landing to support local militia battling the insurgents and were mistakenly identified by kidnappees as landing in insurgent territory.

Some experts connect the influx of foreign fighters with the escalation in insurgents' capacity and tactical sophistication that was seen in the attacks on Mocímboa da Praia and Palma.<sup>267</sup> When the insurgency started in October 2017, fighters simply confronted local police forces, which, in many cases, resulted in al-Shabaab members being arrested or killed. By contrast, the attacks on Mocímboa da Praia and Palma involved significant planning, with insurgents infiltrating the towns prior to the attack to gather intelligence and pre-position fighters and weapons.<sup>268</sup> Withdrawal stopper groups were also deployed to ambush any possible security force pursuit.

However, some expert sources also emphasize that Tanzanian fighters have played an important role in the insurgency from its outset.<sup>269</sup> Migration to Mozambique from Tanzania, particularly for work in the mining sector, and southward migration from the Great Lakes are part of the social makeup of the Cabo Delgado region and this is reflected in the ranks of the insurgency.



## The relationship between Mozambique's al-Shabaab and Islamic State

On 4 June 2019, Islamic State media channels claimed credit for repelling an attack by the 'Crusader Mozambican army' in a tiny village south of Mocímboa da Praia, killing and wounding 'a number of them' and capturing weapons, ammunition and rockets. Photographs of the weapons, which included a Russian belt-fed PK variant machine gun and RPG-7 rockets and a launcher, were distributed online under the auspices of the Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP).<sup>270</sup>

The incident went largely unnoticed and Mozambican police were quick to deny that ISCAP was involved. But it was significant, marking the first time since the start of the insurgency more than two years earlier that Islamic State had officially announced a presence in Mozambique and involvement in a clash with the Mozambican military.<sup>271</sup>

The incident also came just two months after Islamic State claimed its first attack in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in which three Congolese soldiers were reportedly killed and five wounded. The attack was attributed to a new 'province' of the caliphate, Wilāyat Wasat Ifriqiyya (Central Africa),<sup>272</sup> marking the first military action as part of what would become known as ISCAP.<sup>273</sup> The clashes and claims of responsibility were followed by the release of an official Islamic State video showing fighters in the DRC and Mozambique pledging allegiance to Islamic State on 24 July 2019.

Islamic State operations in the DRC have escalated, as Islamic State-affiliated fighters claimed responsibility for an ambitious attack in Kampala, Uganda, on 16 November 2021. A trio of suicide bombers targeted Uganda's parliament and a police headquarters, and a fourth was killed before being able to detonate. The attack claimed at least four lives and wounded dozens, many of whom were police. Other East African countries have raised fears about Islamic State-linked affiliates staging attacks.<sup>274</sup>

The concept of a Central Africa Province of the Islamic State Caliphate was not a new one. As early as August 2018, the Islamic State leader at the time, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, referred to it in a speech.<sup>275</sup> A video released on 29 April 2019 by the Islamic State-affiliated Al Furqan Media Foundation, also showed Al-Baghdadi – in his first appearance in five years – leafing through folders including one marked 'Wilāyat Central Africa'.

In November 2019, in the wake of Al-Baghdadi's death during a US military operation in Syria,<sup>276</sup> the official Islamic State newsletter, Al-Nabā, published a series of photographs of militants from Tunisia, Syria, East Asia, Pakistan, Yemen, Sinai, Somalia and Central Africa clasping hands as they pledged allegiance to Al-Baghdadi's successor, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi.<sup>277</sup> On 2 February 2022, Al-Qurashi was killed in a US counterterrorism operation in Idlib, Syria, US president Joe Biden announced.

The Islamic State's growing interest in a little-known insurgency in northern Mozambique and its efforts to formalize allegiances with militant fighters under the banner of a Central Africa Province came as Islamic State fighters in Syria and Iraq were being routed, vast swathes of territory were being lost, and leadership figures including Al-Baghdadi were being killed.<sup>278</sup> For the increasingly embattled Islamic State, it provided ideal propaganda fodder and a distraction from losses in Syria and Iraq.<sup>279</sup> Their strategic shift to supporting

regional 'provinces', not just in Central Africa but also elsewhere, has been described by analysts as a 'democratization of jihad' whereby Islamic State can push its agenda on multiple fronts globally, even in the absence of a central caliphate.<sup>280</sup> For the Mozambican insurgents, the loose affiliation with Islamic State gave them greater publicity for their ever-more strategically ambitious operations.

Since mid 2019, the Mozambique insurgency has been mentioned directly in over 40 editions of Al-Nabā and in brief communiqués, and distributed as jpeg images under the banner of the Islamic State on Telegram and other encrypted messenger services, detailing clashes, casualties and victories.



An infographic shared on Islamic State channels celebrates the 'victories' in the jihadist group's various provinces, March 2021. The reporting of operations in Mozambique via Islamic State has largely not been as sophisticated as reporting from other provinces. *Photo: Telegram*

But the links between the Islamic State central media apparatus and the multiplicity of platforms through which it disseminates its propaganda remain weak. The ‘fitful appearance’ of incident reports suggests that the relationship between Islamic State and the insurgents is not consistently sustained.<sup>281</sup> Updates from the insurgents in Mozambique have been sporadic and fragmented, far more so than the slickly produced, almost weekly videos and Telegram updates about attacks in the DRC by ISCAP-affiliated militants and in Nigeria by militants aligned to the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). It was only in April 2020, for example, as attacks on towns mounted in Cabo Delgado, that the Mozambique insurgency moved prominently to the front page of *Al-Nabā* for the first time with a now iconic image of an insurgent, his face pointedly shrouded by a red keffiyeh, waving the black flag of Islamic State.<sup>282</sup>

Videos and photos of insurgent attacks in northern Mozambique are relatively rare compared with the volume of propaganda material produced by ISWAP fighters in Nigeria. Media offerings from insurgents in Mozambique also do not share the sophisticated production values of ISWAP propaganda with its soaring soundtracks, visceral and high-definition combat footage, impassioned interviews with frontline fighters, camerawork, editing and subtitles in multiple languages.

Following the deployment of Rwandan soldiers in northern Mozambique in July 2021 and the recapture of the port city of Mocímboa da Praia from insurgents in August, regular communiqués from the insurgents slowed to a trickle and then went silent. In the *Al-Nabā* newsletter, there was hardly a mention of the insurgency until late November when it carried a report, billed on the front page, detailing ongoing battles against coalition military forces in Mozambique and the burning of two Congolese army barracks.<sup>283</sup> Islamic State Telegram channels also lit up with an unprecedented flurry of updates – some backdated to July – as insurgents claimed responsibility for a series of 20 incidents between 24 July and 20 November 2021. These incidents included ambushes and clashes with pro-government forces, attacks on villages and the beheadings of ‘spies’. They offered little explanation for their silence, saying only that it was the result of ‘technical and operational circumstances’.<sup>284</sup>

This rush of activity has continued into early 2022 (at the time of writing), as Islamic State has laid claim to the recent spate of attacks in Niassa Province and continued attacks in Cabo Delgado.<sup>285</sup> Overall, Islamic State messaging around the Mozambican conflict has also become more sophisticated than in earlier stages of the conflict, releasing more video footage of insurgents and regular claims of attacks. The insurgent propaganda aims to counter the narrative put forward by Mozambican and Rwandan/SADC forces operating in Cabo Delgado, which has sought to emphasize seizures of weapons from insurgents and the capture of insurgent bases.<sup>286</sup> By contrast, Islamic State publications and imagery seek to show the ongoing viability of the insurgent force.

This image of an al-Shabaab fighter in Cabo Delgado appeared in an Islamic State newsletter celebrating insurgents’ victories in Mozambique, April 2020.


*Photo: Telegram*





# ISLAMIC STATE NETWORKS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Burnt religious texts in the Imam Hussain Mosque in Verulam, near Durban. In May 2018, armed men launched an attack on people attending prayers at the mosque and released a petrol bomb. © Rajesh Jantlal/AFP via Getty Images



**R**egionally, there are concerns that foreign fighters who joined the fight in Cabo Delgado could scatter to their home countries and stage attacks there, or that Islamic State-linked networks in other countries could gain inspiration from the Cabo Delgado insurgents.<sup>287</sup> This may be happening already: reports have emerged that the perpetrator of a shooting attack carried out in Dar es Salaam in August 2021 had previously fought with al-Shabaab in Somalia before travelling to Mozambique to join the insurgents there. The other wing of ISCAP, based in the DRC and made up of fighters from the ADF, have escalated their attacks with bomb attacks in Kampala in November 2021.<sup>288</sup>

South Africa has some history of extremism movements linked to vigilante groups, such as PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs), which claimed to be fighting gangsterism in the Western Cape and was most active in the 1990s. Since then, the country has rarely been a target for radical Islamic terrorism. The emergence of some cases linked to Islamic State since 2015, however, has led some analysts to argue that this situation is changing.

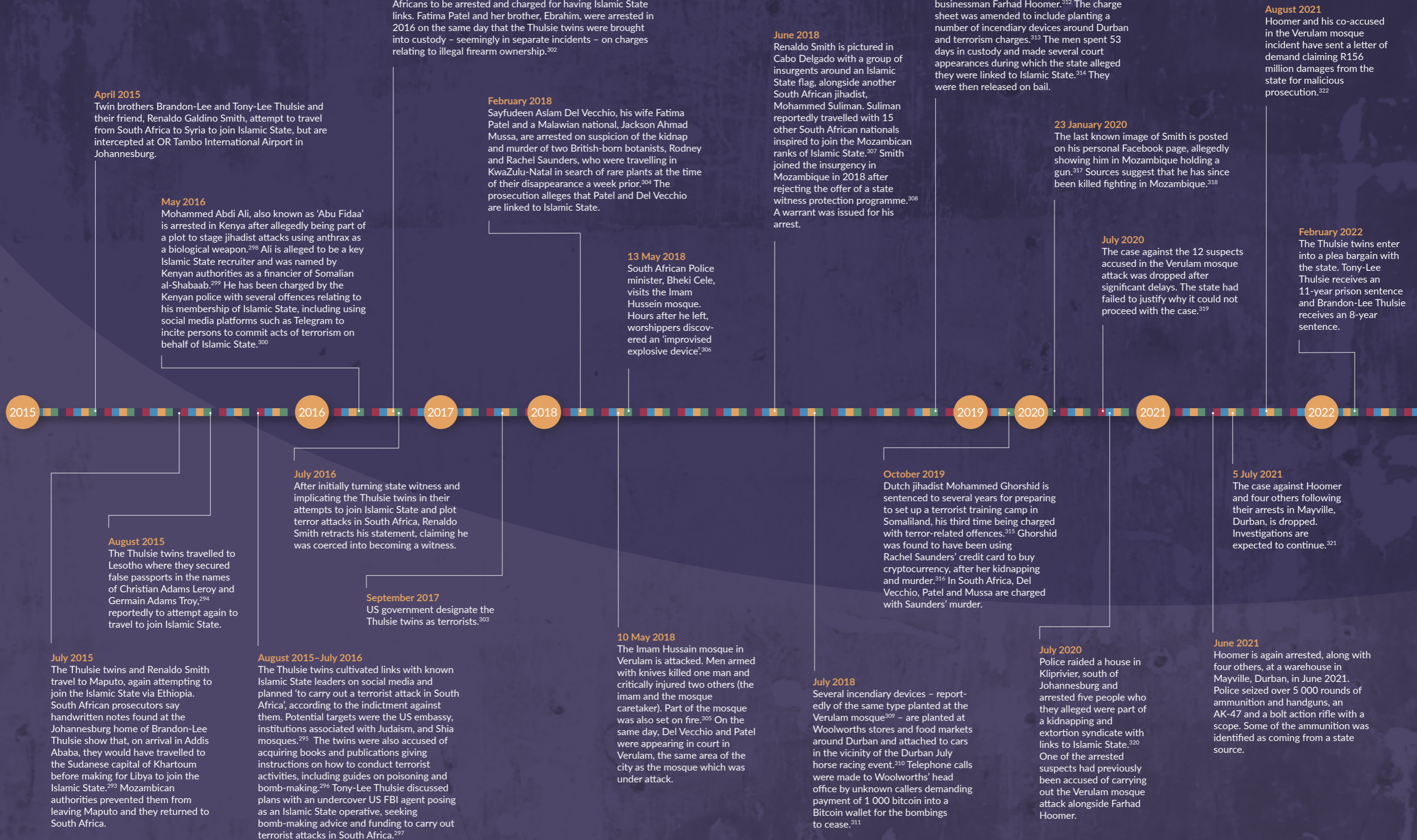
Some have speculated that South Africa's intervention via SADC in neighbouring Mozambique could make the country a bigger target. South African president Cyril Ramaphosa, for example, warned that Islamic State militants could target South Africa and other allied nations intervening in Mozambique at a summit with Kenya's president Uhuru Kenyatta in November 2021.<sup>289</sup>

