

# Mozambique: Vigil Insight Situation Report

19 August 2021

**The retaking of Mocimboa da Praia will stall the spread of the Islamist militant insurgency for now, though the civilian death toll from the conflict is likely to increase along with human rights abuses.**

This document provides an analysis of the current situation and the implications for aid agencies.

## AID OPERATIONS IN MOZAMBIQUE

- The recent increase in armed conflict events between state and non-state actors will **LIKELY** continue to impact aid operations in the Cabo Delgado province, particularly in the northeastern coastal area.
- Sustained attacks on civilians by non-state actors means beneficiaries will continue to need targeted aid.
- Although there are no reports of aid workers being arrested, kidnapped or killed in Mozambique in recent months, aid workers have experienced violence on at least one recent occasion in Cabo Delgado.
- Aid operations in Cabo Delgado have also been affected by a deteriorating security context and difficulties in distributing humanitarian supplies.
- With the loss of Mocimboa da Praia, Islamic State (IS) will move further towards an insurgency rather than peer to peer conflict.
- The war is far from over as insurgencies take time to control and deconflict.



## MITIGATION

The risk from increased security activity from both state and non-state actors (particularly Islamic militants) will remain high. Although aid organisations will need to continue their own assessments on how to adjust their security strategies, there are options available:

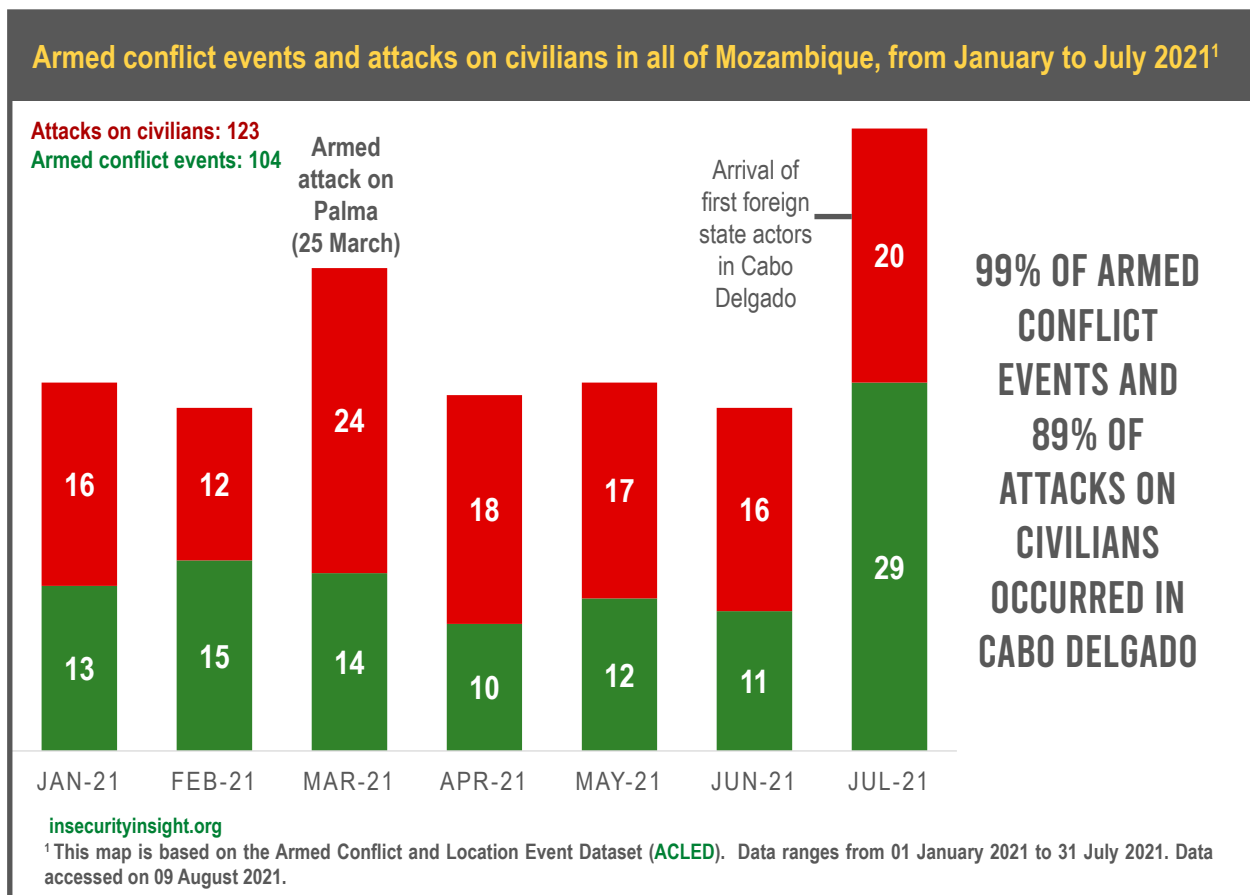
- Apply an acceptance strategy that discusses intervention with local actors.
- Where possible work with local elders or community leaders to ensure longer term risk mitigation against ongoing conflict, especially where UN or INGO security groups' influence is stretched.
- Be aware of the potentially difficult personal situation of local or national staff.
- Be aware of the risk to beneficiaries from attacks on civilians.
- Be aware of the deteriorating security context and risk of indirect fire (IF) to staff and other civilians following the recent increase in armed conflict events.