## **South Africa: A base for terror networks?**

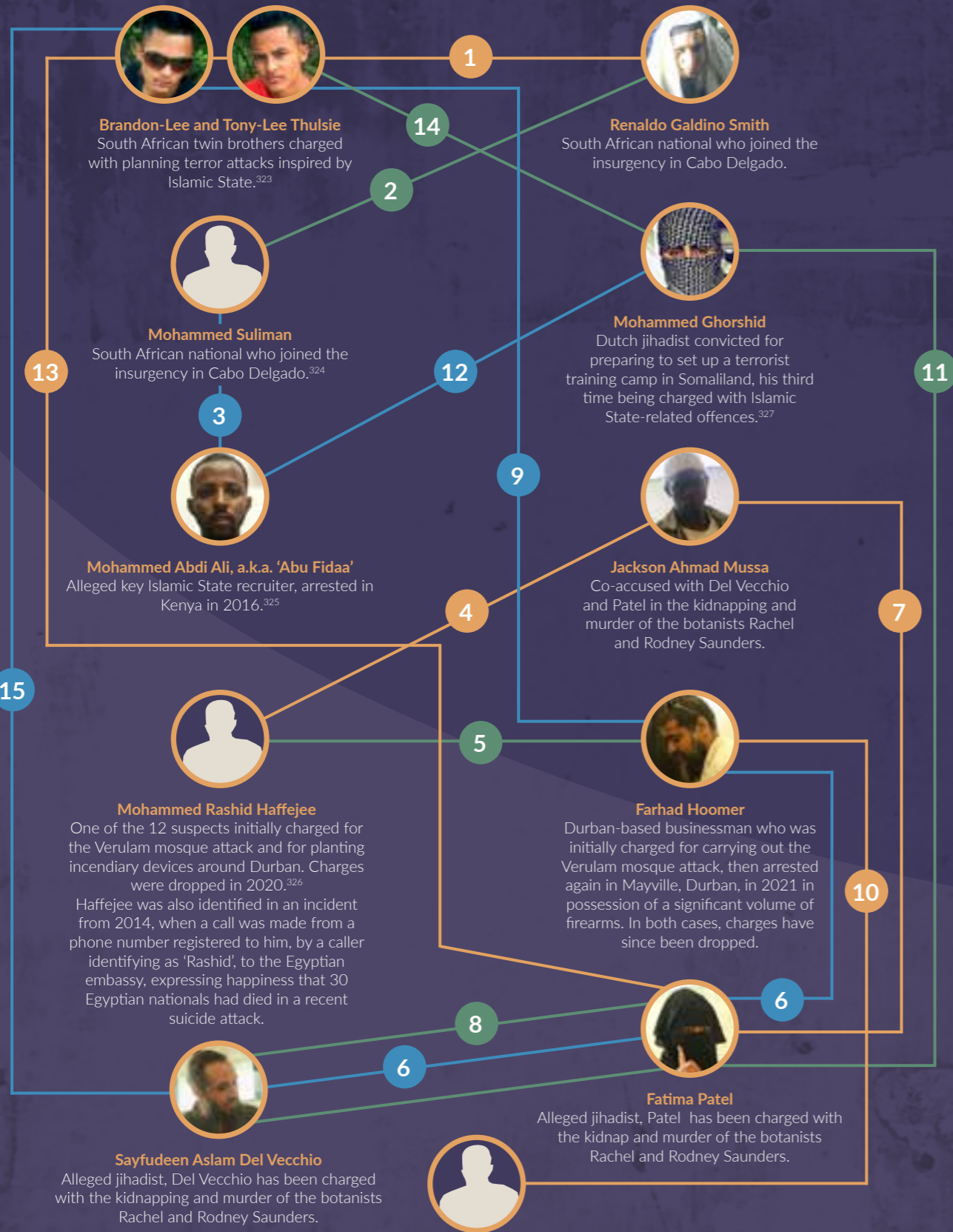
Some experts have argued that South Africa's decision to not formally align itself with US-led counterterrorism policy, and not to deploy troops to counter Islamic terrorism in the past, has prevented it from becoming a target for extremist networks.<sup>290</sup>

South Africa has also sought to shield its citizens from terror-related charges and designations internationally, for example, in the case of South African cousins Farhad Ahmed Dockrat and Junaid Ismail Dockrat. The US sought to add the Dockrats to a UN sanctions list for alleged links to al-Qaeda, which South Africa rejected.<sup>291</sup> The cousins have remained on a US sanctions list since 2007.<sup>292</sup>

## Key Islamist terrorism cases in South Africa



## Connections between key Islamic State cases in South Africa



Ethiopian national who was one of the 12 charged in the Verulam mosque attack investigation. Sayid was also one of five suspects arrested in Kliprivier,<sup>328</sup> who police claimed were part of a 'kidnapping and extremism syndicate'.<sup>329</sup> Sayid was also connected to a female Dutch national who travelled to join Islamic State in Syria and had been 'married' online to a South African jihadist (suspected to be Sayid).<sup>330</sup>

Number	Details
1	The Thulsie twins and their close friend Renaldo Smith together attempted to leave South Africa twice to join Islamic State in 2015. <sup>331</sup> In July 2016 the trio were arrested in Johannesburg in a counterterrorism raid. <sup>332</sup>
2	Smith was pictured with Suliman, another South African jihadist, in Cabo Delgado with a group of insurgents around an Islamic State flag in June 2018. <sup>333</sup>
3	The Thulsie twins were allegedly in contact with 'Abu Fidaa'. In messages seen by the GI-TOC, a contact identified as 'AF' – suspected to be Abu Fidaa – gives advice on conducting operations in secret and promises to find information on targets in South Africa of US, British and French interests. <sup>334</sup>
4	Mahomed Haffejee's contact details were found in Jackson Ahmad Mussa's phone. <sup>335</sup>
5	Co-accused in the Verulam mosque attack.
6	They are husband and wife.
7	Co-accused in the kidnapping and murder of Rodney and Rachel Saunders.
8	The Verulam mosque attack, which South African authorities allege Hoomer coordinated, took place on the same day that Del Vecchio and Patel were appearing in court. <sup>336</sup> While on bail, Hoomer attended Del Vecchio's court hearings. He visited Del Vecchio in jail and has assisted with his legal defence. Hoomer claims to have no prior connection to Del Vecchio but that he stands in solidarity as, in his view, both he and Del Vecchio have been 'unfairly targeted' by the state, part of a global injustice being perpetrated against Muslims. <sup>337</sup>
9	While on bail, Hoomer attended the Thulsie twins' court hearings and attempted to visit them in jail but was prevented by COVID-19 restrictions. As with Del Vecchio, Hoomer claimed to have no prior connection to the Thulsies other than a sense of solidarity.
10	Co-accused in the Verulam mosque attack.
11	Dutch jihadist Mohammed Ghorshid was found to have been involved in converting stolen money, which came from Rachel Saunders' credit card, into cryptocurrency. <sup>338</sup> The Dutch court that tried Ghorshid viewed him, Del Vecchio and Patel as part of an Islamic State-linked terrorist organization. <sup>339</sup>
12	Reporting on Ghorshid's trial in the Netherlands said that he had been in contact with Abu Fidaa. <sup>340</sup>
13	Investigating officers alleged that Patel had been in contact with the Thulsie twins. Patel and her brother, Ebrahim, were arrested in 2016 on the same day that the Thulsie twins were brought into custody – seemingly in separate incidents – on charges relating to illegal firearm ownership. <sup>341</sup>
14	Dutch and South African authorities established that Patel was in touch with Ghorshid and then introduced him to the Thulsie twins. <sup>342</sup>
15	Investigations established that 'Abu Leila Saif' was an online moniker used by Del Vecchio. <sup>343</sup> In Telegram chats with an 'Abuleila Saif', Tony-Lee Thulsie discussed attacking South African Jews. <sup>344</sup> Evidence obtained in the Thulsie Twins matter indicated that 'Abuleila Saif' (i.e. Del Vecchio) was in communication with individuals outside the country with strong links to Islamic State. <sup>345</sup>

However, there have been several instances over the past two decades where South Africa has been used as a base for terrorists operating internationally: as a base to plan attacks, a conduit for financing, or a hiding place.<sup>346</sup> Some analysts have argued that South Africa's extensive issues with gangsterism, corruption and entrenched organized crime have created a febrile situation that terror networks can exploit to their advantage.<sup>347</sup> This includes the case of Samantha Lewthwaite, a British national who was instrumental in planning the Westgate mall attack in Nairobi by al-Shabaab. In 2014, Lewthwaite was discovered to have been living in South Africa, using a fake South African passport, since at least 2008. Other terror suspects have used falsified South African passports and South African nationals have also been identified joining terrorist networks overseas.<sup>348</sup>

The use of South Africa as a 'rear base' for training, concealment and fundraising for Islamist militants was acknowledged by South African state security sources in the first decade of the 2000s.<sup>349</sup> This dynamic appears to continue today. A report released by SADC states that some funding for the Mozambican insurgency has been channelled through individuals and private organizations in South Africa and

other countries in East Africa, including such Tanzania, DRC, Uganda and Burundi.<sup>350</sup>

Since the emergence of Islamic State, a number of South Africans have reportedly travelled to join the group in Syria. An estimate from 2017 ranged widely between 60 and 100 individuals.<sup>351</sup> Since 2015, several Islamic State-linked incidents have taken place in South Africa. Some argue this represents a shift whereby South Africa is becoming an active theatre of operations for Islamist terrorism. In two of these incidents, suspects or people linked to the cases also joined the Islamic State-aligned insurgents in Mozambique, suggesting that the newer, southern African front of the caliphate can draw in individuals inspired by global Islamic State ideals.

The key Islamic State-linked events in South Africa are set out in the timeline on pages 52–53. Our research team interviewed members of law enforcement, prosecutors and suspects in these cases and reviewed an extensive set of court documents to analyze whether these incidents are interconnected or isolated events, and what, if any, links these suspects have to the insurgency in Mozambique.

**Fighters in Mozambique pose with an Islamic State flag in an image shared on social media channels in June 2018. Two are allegedly South African nationals: Renaldo Smith (second left, back row) and Mohammed Suliman (second right, back row).** *Photo: Telegram*



**An image from Renaldo Smith's Facebook page, showing him holding a weapon, believed to have been taken in Mozambique and posted late January 2020.** *Photo: Facebook*





# Islamic State-linked cases since 2015

## The 'Thulsie twins' case

First among these cases to make headlines was that of the 'Thulsie twins'. Along with their friend Renaldo Galdino Smith, Brandon-Lee and Tony-Lee Thulsie made attempts to join Islamic State but were intercepted by law enforcement.<sup>352</sup> The trio were then arrested by the Hawks in a counterterrorism raid in Johannesburg in July 2016. Smith initially turned state witness against the Thulsie twins,<sup>353</sup> but then refused the offer of a state witness protection programme and fled to Mozambique to join the Mozambican insurgency in 2018.<sup>354</sup> Sources suggest that he has since been killed fighting in Mozambique.<sup>355</sup>

The Thulsie twins became the first South Africans to be arrested and charged for having Islamic State links, accused of having cultivated links with known Islamic State leaders on social media, gathered materials on terrorism and bomb-making (including consulting an undercover US FBI agent for bomb-making advice and funding) and planned attacks in South Africa.<sup>356</sup> In February 2022, more than five years after their arrest, the Thulsie twins entered into a plea bargain with the state. Tony-Lee Thulsie received an 11-year prison sentence and Brandon-Lee Thulsie was sentenced to eight years.

## The Del Vecchio and Patel case

In February 2018, Sayfudeen Aslam Del Vecchio, his wife Fatima Patel and a Malawian national, Jackson Ahmad Mussa, were arrested on suspicion of the kidnapping and murder of two British-born botanists, Rodney and Rachel Saunders. The couple had been travelling in KwaZulu-Natal in search of rare plants at the time of their disappearance, a week prior to the arrest.<sup>357</sup> Del Vecchio and Patel were not charged with terrorism, yet several aspects of their case attest to their links with Islamic State. For many years, Del Vecchio had made no secret of his radical views and his 'affiliation to the Islamic State'.<sup>358</sup> Fatima Patel was suspected of helping a 15-year-old join Islamic State in 2015 and had been active in posting jihadist content on social media, establishing an extremist Twitter profile as 'The Lioness'.<sup>359</sup>

Police stated in court proceedings that the couple were suspected of terrorist activity from as early as 2017 and that the state was in the process of drafting an affidavit asking to search their home when it came to light that they were suspected of kidnapping.<sup>360</sup> The search of Del Vecchio and Patel's home also uncovered Islamic State flags, a modified cell phone, which appeared to be the trigger for an improvised explosive device (IED), and handbooks on bomb-making. Analysis of their phones discovered messages between Del Vecchio, Patel and Mussa about 'killing the kuffar' in apparent reference to the killing of Rodney and Rachel Saunders.<sup>361</sup> A Dutch jihadist named Mohammed Ghorshid was later reportedly found using stolen money that came from Rachel Saunders' credit card to buy cryptocurrency, having received the details from Del Vecchio and Patel.<sup>362</sup>

Del Vecchio and Patel appeared in court in a Durban area known as Verulam in May 2018. Towards the end of a day of court proceedings, there was a disturbance in the press gallery.<sup>363</sup> The nearby Imam Hussain mosque was on fire as men armed with knives attacked the Shia place of worship, killing one man and critically injuring two others.<sup>364</sup> Three days later, an IED was discovered in the mosque.<sup>365</sup> Several other incendiary devices – reportedly of the same type planted at the Verulam mosque<sup>366</sup> – were planted in Woolworths stores<sup>367</sup> and markets around Durban in July 2018.<sup>368</sup> Phone calls were made to Woolworths demanding Bitcoin payments for the bombings to cease.<sup>369</sup> Twelve suspects were accused of alleged involvement in the Verulam mosque attack, including Durban businessman Farhad Hooper.<sup>370</sup> The trial of Del Vecchio, Patel and Mussa has yet to commence.

## Farhad Hooper

Farhad Hooper and the other men were charged with several crimes relating to the mosque attack: murder and attempted murder, planting explosive materials and arson. The charge sheet was later amended to include planting incendiary devices around Durban and terrorism charges.<sup>371</sup> They were also charged with possessing an IED remote control and extortion of

three Durban businessmen (who allegedly had dealings with Hoomer), demanding they each pay R10 million into a *hawala* account in Dubai.

In a series of raids on the day of the arrests, police reported that they discovered a Tanzanian man being held for ransom in the basement of a property belonging to Hoomer – in an apparently unrelated criminal scheme in which undocumented foreign nationals were kidnapped for ransom. Police reported that extremist literature was also found and in court proceedings, the state alleged the suspects were linked to Islamic State.<sup>372</sup> Yet the case against them was later dropped.<sup>373</sup> A further postponement (requested by the state) was refused by the magistrate, who criticized unreasonable delays in the trial as prejudicial to the accused. State prosecutors said investigators had yet to analyze the five terabytes of data recovered from over 200 devices seized from the accused.<sup>374</sup>

Senior state prosecutor Mahen Naidu said the state would continue with its investigations. 'We already have all this information. As much as the court wouldn't accept that COVID-19 affected the police and hampered investigations, it did. We will finalize our investigations and approach the DPP [director of public prosecutions] to get the authority to prosecute and to place the matter back on the roll,' Naidu said.<sup>375</sup> Hoomer and his co-accused have since threatened to launch a damages claim of R156 million against the state for malicious prosecution.<sup>376</sup>

In June 2021, a second case was also dropped after Hoomer and four others were arrested at a warehouse in Mayville, Durban. Police seized over 5 000 rounds of ammunition and handguns, an AK-47 and a bolt action rifle with a scope. Some of the

ammunition was identified as coming from a state source. This case was dropped a few months later, to the frustration of police and prosecutors.

A policeman close to the investigation said the evidence was incorrectly gathered, either intentionally or because of ineptitude.<sup>377</sup>

### **Kliprivier case**

Shortly after charges against Hoomer and the other suspects in the Verulam mosque attack were dropped in July 2020, police raided a house in Kliprivier, south of Johannesburg, and arrested an alleged kidnapping and extortion syndicate described by South African authorities as 'one of the biggest breakthroughs [in] investigations of international terrorism in South Africa'.<sup>378</sup> Islamic State-related material was reportedly found at the house, just as Islamic State 'training DVDs' were recovered from Hoomer's property after the Verulam mosque attack investigation.

Police claimed that some of the firearms recovered at the house had been used in other kidnapping cases in KwaZulu-Natal and in a shooting at a restaurant in Melville, Johannesburg, that had been identified as a terrorist incident.<sup>379</sup> One of the suspects was successfully prosecuted for kidnapping and extortion.<sup>380</sup> It has been reported that some of the accomplices of the Kliprivier incident have since fled to join the insurgency in northern Mozambique.<sup>381</sup>

An officer in the Hawks unit for Crimes Against the State told the GI-TOC that they believe that this extremist network is moving members between 'cells' in different parts of South Africa, including Johannesburg and Durban, either so these members can be involved in extremist operations or to allow members to evade law enforcement.<sup>382</sup>

## Farhad Hooper – South African jihadist leader or unfairly targeted individual?

Farhad Hooper – formerly accused of leading the 2020 attack on the Verulam mosque and other firearms-related charges – openly discusses his radical ideology. In an interview with the GI-TOC, he argued that his goal is the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. Democracy, in his view, is a form of tyranny and enslavement. He said that he was prepared to take up arms to advance these goals.<sup>383</sup> Yet, he claimed that the firearm charges laid against him were false: the guns and ammunition seized in Mayville, he claims, were for legitimate use in hunting.

South African law enforcement views Hooper as a key leader of Islamist extremists in South Africa.<sup>384</sup> A source in the National Prosecuting Authority said of Hooper: ‘He is one of the big fish in the leadership. There is a struggle for ascendancy among the radicals in South Africa to establish Islamic State here ... We know he is an emir (of high rank or office) and he has generals under him ... He is a critical role-player. The police are understaffed and under-resourced and he’s not a priority for the state. He is unpredictable and unafraid to act on his beliefs.’<sup>385</sup> However, another Hawks source told the GI-TOC that other extremist factions, notably a West African faction with strong links to Somalia, were also emerging to challenge Hooper’s pre-eminence among extremists in South Africa.<sup>386</sup>

Hooper denied the allegations against him. ‘What makes them say I am a terrorist?’ he said. ‘The state has all my bank records, my cell phones and my computers. If they have proof that I am being funded or am funding someone, let them present it.’<sup>387</sup> He argued that he and other terror suspects in South Africa, namely Del Vecchio and the Thulsie twins, are being unfairly targeted by the state as part of a wider global injustice being perpetrated against Muslims.<sup>388</sup> This global injustice, he says, is what has prompted his letter of demand claiming damages from the state. While on bail, he attended the court appearances of Del Vecchio and the Thulsie twins, which he claims was out of a sense of ‘fellow feeling’ for his plight. He visited Del Vecchio in jail and has assisted with his legal defence. He tried to visit the Thulsie twins in jail but COVID-19 restrictions prevented this. He claimed not to have any prior connection to Del Vecchio or the Thulsie twins.



Weapons, ammunition and other materials (including a cell-phone reception jammer) recovered by police in Durban, July 2021. Charges were later dropped against Farhad Hooper and his co-accused.

*Photo: SAPS*

## The Islamic State threat in South Africa

Some observers argue that the cases that have emerged since 2015 prove that South Africa now 'faces an imminent threat of jihadist terrorism'.<sup>389</sup> Whereas previously South Africa avoided becoming the target of Islamic State's jihadist ire because of its stance on international terrorism policy, it now faces 'blowback' due to its intervention in the Mozambican insurgency,<sup>390</sup> as Islamic State itself has threatened in a 2020 issue of its publication *Al Nabā*.

Our analysis has found that there are several common links between these cases. As outlined in the diagram on page 54, there are several direct links between some of the individuals involved, such as between Fatima Patel (accused of the kidnapping and murder of Rodney and Rachel Saunders) and the Thulsie twins, and between Mahomed Haffejee (one of Hooper's co-accused in the Verulam mosque attack) and Jackson Ahmad Mussa (co-accused to Fatima Patel and Sayfudeen Aslam Del Vecchio). There are also indirect links with international jihadist figures, such as Abu Fidaa (a key Islamic State

recruiter in Kenya), who links the Thulsie twins, Del Vecchio and the Dutch jihadist Mohammed Ghorshid. However, the available information does not prove that these different incidents were connected as part of a concerted extremist network.

But the different cases are also linked in their modus operandi. In the Del Vecchio case, the bomb threats around Durban and the Kliprivier group, at least part of the aim in each instance was financial. In each case, the suspects are alleged to have wanted to extort or steal money, potentially to support international jihadist activities.

In two instances, there are direct connections to Islamic State-aligned group fighting in northern Mozambique: first Renaldo Smith, and then the alleged accomplices of the suspects in the Kliprivier case. More broadly, South African law enforcement reports that there are at least seven South African nationals known to be currently fighting in Mozambique, but that 30–40 are suspected.<sup>391</sup>

**The 12 co-accused in the Verulam mosque case appearing in the Verulam magistrate's court in 2020. The charges were later dropped. © Sunday Times/Jackie Clausen**



## The risks of overestimating the Islamic State threat

The northern Mozambique insurgency, its links to Islamic State, and the threats issued by Islamic State to carry out attacks against South Africa have put the spotlight on extremist networks within South Africa. This brings with it a risk that the actual threat of Islamist networks becomes overstated.

In absolute terms, incidents that appear to be linked to extremist Islamist ideologies are still relatively few. One may compare the frequency of incidents in countries like the United Kingdom (UK), where the Metropolitan Police reported that 18 Islamist terror plots were intercepted between 2017 and September 2021,<sup>392</sup> during which time 11 terror-related attacks took place.<sup>393</sup> Compared with the UK, which has been so prominent in the global 'war on terror' and in military interventions overseas, South Africa has not been targeted for attacks to the same degree.

Members of the South African Muslim community have also been anxious to emphasize that reporting should not inadvertently or lazily fall into Islamophobic and alarmist tropes, and equate isolated instances of extremism with the wide variance of interpretations of Islam practised in South Africa.<sup>394</sup> There have

been instances in previous years where reporting on alleged terror-linked cases in South African media has fallen below adequate reporting standards.<sup>395</sup> Farid Sayed, editor of Muslim View, a monthly newspaper, argues that media outlets often project the notion that extremism is pronounced in the Muslim community in South Africa, which has been part of the national community for hundreds of years, when in fact cases of extremism are extremely isolated.<sup>396</sup>

Rafeek Shah, a well-known Muslim cleric who runs two mosques in Durban and is a former member of parliament, agrees with Sayed that extremism in South Africa is contained within a minuscule number of select groups.<sup>397</sup> He also believes Muslim communities can often be caricatured as radical when political positions like an affinity to the struggle in Palestine, an opposition to US hegemony and US intervention in Afghanistan are misconceived as extremism. Such misconceptions may have a real-world impact in fuelling Islamophobia and xenophobic tensions, and influence policy by exaggerating an extremist threat.