### When travelling:

- Vary routes where possible - especially main roads such as the N380/N381 or R763 (northern Cabo Delgado area), as IS is prevalent in this area. If at all possible - avoid eastern Cabo Delgado or spend limited time in the east.
- Ensure compliance at all times with guards manning checkpoints.
- In high risk areas, advise all staff to wear PPE, this should be reinforced for drivers. First aid and breakdown kits should be kept in the vehicle at all times and be easy to access. An alternative communication means (satellite or GSM mobile) should also be kept.
- Ensure where possible that a member of staff has been trained in "trauma management/basic trauma life support".
- Travel in convoy and advise coordination with UN or INGO security groups where possible.
- Restrict travel plans to only those required to travel - ensure strict discipline of social media.

## CONTEXT

Mozambique and Rwandan forces (Rwandan Defence Forces - RDF) reported retaking the port of Mocímboa da Praia on 8 August, the last stronghold in the Cabo Delgado province of insurgents linked to IS. Fighting had increased since the spread of the militants over two years ago (see [June 14 report](#)), with attacks against civilians seeing a rise in March to June (see graph below). 1000 Rwandan troops deployed last month alongside Mozambique forces as part of the 16 member South African Development Community (SADC) efforts to aid Mozambique's fight to control and reduce the influence of IS and associated groups in the Cabo Delgado province. The army also took control of Awasse - a strategic settlement near to Mocímboa da Praia. Other members of the SADC have provided troops in the past few weeks including Botswana, Angola, Zimbabwe and around 1,500 troops from the South African Defence Force who deployed on 05 August including a contingent of armoured vehicles. The SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) will last from 15 July to 15 October, and comes alongside both an EU training mission which formally started on 12 July, as well as a US contingent who launched a second Joint Combined Exchange Program with Mozambique Special Forces over a week ago. Parallel to the arrival of foreign state actor troops, the number of armed conflict events has also significantly increased in the Cabo Delgado province.



**i Attacks on civilians** are defined as any incident where unarmed civilians are harmed by armed state / foreign state actors or non-state actors, either in a target or indiscriminate way. In this report, it comprises incidents in the ACLED category 'violence against civilians' and in the ACLED sub-category 'looting and property destruction'<sup>2</sup>. Examples include: the abduction of civilians, raids on villages, sexual violence against civilians, and the killing of individual or groups of civilians.