Members of PAGAD at a funeral in Cape Town.  
© Reuters/Alamy Stock Photo



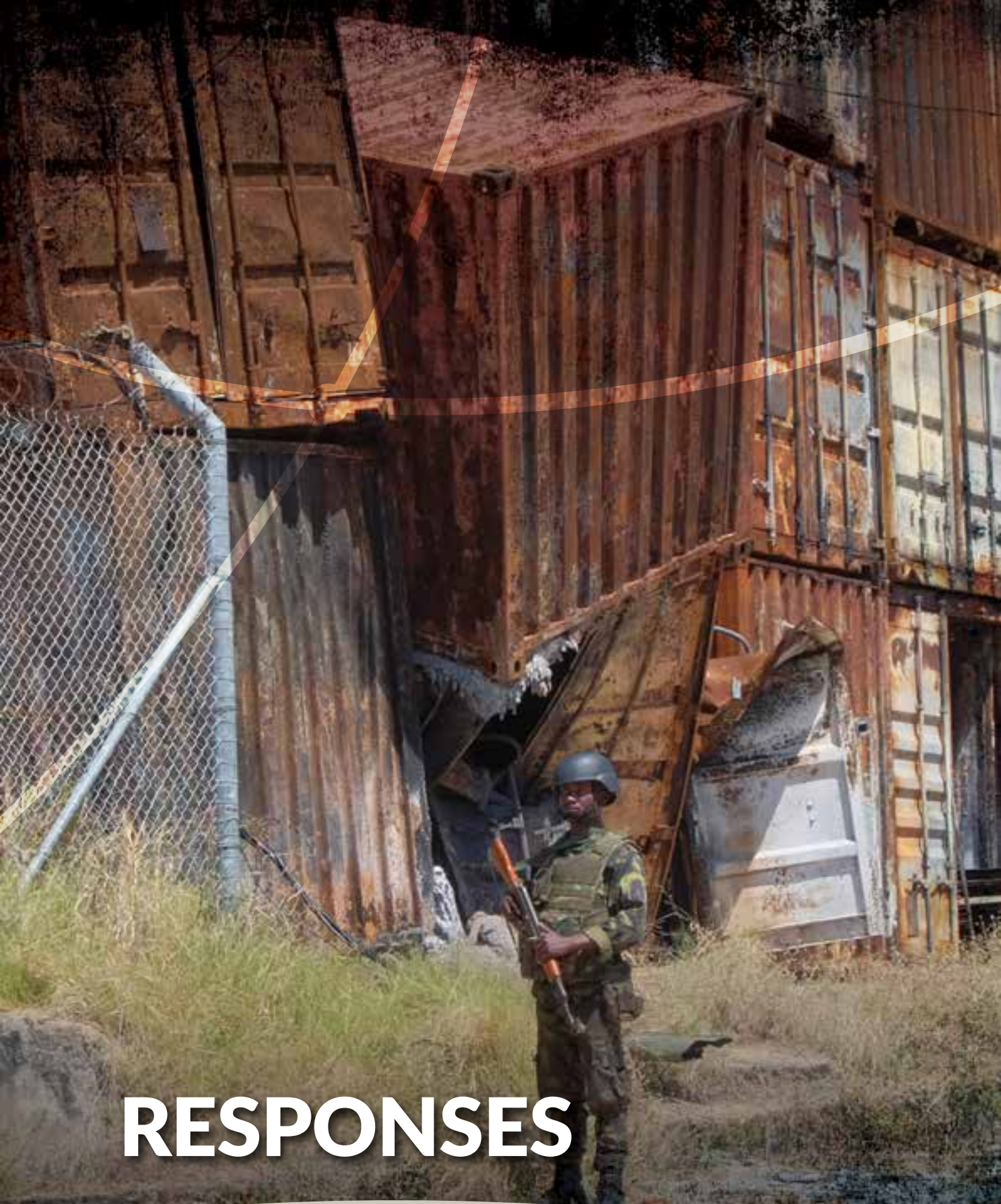
## Extremist networks in the Western Cape

People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) is a group that became synonymous with vigilante-style attacks in the Western Cape in the late 1990s. Since PAGAD's rise to prominence, no similar homegrown terrorism organization has emerged in South Africa.<sup>398</sup> The group emerged as a vigilante organization targeting gangsters and drug traffickers in Cape Town, including by carrying out assassinations and pipe-bomb attacks. PAGAD then evolved into what the United States subsequently labelled as a terrorist organization, alleging the group was behind a series of bomb attacks staged in Cape Town starting in 1998.<sup>399</sup>

The activities of PAGAD were largely quashed when several of its key leaders received lengthy prison sentences.<sup>400</sup> By the first half of the year 2000, PAGAD's days as a mass movement were perceived to be over.<sup>401</sup> However, members of PAGAD have reportedly continued the group's work in anti-gangster vigilantism over the years, albeit on a smaller scale.<sup>402</sup> Several major PAGAD leaders were released from prison in late 2020.<sup>403</sup> In interviews, members claimed to be sourcing weapons, training and relaunching the PAGAD cause.<sup>404</sup>

Within its predominantly Muslim membership, PAGAD has historically included both Sunni and Shia members. Throughout its history, PAGAD has reportedly been riven with tension between factions in the organization, between those which wished the organization's role to focus primarily on the local fight against gangsterism, enacted through violence as per its original *raison d'être*, and more radical factions which want to align the group with extremist Islamist ideals.<sup>405</sup> Interviews with PAGAD members suggest these splits continue today.

Interviews with several PAGAD members in late 2021 and early 2022 suggested members aligned to more radical factions have been following the conflict in Mozambique with interest, but there is no evidence that these individuals have been actively involved in, supported the insurgency financially, or mobilized around Islamic State.<sup>406</sup> As seen in previous years, PAGAD's focus appears to be more insular, directed at gangs and drug trafficking in their own communities.



# RESPONSES

A Rwandan soldier in Mocímboa da Praia, northern Mozambique, August 2021. © Emidio Jozine/AFP via Getty Images



## National security institutions in disarray in South Africa

The incidents linked to Islamic State that have emerged in South Africa since 2015 do not necessarily show an immediate, sustained threat of Islamic terrorism to the country. However, they do starkly demonstrate that the institutions tasked with identifying, prosecuting and preventing these cases are fundamentally weak.

South Africa's security institutions have long been riddled with corruption, maladministration and infiltration by organized crime. Concerted efforts by powerful political interests to undermine their independence, misappropriate intelligence resources for political purposes, and cripple police and prosecutorial capacity to act on corruption – notably during the decade-long tenure of President Jacob Zuma – have had a devastating effect.

The State Security Agency (SSA) – which is key to assessing intelligence on foreign and domestic threats – is among the many agencies that have been undermined. A report of a high-level review panel on the SSA, appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2018, was damning in its assessment:

'There has been a serious politicization and fictionalization of the intelligence community over the past decade or more, based on factions in the ruling party, resulting in an almost complete disregard for the Constitution, policy, legislation and other prescripts, and turning the civilian intelligence community into a private resource to serve the political and personal interests of particular individuals,' the report concluded. Secret funds were looted, corruption was widespread and the SSA became a 'cash-cow' for many inside and outside the agency.<sup>407</sup>

In early 2021, the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, chaired by Acting Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, heard evidence that millions of South African rands were funnelled through the SSA during the Zuma presidency.<sup>408</sup>

The SSA faced accusations of incompetence after the widespread violence in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces following Zuma's imprisonment for contempt of court in July 2021. The violence, looting and burning – which left 340 dead, 150 000 jobless and R50 billion in losses to South Africa's struggling economy<sup>409</sup> – was unforeseen by the SSA.<sup>410</sup> In August 2021, as part of a cabinet reshuffle, Ramaphosa scrapped the Ministry of Intelligence and announced the SSA would now be directly accountable to the





Acting Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. The Judicial Commission of Inquiry heard how money was funnelled by South Africa's State Security Agency to support the Zuma regime. © Veli Nhlapo/Sowetan/Gallo Images via Getty Images

presidency.<sup>411</sup> Ramaphosa denied critics' allegations that the move was a power grab for the presidency, saying the shift aimed to 'professionalize' the agency.<sup>412</sup>

Similarly, the police's Crime Intelligence Division has been all but crippled by years of systemic abuses and corruption. Funds intended for intelligence operations and payments to registered confidential informants, governed by loose internal controls, were systematically looted.<sup>413</sup> The division's former head and Zuma ally, Richard Mdluli, is currently serving a prison sentence for kidnapping and assault and now

also faces charges of fraud, corruption and theft relating to the looting of a secret slush fund.<sup>414</sup>

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), also partially hollowed out during the Zuma years and hamstrung by state capture, politically pliant appointments and a rapid turnover in staff and leadership, is now struggling to right itself.<sup>415</sup> It faces the continued fallout from an exodus of skilled staff, the often-glacial pace of prosecutions and pressure to make progress in high-level corruption prosecutions and to prioritize prosecutions that can make an impact on violent crime.<sup>416</sup>

## The impact of weak institutions

Even with the necessary political backing to create real reform, efforts to repair these agencies may take years to have a real impact. The national-level problems affecting South Africa's security institutions can be seen to influence its response to terrorism cases.

In 2013 South Africa adopted a National Counterterrorism Strategy, which remains in effect to this day. Several other laws provide a basis for terrorism responses and efforts to curb terrorist activity and investigate terrorist financing. However, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – a global intergovernment watchdog of money laundering and terrorist financing – published a report in October 2021 which found that South Africa was not pursuing investigations into terrorism financing consistent with international standards. The report says the country has specialist prosecutors and police to investigate terrorism funding but that 'South Africa has failed to demonstrate that it is effectively identifying, investigating or prosecuting terrorist financiers or addressing terrorism finance through alternate measures'.<sup>417</sup> FATF notes that South Africa has only ever convicted one person involved in terrorism financing, while highlighting that South Africa has thousands of charitable and non-profit organizations with insufficient oversight, suggesting some might be at risk of terror financing abuse.

Authorities have stated that they are engaged in active investigations into terrorist financing from South Africa to Mozambique. Hawks spokesperson Lloyd Ramovha told media in August 2020 that South Africans were aiding and abetting Islamic State in Mozambique with 'financial and material support'. The investigation involved Interpol and Mozambican authorities, with detectives looking at cross-border financial flows, the origins of these funds and the involvement of organized crime in raising finances.<sup>418</sup> However, sources we spoke to levelled criticisms at the way counterterror investigations have been handled.

Investigators with close knowledge of Islamic State-linked cases expressed fears that South African authorities do not currently have enough technical and specialist capacity to deal with cases of this

nature. Terrorism cases also require significant manpower, informer networks, cyber capabilities, specialist language skills, cultural knowledge and an understanding of militant ideology, elements that are largely lacking in South Africa's security establishment today.<sup>419</sup> An officer in the Hawks unit for Crimes Against the State expressed concerns that the unit is 'seriously understaffed', with only around 20 officers with the requisite knowledge and experience nationwide.<sup>420</sup>

Several sources told the GI-TOC that there is a single South African Police Services expert who analyzes data seized in terror raids. The Verulam mosque attack investigation alone yielded five terabytes of data for analysis from 200 separate devices seized from the accused, creating an insurmountable task for the personnel available.<sup>421</sup> One senior NPA source told the GI-TOC: 'It is ridiculous that one person [has to analyze five terabytes of data from 200 devices from this case]. You should have a team of at least 15 people doing that. It is an impossible task. It is like asking me to get to the moon but then giving me a horse cart to get there. It is shocking. To study ISIS, you need an entire team dedicated to online recruitment alone.'

This lack of investigative capacity contributed to what the magistrate criticized as 'unreasonable' delays, which led to the Verulam mosque prosecution being struck from the roll.<sup>422</sup> Significant delays have also affected other terror offence cases. In October 2021, when the Thulsie twins appeared in court, the judge slammed the delays in their trial as 'preposterous'.<sup>423</sup> An officer close to the investigation into Hooper's July 2021 arrest in Mayville also said that the evidence was incorrectly gathered, which led to the case being dropped, either due to ineptitude or wilful sabotage of the case.<sup>424</sup>

Senior Hawks sources allege that a lack of expertise domestically has left South African investigators reliant on the cooperation of overseas partners. The Thulsie twins, Del Vecchio and Verulam mosque cases were all supported by international partners who are better able to monitor online jihadist activity. The October 2021 FATF report similarly said that in the case of the



Rwandan soldiers patrol in front of what remains of the airport in Mocimboa da Praia, September 2021. The town was occupied by insurgents for almost a year. © Simon Wohlfahrt/AFP via Getty Images

Thulsie twins, assistance had been provided by Syria, Iraq, Kenya, Lesotho, the UK, the US and France.

Publicly, the South African government has affirmed its commitment to counterterrorism.<sup>425</sup> President Cyril Ramaphosa visited the Verulam mosque two weeks after the attack and expressed condolences to worshippers, saying 'law enforcement agencies have been tasked to give this [attack] high priority'.<sup>426</sup> However, several sources in South Africa's justice and security cluster expressed fears that there is little appetite in government to see terrorism as a serious issue. This is attributed to authorities being otherwise

preoccupied with high-profile corruption cases in South Africa.

Another reason posited was that the government did not want terror cases to tarnish South Africa's reputation.<sup>427</sup> However, another senior NPA source disagreed: 'These are all priority crimes being worked on by speciality components in the police and the NPA.' A Hawks officer investigating terror cases told GI-TOC that while police wanted to pursue terror cases, the state's capacity to do so is increasingly diminished as more and more senior detectives retire.<sup>428</sup>

## Responses to the insurgency in Mozambique

Up to early November 2021, Mozambican government and regional forces expressed confidence that the conflict in Cabo Delgado is drawing to a close.<sup>429</sup> President Nyusi has promised representatives of gas companies which have invested in Cabo Delgado that the Mozambican government will 'do everything to remove the last obstacle' to 'complete security and tranquillity'.<sup>430</sup> Professor Mpho Molomo, head of SAMIM, told assembled regional experts and civil society that he believed the foreign intervention of Rwanda and the SADC is what is required to 'save' Cabo Delgado.<sup>431</sup> However, the breakthrough spate of attacks in Cabo Delgado and expansion to Niassa Province have shown that the regional interventions have not yet achieved sustainable security. The SADC intervention force has since been extended until April 2022.<sup>432</sup> Mozambican military leaders have agreed with Rwandan forces to continue and extend their operations.<sup>433</sup>

However, there is a broad consensus among civil society and international observers that the conflict cannot have a purely military solution.<sup>434</sup> While the military may have an important role in achieving initial stability and allowing the return of humanitarian aid, trade, and business to areas which have been cut off for many months, this does not obviate the structural drivers of the insurgency.<sup>435</sup> As outlined earlier in this report, the insurgency is fundamentally driven by extreme political and economic marginalization, channelled through religious extremism and expressed through violence.

The intervention by Rwandan and SADC forces has recaptured territory that the Mozambican military was unable to achieve. The Rwandan forces have also reportedly been able to build better communication with communities in Cabo Delgado, in part because of their greater ability to communicate in Swahili, as the lingua franca of East Africa and Cabo Delgado, compared with Mozambican forces, as well as their better discipline, leadership and understanding that local support is critical in counterinsurgency operations. However, civil society figures have repeatedly raised concerns about a lack of

transparency over the Rwandan intervention in particular,<sup>436</sup> and to some extent the SADC intervention as well.<sup>437</sup>

Interviewees in Mozambican civil society stressed the importance of alternative channels of peacebuilding to military intervention. First, authorities need to build frameworks of inclusive dialogue with communities in Cabo Delgado to prevent political grievances from repeatedly erupting into violence at later stages.<sup>438</sup> Some international observers have also stressed the need for negotiation with al-Shabaab, when the timing is right.<sup>439</sup> Second is the need for an ambitious redevelopment plan for the region, not only to rebuild the infrastructure that has been destroyed in the conflict but also to provide meaningful opportunities for unemployed youth in Cabo Delgado. This is essential to shift the balance of incentives for young people away from joining al-Shabaab.<sup>440</sup>

A third important channel is the need to strengthen the capacity of Mozambican government institutions so that they can independently manage the threat of conflict and terrorism.<sup>441</sup> Issues of endemic corruption and high-level positions being filled by political appointees as opposed to appointments based on merit, were described as eroding the efficacy of these institutions. This includes intelligence-gathering capacities, which were assessed by Mozambican experts as ineffective.<sup>442</sup> Faction-fighting within the Frelimo elite was also seen as a major stumbling block to effectively building institutions, including the military.<sup>443</sup>

Weaknesses in the military institutions were demonstrated by defections to the insurgents in the early stages of the conflict, as well as the loss of weapons and equipment, through both capture by insurgents and, it is alleged, deliberate sabotage by elements of the military.<sup>444</sup> The fact that the Rwandan and SADC interventions were able to make progress in a matter of months is testament to how weak the Mozambican military response was before their arrival, hence their reliance on private military capacity.

In a cabinet reshuffle in November 2021, President Nyusi named the former military commander of operations in Cabo Delgado as defence minister, and a high-ranking police officer as interior minister. Nyusi has said that the appointments herald reform and restructuring in the military.<sup>445</sup>

The Mozambican government has also produced a reconstruction plan that emphasizes the need for development. This includes support to the agriculture sector to aid the dire food security situation (as the latest UN estimates suggest up to a million people in northern Mozambique are severely food insecure) and a focus on youth employment in the budget.<sup>446</sup> However, the view from outside government is pessimistic that these goals will be achieved. The most likely outcome is that the government will be able to achieve and maintain sufficient security for the oil and gas extraction, but this is unlikely to translate into sustainable peace for local people.<sup>447</sup>

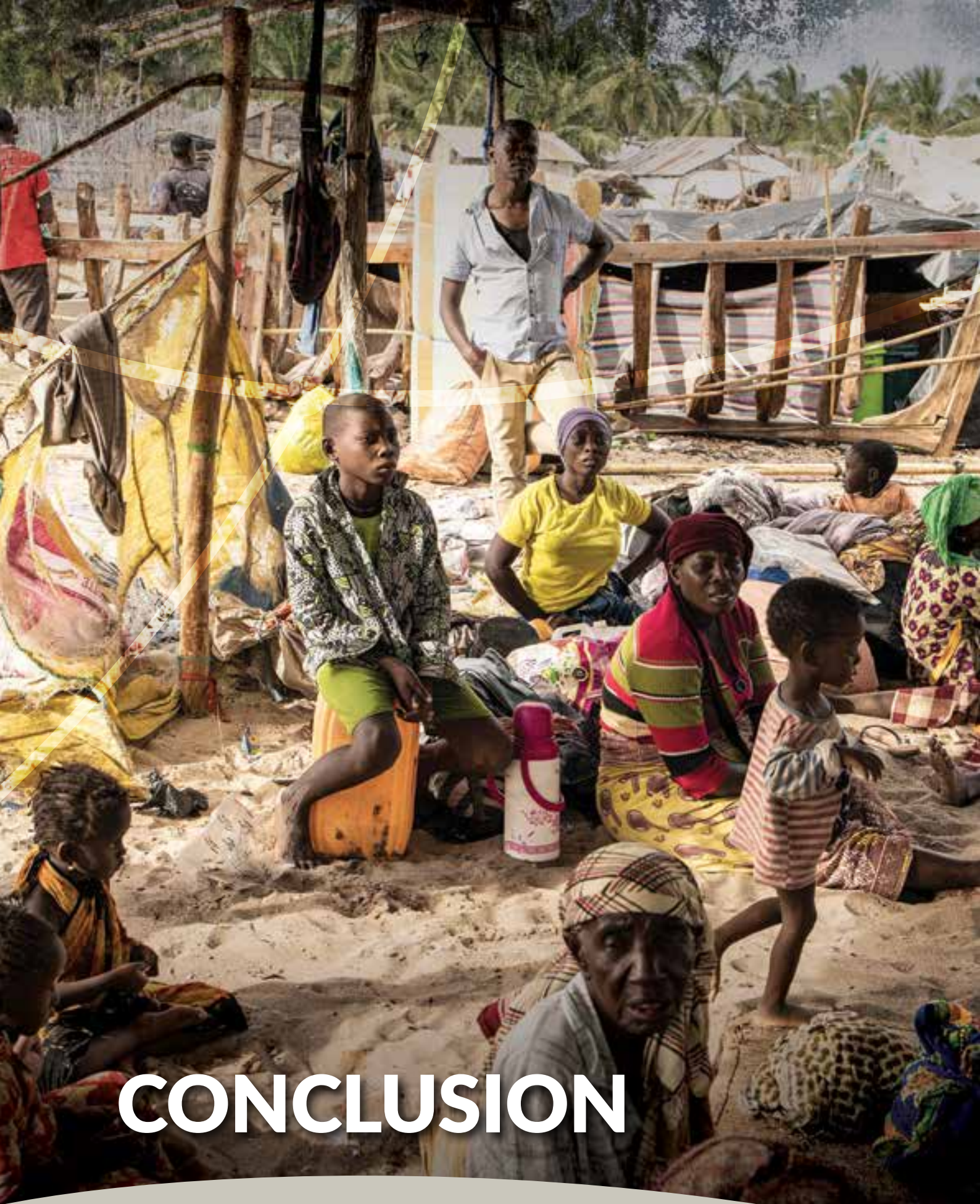
It has also been highlighted that the way the reconstruction plan is structured will shift the balance of power over Cabo Delgado further towards the central government.<sup>448</sup> Power in Mozambique is already highly centralized around the presidency, leaving regional authorities with little autonomy.<sup>449</sup> In the face of an insurgent movement which has risen up in part in revolt against elite control and exploitation of the region's resources, the impact of further centralization of power in Maputo will likely have negative consequences.

Without reform in key Mozambican institutions and a sustained reconstruction strategy in Cabo Delgado that offers young people a viable alternative to conflict and insurgency recruitment, Mozambique runs the risk that military gains by regional forces will be short-lived, violence will re-emerge, and Cabo Delgado will continue to be a source of instability for the region as a destination for extremists from other countries.<sup>450</sup>

**A worshipper in a mosque in Pemba. The city hosts tens of thousands of people displaced by the violence.**


© John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images





# CONCLUSION

Displaced people gather under a makeshift shelter on Paquitequete beach, Pemba. © John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images



**T**he Cabo Delgado conflict is a watershed moment in a new security environment. It has emerged out of social and economic marginalization, alongside a breakdown in governance and the rule of law. This differs from the struggle for independence of previous generations. It is a conflict with localized causes which have been channelled through religious extremism, but fundamentally many of the drivers are political and economic. These grievances have manifested in violence owing to the failure of institutions, governance and other avenues of dialogue with aggrieved groups.

The illicit economy may not have become a major source of funding for al-Shabaab, but it has, nonetheless, played a significant role in creating the conditions for the conflict. The pervasiveness of organized crime in Cabo Delgado over many decades shaped the situation in which the conflict emerged: a region without effective rule of law, where corruption is pervasive, and where discontented people – particularly young people – have few avenues to make their political views heard and few opportunities for economic empowerment.

Unless these failures of governance and grievances are addressed, there is a risk that Cabo Delgado may enter cycles of violence that could have a destabilizing effect on the wider region. The drivers of the conflict are not being addressed by the current military response to the insurgency, and many people remain sceptical as to whether they ever will be. Many of the same conditions that brought about the insurgency in northern Cabo Delgado also exist in other regions, in particular Nampula Province, and to some extent Niassa Province. There is a concern that the return of fighters from Cabo Delgado to these areas and redirected trafficking routes could lead to new outbreaks of violence.

The link between organized crime and terrorist groups is often far more complex than the prevailing narratives would suggest, as our findings from northern Mozambique demonstrate. Similarly, the relationship between Mozambique's al-Shabaab and Islamic State is more complex than a direct allegiance and command from Islamic State centre. Their relationship has strengthened and waned over time, and appears to be opportunistic rather than systemic, with Mozambican insurgents tapping into this global jihadist ideology while maintaining their local causes and justifications for violence.

There is a tendency for government and military statements to describe al-Shabaab as being closely involved in trafficking, particularly of drugs, and aligned to Islamic State.

The evidence to support these claims is not clear. However, it is easy to see how presenting al-Shabaab as a terrorist and criminal organization, tapped into regional trafficking flows and connected with the world's most notorious criminal organizations, is politically expedient. In our view, this belies the more complex reality of the conflict, where endemic discontent has flared up along religious and ethnic lines, and the management of the same resources which are hailed as holding the key to Mozambique's future has instead helped fan the flames of violence.