**Armed conflict events** are defined as any violent interactions between two armed groups. These can include both direct attacks or clashes and indirect fire where one group shells another. In this present report, it includes incidents in the ACLED categories 'Battles' and 'Explosions/Remote violence'. Examples include: armed clashes on the ground, airstrikes, and shelling/rocket/mortar attacks. This category excludes one-sided interactions.

<sup>2</sup> See [ACLED Codebook](#) for the respective ACLED definitions.



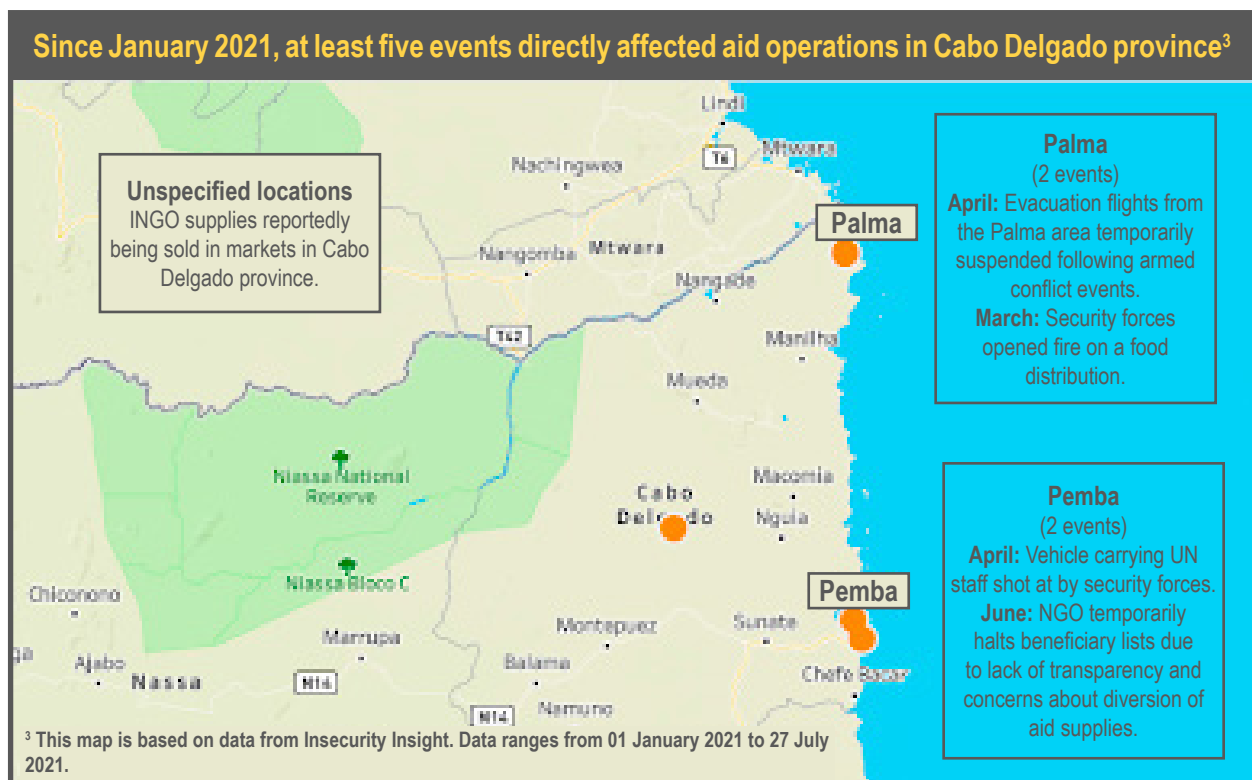
## ANALYSIS

The SAMIM and Rwandan troops (along with the EU and US) came at the request of Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi, following his previous reluctance to accept foreign intervention to tackle an IS insurgency that had seen Palma City attacked in March. The decision came against a background of dramatically rising numbers of IDPs. Numbers of internally displaced increased from 172,000 in April 2020 to over 732,000 in April 2021. Following the attack on Palma city, another 68,000 people have been displaced, pressurising President Nyusi to seek military support from the SADC.