As the conflict evolves and some foreign fighters return to their countries of origin and other regions of Mozambique, there is a risk that violent attacks could be staged elsewhere. The spate of attacks in Niassa Province shows that this is already a reality. The question is, therefore, whether the institutions tasked with identifying and preventing such attacks are resilient enough for the job. South Africa has been fortunate in that it has rarely been the target of extremist activity. However, South Africa's security institutions have been systematically eroded and are now grappling with the legacy of a decade-long decline, leaving the country ill equipped to face emerging threats. Similarly, in Mozambique, the institutions tasked with investigating, gathering evidence and countering terrorism threats are fundamentally weak. The rapid progress of the Rwandan and SADC forces in securing insurgent-controlled territory demonstrated how ineffective the Mozambican response to the insurgency had been. It is these institutional issues, as well as the actions of extremist networks, which will determine how the regional threat evolves in the months and years to come.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Dhows in the port of Mocímboa da Praia, northern Mozambique. © Bert de Ruiter/Alamy

## For the Mozambican government:

- Ensure stability of local governance structures and tackle the drivers of corruption and maladministration which have undermined governance in Cabo Delgado. There needs to be a sense of a governed and ordered space in which local people can rebuild their lives and futures following the conflict.
- Improve trust between state and local populations, for example by bringing local civil society and community leaders into governance at district and provincial levels to ensure local issues, especially around service delivery, are heard and government spending is addressing local grievances.
- Support ongoing decentralization by ensuring decision-making is about government investment in Cabo Delgado, such as through the North Integrated Development Agency, as transparent and locally based as possible. This will help to ensure that money is directed to the needs of Cabo Delgado communities, to create the conditions for economic opportunity and prosperity, and to give more legitimacy to the funding if it is not perceived as being pre-programmed in Maputo.
- Professionalize law enforcement agencies into organizations that protect and serve the citizens of Mozambique. Reforms should focus on improving trust between local population and the state. Leadership changes are needed to create behaviour change and prevent future human rights abuses by security forces. These abuses drive insurgent recruitment. Human rights abuses that have already taken place should be investigated transparently.
- Use specialist police teams and prosecutorial capacity in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula to tackle the illicit economies that helped create the conditions for the insurgency and drive corruption. Consider establishing targeted medium-term support partnerships with international partners to help provide the resources and capacities to achieve this, and to address the transnational nature of the criminal networks.
- Communicate transparently about developments in Cabo Delgado and allow national, regional and international press easy access to Cabo Delgado.

## For SADC:

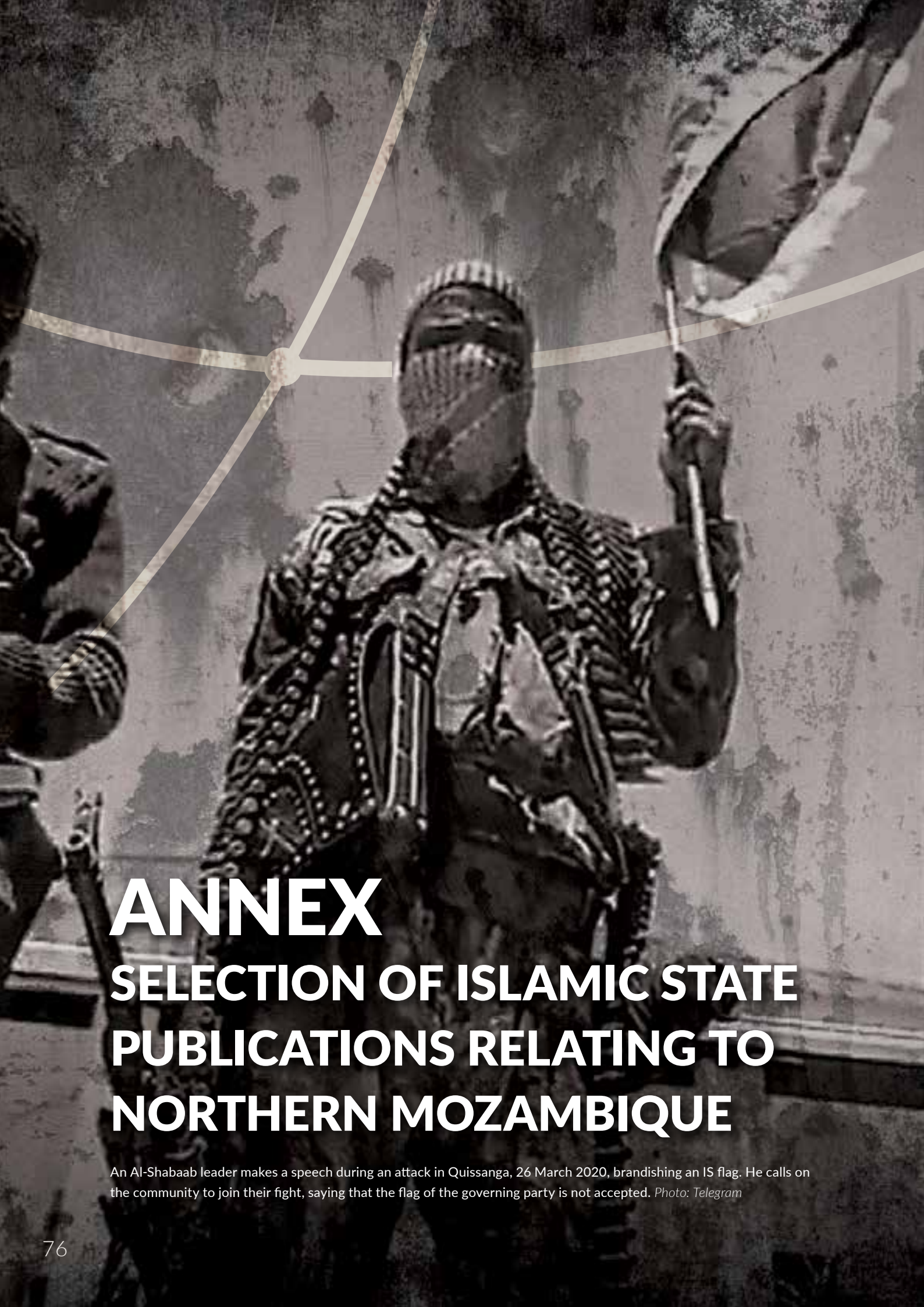
- Support key member states to collaborate on regional threats linked to Cabo Delgado. For example, facilitate improved intelligence-sharing among SADC states and Mozambique to help counter regional trafficking routes and monitor regional extremist threats.
- Support Mozambique to address the humanitarian crisis in northern Mozambique to ensure the immediate needs of the population (particularly women and other marginalized groups), such as safety, food security and shelter, are met. Also, support Mozambique to improve security-force relationships with local people, and to promote transparency and unimpeded press access.
- Support Mozambique to create the changes in security-force culture and management recommended above, in order to improve security-force relationships with local people.
- Maintain engagement with the government of Mozambique on key issues to ensure long-term stability in northern Mozambique, including human rights abuses, transparency and corruption, and to commit to improving local governance and socio-economic conditions.

## For the international community:

- Maintain engagement with the Mozambican government to address the underlying issues in northern Mozambique that led to the emergence of the conflict. In particular, the international community should focus on supporting processes that strengthen local governance systems and build institutions that are more resilient to corruption, more transparent and expose and prosecute all human rights abuses.
- In order to address the drivers of the conflict and support ongoing decentralization in Mozambique, as far as possible development support programming and aid for the north should be decoupled from the Mozambican central government and provided directly to northern Mozambique at the provincial and district level.
- Provide direct support to local non-government organizations and civil society groups that help communities to be resilient in the face of illicit economies and weak governance.
- Bilateral and multilateral support to military and police training missions should be embedded in a joint strategy that aims to strengthen leadership and professionalism. Preconditions must include a clear commitment by the Mozambican government to reform the security cluster towards professional, effective and service-oriented law enforcement agencies.

## On behalf of civil society:

- Mozambican civil society organizations have a critical role in monitoring the situation, reporting on human rights abuses and conducting research in very challenging circumstances and at great personal risk. They also play a critical role in developing innovative programmes and forums for debate to help resolve the conflict. This role needs to be acknowledged and supported by the Mozambican government and international community.
- The international community and international civil society should engage and partner with local organizations to support them in their critical roles.
- The Mozambican government should allow civil society organizations the freedom to operate and to take a meaningful role in conflict resolution and reconciliation.



# ANNEX

## SELECTION OF ISLAMIC STATE PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

An Al-Shabaab leader makes a speech during an attack in Quissanga, 26 March 2020, brandishing an IS flag. He calls on the community to join their fight, saying that the flag of the governing party is not accepted. *Photo: Telegram*

Throughout the course of this research, the GI-TOC team has monitored publications and statements in Islamic State-run social media channels relating to Mozambique, primarily through encrypted platforms such as Telegram. This annexure brings together a selection of translations of key statements issued by the jihadist group since June 2019, illustrating how the Islamic State (IS) central command – which directs its media output – has sought to present the Mozambican insurgency and what this reveals about its strategy and ideology.

As previous analysis has revealed, the frequency of IS communiqués relating to Mozambique has waxed and waned throughout the conflict.<sup>451</sup> A period of relative quiet up to November 2021 was succeeded, at the time of writing, in January 2022, by a flurry of reports.

Our aim is not to present a quantitative analysis of the frequency of IS publications and claims of attacks but to use key publications to demonstrate the globalist narrative the jihadist group has sought to build around what (according to our analysis) is a conflict rooted in local grievances. Featured here are primarily issues of *Al Nabā*, Islamic State's official weekly newsletter. The group issues a range of other short statements (circulated as jpegs), infographics and videos.

## Key document 1: *Al Nabā* issue 185, 6 June 2019

### Translated relevant sections

**Headline: Dozens of dead and wounded from the Congolese, Mozambique armies and the 'United Nations' forces. The spoils of the Mujahideen after their attack on the Mozambican army**

... Dozens of the joint forces of the Congo and Mozambique armies and the United Nations Crusader forces were killed and wounded as a result of the attacks launched by the Caliphate soldiers in Central Africa ...

Caliphate soldiers managed to repel an attack by members of the Crusader Mozambican army in the village of Metubi in Mocimboa region, where they clashed with them, using various types of weapons, killing and wounding a number of them ... The Mujahideen seized weapons, ammunition and missiles, praise God.

... The media office published pictures of the spoils that God bestowed on the soldiers of the Caliphate after they repelled the attack of the Mozambican army in the village of Metubi, thank God.

### Commentary

This is the first issue of *Al Nabā* to claim credit for an attack in Mozambique. From the outset, the jihadists report on attacks in Congo and Mozambique together, presenting a united front of what they claim as their 'Central Africa Province'. The reference to opposing forces as 'Crusader(s)' – thereby casting the modern conflict as a centuries-long struggle between Islamic and Christian traditions – is common in IS publications.

The account of the attack given here appears to be inaccurate, as the village named is not in the Mocimboa da Praia district but elsewhere in Cabo Delgado.



## Key document 2: Al Nabā issue 204, 17 October 2019

أخبار العدد ٢٠٤  
الطبعة ١٧ أكتوبر ٢٠١٩

### دقروا وأعطيوها ١٠ آيات لهم

#### جنود الخلافة يوقعون ٤٩ قتيلًا وجريحًا من الجيش والحشدين والشرطة الاتحادية في ديابلي



الدينه تامل على شتها ٨ مرتين يتبعه حيوه ناسفة ما ادى لتدمير ما وانهارها بالمشاة. كما استهدف الجنودون عيلة الرتل سلاح الجيش والقشبال البورية ما ادى لهلاك ٩ عناصر بينهم هيايت برتعة (معلم). وكذا القصف على توتيله. كما احتلوا الحصن (١٧٢) سطر) آية الحشد الرافضى الرتل في منطقة (ديابولي) غرب (مختلج) بضع عيلة ناسفة وكذا القصف في حين تجاوز الاثنى (١٦) سطر) يعقل الله تعالى. حيوه ناسفة على آية اخرى قبل حيا من عناصر العيلة والعمالة والطرد المعطاني الرتلين في قرية (الاصلاح) شمال (خولوا). ما ادى لقتلها واصابة ١٠ عناصر بينهم وكذا القصف. كما تم قتلهم جميعا. سأل الله ان يجمعهم بهم.

في حين تجاوز الاثنى (١٦) سطر) يعقل الله تعالى. حيوه ناسفة على آية اخرى قبل حيا من عناصر العيلة والعمالة والطرد المعطاني الرتلين في قرية (الاصلاح) شمال (خولوا). ما ادى لقتلها واصابة ١٠ عناصر بينهم وكذا القصف. كما تم قتلهم جميعا. سأل الله ان يجمعهم بهم.

بلاسلما القنصا والقشبال البورية. ما ادى لقتل ٤ آيات و٣٠ عناصر. وكان الصغار اربعة وعشرون (خمسة عشر) النصف الجنود البورية الاتحادية سوية جنود الجيش الرافضى الرتل فرس برسر ويعقل الله تعالى لقتل حيوه ناسفة على آية اخرى قبل حيا من عناصر العيلة والعمالة والطرد المعطاني الرتلين في قرية (الاصلاح) شمال (خولوا). ما ادى لقتلها واصابة ١٠ عناصر بينهم وكذا القصف. كما تم قتلهم جميعا. سأل الله ان يجمعهم بهم.

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**أية وكية الضمير: ديابلي**  
**خصي:** قتل ارباسي جنود الخلافة الهادي ٢٩ عنصرا من الحشد والجنود الرافضيين والشرطة الاتحادية والشرطة المشائري الرتلين بينهم ٦ عناصر من الكتائبين الكومبارين إضافة إلى تدمير ونهط ١٠٠ آيات ونظيها وحسب مسرر لمي ل. الاثنى (٨) سطر) فوكي الحشد الرافضى الرتل على قرية (الاصلاح) كركوش. حيث تم استهدافه

### Translated relevant sections

**Headline: Repelled attack by the Mozambican and Russian armies, killing and wounding a number of them in Central Africa**

... With the help of God Almighty, the Caliphate soldiers in Central Africa repelled an attack launched on their positions by the Mozambican Crusader army in cooperation with the Crusader Russian army in the region of Cabo Delgado in the village of Mbau.

A secure source told Al-Nabā that a number of soldiers of the Mozambican and Russian armies launched a joint attack on the positions of the Mujahideen in the Cabo Delgado region on Sunday 13 October, where the Mujahideen clashed with them with various types of weapons, which led to the Crusaders fleeing, leaving weapons behind and miscellaneous ammunition.

The source indicated that the clashes led to the killing of a number of soldiers and the wounding of many others, in addition to the capture of one member, praise God.

### Commentary

In this publication, IS reports on clashes between al-Shabaab militants, Mozambican forces and the Wagner Group mercenaries who, in this earlier stage of the conflict, were contracted by the Mozambican government to suppress the insurgency.

## Key document 3: Al Nabā issue 227, 26 March 2020

أخبار العدد ٢٢٧  
الطبعة ٢٦ مارس ٢٠٢٠

### عشرات القتلى والجرحى من الشرطة والجيش بهجوم واسع لجنود الخلافة في موزمبيق

#### عشرات القتلى والجرحى بهجوم واسع لجنود الخلافة في موزمبيق



الجنود محاربون من موقع مطروحات. حيث يتبعه ١٠ عناصر "مدرسة" اربعة عركتات عسكرية بجبهة منها عركتة "كومون موبيل" الامريكيا وعركتة "توتال" الفرنسية.

**مهاجمة واراق تخشيتين**  
وفي هجوم آخر يوم الاربعة (٨) سطر) حاصم حوزة القنصا من كتائب القشبال الرافضى في منطقة (كيمانغا). قتلوا باقران (امر) الجنودون التكتلين وبدأ من الايات. وانقلوا القنصا والقتال

**الاصطدام الضخمة**  
كان جنود الخلافة في وسط القرية في وقتها ٢٠ عنصرا من الجيش الكومباري واصابوا اربعة من القشبالين. وانقلوا القنصا من المنطقة (الاصلاح) في منطقة (كيمانغا). قتلوا باقران (امر) الجنودون التكتلين وبدأ من الايات. وانقلوا القنصا والقتال

القتلى ما ادى لقتله والله الحمد. وفي عيلة اخرى يوم الاربعة (٢٨) سطر) قتلهم حوزة القنصا من كتائب القشبال الرافضى في منطقة (كيمانغا). قتلوا باقران (امر) الجنودون التكتلين وبدأ من الايات. وانقلوا القنصا والقتال

**الاصطدام الضخم**  
وكان جنود الخلافة في اربعة واراق وكان جنود الخلافة ٣ جنود من الاربعة واراق واقتلوا اربعة من القشبالين واطردوا الجنودون التكتلين وبدأ من الايات. وانقلوا القنصا والقتال

**الاصطدام الضخم**  
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**أية وكية وسط القرية**  
قتل العشرات من عناصر الشرطة والجيش الرافضيين المسلمين واصيب اربعة من جنود الخلافة بينهم جنود البورية الاتحادية في قرية شمال شرقي موزمبيق. كما أحرقوا كتائب الجيش ودمروا ما ادى الى هلاكهم جميعا في منطقة (كيمانغا).

**عشرات القتلى والجرحى بهجوم واسع**  
في التماسين. يتوحيق الله تعالى. حيوه ناسفة على آيات و٣٠ عناصر. وكان الصغار اربعة وعشرون (خمسة عشر) النصف الجنود البورية الاتحادية سوية جنود الجيش الرافضى الرتل فرس برسر ويعقل الله تعالى لقتل حيوه ناسفة على آية اخرى قبل حيا من عناصر العيلة والعمالة والطرد المعطاني الرتلين في قرية (الاصلاح) شمال (خولوا). ما ادى لقتلها واصابة ١٠ عناصر بينهم وكذا القصف. كما تم قتلهم جميعا. سأل الله ان يجمعهم بهم.

**استهداف مقر واراق بئر نطق**  
للـ PKK ومقتل عنصر وساحر بصمليات متفرقة في الخير

**قتلى وجرحى من الـ PKK بتفجير آية لهم عربي الرقة**

### Translated relevant sections

**Headline: Dozens from the police and army dead or wounded in a massive attack by the Caliphate soldiers in Mozambique**

... Dozens of the Crusader Mozambican police and army members were killed, and others were wounded in a massive attack launched by the Islamic State soldiers in a coastal town in Cabo Delgado region in north-eastern Mozambique. They also burned two army barracks and a number of vehicles in another attack in Quissanga region.

### Dozens dead and wounded in massive attack

In detail, by the grace of God almighty, on Monday (23.03.2020) the Caliphate soldiers attacked five locations where the Mozambican Crusader police and army were stationed, in the coastal town of Mocimboa da Praia in Cabo Delgado region, where clashes took place with various types of weapons, which led to the death and injury of dozens, while the rest fled. The Mujahideen seized a large quantity of weapons, ammunition, equipment and a number of vehicles before returning to their positions safely, praise God. The next day, Amaq news agency [IS media] published videotape showing some of the dead Crusaders and the quantities of weapons and ammunition seized by the Mujahideen in the attack, thank God.

### Attack Echoes

Pictures showed up on the web of Mozambican police and army positions and vehicles being burned in the middle of the town where the enemy media stated that the Mujahideen were able to take control of the military barracks for a short period before they withdrew from it. On the occurrence of the attack, the Mozambican government spokesman stated, "the attackers left behind after their withdrawal a torrent of destruction and corpses".

The attack also sounded the Crusaders' alarm bells, as it took place in the south area directly across the way from the gas project site worth 60 billion dollars sponsored by large Crusader companies including the American company Exxon Mobil and the French company Total.

## Commentary

This attack, in March 2020 on Mocimboa da Praia, during which al-Shabaab militants briefly occupied the town and targeted military buildings, was seen at the time as a significant escalation of the conflict. It was the first in a series of attacks on the town before the insurgents later occupied it for several months.

This publication contains an early example of a theme that is repeated frequently in later publications, where IS directly reports on (and, in a way, celebrates) the international attention its attacks in Mozambique are generating, attributing it to international political and business interest in the gas fields in Cabo Delgado.

It is one of several publications released by Islamic State reporting on the series of attacks on Mocimboa da Praia that preceded the major attack, in which insurgents took full control of the town for several months. The focus on this particular town suggests that Islamic State Central views this achievement as a significant sign of its progress in Mozambique. The descriptions of Mocimboa da Praia in other publications suggest that it was considered significant because of the international impact of the takeover of the town rather than because of its strategic importance to the Mozambican insurgents in their efforts to extend their territory.

## Key document 4: Al Nabā issue 231, 23 April 2020

### Translated relevant sections

#### Headline: 3 Congolese army members killed and Mozambican army helicopter shot down

A special source told Al-Nabā that the Caliphate soldiers managed to shoot a plane on Wednesday (08.04.2020) in Mozambique, after their attack in Quissanga, Cabo Delgado, in north-eastern Mozambique. The source explained that the Mujahideen targeted the plane with medium-range weapons while it was trying to withdraw after the attack. This led to a direct hit that fell not far from the Mujahideen's position, so they were able to reach it. The source also pointed out that the pilot had jumped from the plane before its fall. Amaq news agency later published a videotape showing the wreckage of the plane and the gathering of the Mujahideen around it. Thank the God almighty.

## Commentary

This report is a typical example of the way in which Al Nabā publications report on attacks claimed by IS in Mozambique, detailing the location and number of deaths of enemy soldiers as well as assets seized. These may also be shared in images and videos on social media.

The helicopter referred to here was provided by Dyck Advisory Group, a South African private military company contracted by the Mozambican government following the withdrawal of Wagner Group, a Russian private military group, which incurred heavy losses. As reported here, footage of the insurgents around the crashed helicopter was released on social media.

The screenshot shows the front page of Al-Nabā issue 231, dated 23 April 2020. The main headline reads: "مقتل 3 من الجيش الكونغولي وإسقاط طائرة مروحية للجيش الموزمبيقي" (Death of 3 Congolese army members and a Mozambican army helicopter shot down). Below the headline is a photograph of a blue and white helicopter in flight. To the right of the photo is a sub-headline: "وثيقة وسيدة الإفريقية" (African Women's Document). Below the photo is another sub-headline: "مقتل 3 من الجيش الشريفي الكونغولي" (Death of 3 Congolese Shari'ah army members). The main text of the article is in Arabic, starting with "مقتل 3 من الجيش الكونغولي وإسقاط طائرة مروحية للجيش الموزمبيقي". The article describes the attack on a Congolese army plane in Mozambique, mentioning the use of medium-range weapons and the pilot's escape. It also mentions the capture of the wreckage and the gathering of Mujahideen around it. The article is signed by "أخبار" (News) and "البيان" (The Statement).

## Key document 5: Al Nabā issue 241, 2 July 2020



### Translated relevant sections

#### Headline: Crusaders risk their investments in Mozambique!

... Whoever follows the various media's coverage of news about the battles of the Caliphate soldiers against the Crusader Mozambican army will find that the focus is almost limited to the importance of the sites of these battles near the huge gas fields in which the Crusader oil companies have invested billions of dollars, and everything else is not important for the infidel 'Non-Muslim' countries nor for their media.

... For centuries the Crusaders and communist atheists oppressed Muslims and forced a large part of them to leave their religion, and that crime did not stop even after the end of the Portuguese rule and the communist gang's seizure of power, and like Muslims everywhere, the crimes of the infidels in Mozambique were forgotten, until a group of Mujahideen announced that they were joining the Muslim community. The banner [flag] of the Islamic State was raised in those spots and the world saw the people's joy there over the Mujahideen's abuse of the enemies of Islam.

Only then did the Crusaders realise that the continuation of the communist government's crimes against the Muslims had opened the door for Caliphate soldiers to take revenge on the Crusader Mozambican army and those who aided it from the infidels and apostates

Especially since the policy of this cowardly army is that after every vile defeat it receives at the hands of the Caliphate soldiers it increases its

aggression against the people in the area in which it is defeated, hoping to restore an alleged prestige that it tries to impose on the weak with oppression and terror, which, in turn, leads to an increase in Muslims joining the soldiers of the Islamic State ...

After the failure of this rickety army to fulfil its promises to the Americans and the French of victory over the soldiers of the Caliphate and incurring heavy losses in the war, it took the initiative to enlist the help of the Russian Crusader intelligence mercenaries working under the cover of the 'Wagner' company, who were also harassed by the Caliphate soldiers and forced them to take their name out of the battle ...

... Today it seeks to implicate the 'South African' government and its army in leading the war there, due to its proximity and strong relations with the Mozambican government, but 'South Africa' has enough internal problems, which pushed it to avoid getting involved in this war, which will land it in a major financial, military and security predicament. It may be used to hasten the soldiers of the Islamic State to open a battle front within its borders! God willing ...

### Commentary

This publication made headlines because of the direct warning that if South Africa intervened in Cabo Delgado, as it has now done as part of the Southern African Development Community force, IS would retaliate with attacks within the country itself. In contrast to most of the articles, which limit themselves to factual reporting about attacks, the number of enemies killed and assets captured, this one gives more of an insight into the ideology of IS in relation to Mozambique. It accuses the Mozambican state and the former colonial powers of oppressing the Muslim population in Cabo Delgado and of a rapacious focus on the gas resources of the region rather than on the people. Leaders of the Cabo Delgado insurgents have made the same arguments in speeches to local people, which have been recorded and shared on social media. In these speeches, they encourage members of their audience to join them and condemn the Mozambican state as 'corrupt'.



## Key document 6: Al Nabā issue 249, 27 August 2020

### Translated relevant sections

#### Headline: Dozens from the Mozambican army killed and wounded again, the Caliphate soldiers take control over Mocimboa da Praia and its vital port

... The Caliphate soldiers have launched a massive attack in the past weeks on the coastal city of Mocimboa da Praia, located in Cabo Delgado region, northern Mozambique. The attack resulted in the control of the city and its vital port, which supplies the Crusader gas companies near the area, after violent clashes that lasted for several days and left dozens of members of the Mozambican army and its navy dead and wounded, in addition to seizing large quantities of weapons, ammunition and equipment. The enemy media described the attack as the most serious in the region in years, stating that it reflected 'increased confidence and strength' in the ranks of the Islamic State in Central Africa ...

A statement issued by the Mozambican army command late on Wednesday said that 'in the past seven days the terrorists who infiltrated in the local communities carried out serial attacks'. He added: 'The task of neutralising the terrorists is still under way in affected areas.' The Mozambican media reported the port fell because the navy forces had run out of ammunition after days of fighting. According to the same source media, helicopters belonging to South African companies participated in the battle but were unsuccessful in repelling the attack, and both electricity and communication networks were cut off in the city.

#### International attack

Internationally, the attack sparked great fears because of Mocimboa da Praia's location, about 80 km south of Afungi island, where the largest Crusader gas companies in Africa are located. The port of which the Mujahideen took control was a key point for providing these companies with logistical support, being closest to them geographically.

On the other hand, according to international observers, the attack represents the increased confidence and strength of the Islamic State in central Africa. It reflects the extent to which its combat capabilities have developed compared to the failure and inability of the government and its army to put an end to the growing strength of the Mujahideen.

In the context, an African researcher at Chatham House, a research institution concerned with global politics, stated that 'the Mujahideen are gaining better armament and organization while the government forces are suffering from frustration. This is an unexpected setback for the government in Cabo Delgado'. Another researcher, from Risk Group, a global advisory group, stated: 'The attack is another indication of how weak the arm's response to the attacks in many parts of Cabo Delgado' is, adding that 'taking control of Mocimboa da Praia as well as previous attacks on provincial capitals several months ago shows that the Islamic State fighters have improved'.

#### Commentary

Islamic State's media office has devoted most of this detailed report on the capture of Mocimboa da Praia to what it clearly considers a significant victory for its southernmost fighting front. As in previous publications, it highlights the anxiety the conflict is causing internationally because of its proximity to the gas projects, showing how this is an advantage to Islamic State in its mission to spread terror globally. In quoting reports from the Mozambican military, Chatham House and other sources,<sup>452</sup> the writers also showed a surprising willingness to engage with the analysis by these sources of the conflict because they acknowledged the fact that at that point the tides of the conflict were turning in Islamic State's favour.

## Key document 7: Al Nabā issue 280, 31 March 2021



### Translated relevant sections

**Headline: Their time has come. Caliphate soldiers storm Palma and kill dozens of Mozambican forces and Christians and launch other attacks in Congo**

... **Raiding Palma city and killing dozens...** a security source told [Al-Naba] that the Caliphate soldiers launched a large-scale attack on Wednesday (23.03) on the coastal city of Palma in the Cabo Delgado region near the border with Tanzania. The source added that the attack was launched from the town of Mocimboa da Praia and lasted for three consecutive days, killing at least 55 Mozambican and Christian forces, including nationals of Crusader countries from outside the country, and wounding dozens of others.

The source confirmed that the Mujahideens were able to storm the city and take control of government headquarters, banks and commercial factories after the army and police forces fled from it, in addition to their control of a large number of different machines and equipment. Praise God for his success.

#### Network outage in the city

The source from Mozambique noted that the Mozambican government had cut off all communication networks since the beginning of the attack in an attempt to hide its great losses and conceal the truth of what had happened in the city, which occupies an important economic position in

the region due to its proximity to major economic projects for the Crusader countries in addition to its overcrowding with affiliated companies and factories for the government and the army.

#### Echoes of the attack at an international level

The attack caused a state of shock at an international level, especially among the governments of the Crusader countries, which were quick to 'condemn' what had happened and 'pledge to send forces and military missions' to support Mozambique in the fight against 'terrorism' that they claimed to have eradicated dozens of times before!

The Mozambican government issued few 'statements' about the attack. No wonder. What could it say?! Other states, such as Britain and France, talked a lot about the horror of what had happened after they evacuated dozens of their 'nationals' who had long crouched in the region stealing the wealth of Muslims for years in complete silence before the bullets of the Islamic State dispel this silence forever, God willing, while the cries of its soldiers proclaim 'God is great' in Central Africa ...

#### Commentary

Like the capture of Mocímboa da Praia, the takeover of the strategic town of Palma was reported in great detail. This publication also emphasises the strategic importance of Palma because of the gas project and exults in the fact that Western analysts of the conflict have acknowledged Islamic State's successes.

## Key document 8: Al Nabā issue 282, 30 September 2021

### Translated relevant sections

#### Headline: Infection of failed campaigns

The contagion of failed campaigns has infected all the armies fighting the Islamic State ... the whole world saw what happened in Mozambique after the recent campaigns that the Mozambican army and its African allies had launched against the Mujahideen of the Islamic State in the north-eastern regions of Mozambique during the previous period and how the Mujahideen were able to absorb the campaigns and turn the tables on the Crusaders on the day the world woke up to the news of the Mujahideen's invasion of the economic city of Palma, and how this attack shocked the Crusader governments that began to delude themselves through their media and mourn their losses. They see that the Caliphate they fought in Iraq and the Levant has been implanted in Central Africa and that the money they spent, the armies they mobilised, the parties they affiliated with and the alliances they established have failed. They have nothing but heartbreak.

### Commentary

This publication offers an insight into the ideological repositioning of Islamic State over recent years as it has lost its core territories in Iraq and Syria, and has begun to create regional 'provinces' in other areas, including the 'Central Africa Province' encompassing Mozambique and Congo. Here, the jihadists argue that while Western forces may claim victory over the group in the Levant, its ability to wage war has endured and emerged in new regions.



## Key document 9: Al Nabā issue 295, 15 July 2021

### Translated relevant sections

#### Headline: 15 Mozambican soldiers were killed in Palma, and the Mujahideen cut an important trade route in the Congo

... The battles were renewed on Wednesday 23 June in the outskirts of Palma and its surroundings after joint forces from Mozambique, South Africa and Portugal attempted to penetrate the land near the city but were confronted with fierce opposition from the soldiers and had to carry out airdrops to raid the area ...

The battles resulted in the killing of more than 15 members of the Mozambican forces, others wounded, the destruction of a vehicle, the seizing of two other vehicles and six rifles, in addition to burning three Christian villages south of Palma in simultaneous attacks.

It is worth noting that since the Mujahideen took control of Palma city months ago, intermittent battles have taken place on the outskirts of the city and its surroundings, which exhausted the Mozambican forces, prompting them to seek the assistance of forces and militias from outside Mozambique.

### Commentary

Here Islamic State reframes the formation of a SADC coalition to fight the insurgents as a development that shows its strength, forcing the Mozambican state to capitulate and seek outside help. In the months following this publication, the intervention of international forces resulted in IS losing a swathe of the territory it had built up in the preceding year.



## Key document 10: Al Nabā issue 298, 5 August 2021



### Translated relevant sections

#### Headline: *Their time has come*

... After years of negotiations and rivalries, African countries decided to form a 'regional alliance', whose training would be supervised by officers from Portugal and America, to confront the Islamic State in Mozambique ...

The African alliance, which was barely complete, began to be divided among itself ... [including the] objection of the 'Mozambican opposition' to the arrival of 'Rwandan' forces in a way that they likened to the failed secret deals concluded by their government with Russian and South African mercenary companies to fight the Mujahideen, which threatens to ignite the old conflict between the government and the opposition.

The infidels and hypocrites, through their media, are trying to portray the war and the battles taking place in northern Mozambique as a 'war on gas'! Blind to the existence of the new-old Crusader invasion of Muslims and their homes in that region, which was subjected to the most heinous crimes and massacres committed by the Christians and their armies against Muslims, this deliberate misleading is an extension of the systematic campaign of distortion that accompanied the expansion of the Islamic State in the Levant. Today the Islamic State is fighting the infidels in Central Africa, jihad in the cause of God Almighty is to support and protect Islam, applying the purpose for which God Almighty created us. The goal is for the Mujahideen to win their wars against the armies of the cross in Mozambique and Congo.

### Commentary

This editorial deviates from the usual template of IS publications, which report directly on attacks. In seeking to frame the conflict in Mozambique as one front of a global jihadist war, and not as a conflict based on local grievances – accusing international military and the media of 'disinformation' by framing the conflict as a 'war on gas' – it gives us an insight into what the Cabo Delgado conflict offers Islamic State – a fresh opportunity, at a time when it has lost its core territories in Iraq and Syria.

The tone of the report differs from that in previous publications (such as issue 231, translated above), which do, in fact, argue that local factors, including the management of the gas projects, play a role in the conflict. It also conflicts with statements made by Mozambican al-Shabaab leaders about what motivates their insurgency.

## Key document 11: Al Nabā issue 313, 8 November 2021

### Translated relevant sections

**Headline: Two suicide bombings hit the heart of the Ugandan capital, Kampala, and the Mujahideen escalate their attacks in Mozambique and Congo**

Two suicide bombings hit the heart of the Ugandan capital, Kampala, leaving more than 30 Ugandan policemen and other Christian followers dead and wounded. [The attacks were] carried out by three Ugandan suicide bombers from the Islamic State soldiers to cause a state of panic among the Ugandan government, which is currently paying the price for its involvement in the Mujahideen's war at home and abroad, to start the bill of reckoning in the capital of Uganda and its most fortified areas.

The Mujahideen continued to attack in Mozambique, where they killed 17 Mozambican soldiers, 17 spies and militia members, with attacks and clashes in the most prominent areas in the Mueda district in Cabo Delgado in addition to other attacks by the Caliphate soldiers in Congo that affected four Christian villages in Beni and Ituri.

### Commentary

It is significant that this publication draws attention to 'escalating attacks' on both fronts in Central Africa simultaneously. Islamic State is trying to suggest that there is a coordinated strategy between the two fighting groups.

## Key document 12: Al Nabā issue 313, 8 November 2021

### Translated relevant sections

**Headline: Central African harvest during the first third of the year 2021**

70 operations:

- 29 Congo
- 27 Mozambique
- 4 Uganda
- 269 Christian deaths and injuries
- 12 ambushes
- 5 explosions
- 2 assassinations
- 49 attacks and clashes
- 2 martyrdom operations
- 39 vehicles were destroyed and damaged
- 13 barracks were destroyed and burned
- 69 homes were destroyed and burned down

### Highlighted attacks:

(02.09.2021) – An ambush in which explosive devices were used to target the Congolese army patrol near their camp in Bacho area in Beni, killing at least two members and wounding others.

(13.11.2021) – An armed attack by the Mujahideen on four villages in ... Cabo Delgado, which resulted in killing 10 Mozambican police members, police stations and Christian houses were also burned.

(16.11.2021) – Two suicide bombings hit the Ugandan capital, Kampala. The first took place in front of a police station, the second near the Parliament, killing more than 30 policemen and injuring policemen and Christians.

### **Commentary**

This type of infographic is characteristic of the relatively sophisticated reporting in Islamic State publications and video productions referring to its operations in West Africa. The presentation of the statistics here – on deaths and injuries, suicide attacks and destruction – shows the same willingness to present attacks in Mozambique and Congo as a united front for the Islamic State Central Africa Province. The word ‘harvest’ in the title refers to deaths and destruction. It should be noted that the total number of attacks Islamic State has claimed in Mozambique since 2019 is only a small proportion of the violence that has engulfed Cabo Delgado.

## NOTES

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# GLOBAL INITIATIVE

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME

## ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 500 Network Experts around the world.

The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

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