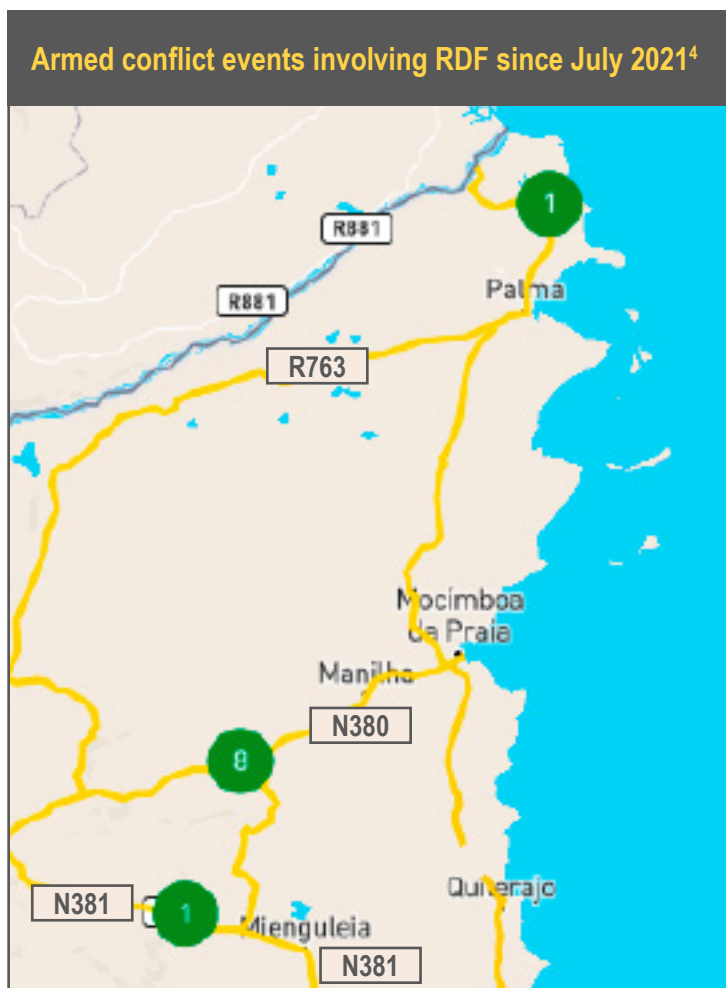
Although aid organisations have not been directly targeted (bar one incident - see Map 1), civilians have been subjected to high levels of violence particularly between March to July (see Graph). Indeed, OCHA notes that at least 900,000 people are food insecure - with both rural and urban communities affected. The conflict, however, has meant that aid organisations have been affected by the deteriorating security context and have experienced difficulties in the distribution of aid supplies, especially in Cabo Delgado.

Attacks against civilians - either by Mozambique and foreign state forces and non-state actors (NSAs) - remain underreported. This was highlighted during the Palma city attack, where the final casualties are still unknown. A significant minority of attacks are not officially reported. Some remain mentioned on social media without being picked up and no further information is forthcoming. The available information highlights that **the threat to aid comes from both state actors and IS**, who affected the work of aid agencies and at times have targeted people working with INGOs and their beneficiaries (see Map 1). Violence and threats against aid agencies and beneficiaries are **HIGHLY LIKELY** to continue.

Map 1: Incidents affecting aid operations in the Cabo Delgado province



[JOIN MAILING LIST](#)



**Map 2**

<sup>4</sup> This map is based on data from the **Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)**. Dots show the location and number of incidents that occurred in Cabo Delgado province between 01 January 2021 to 30 July 2021. ACLED data accessed on 09 August 2021.

While violence has been reported from various locations within Mozambique, the majority of armed conflict events and attacks on civilians since January 2021 occurred in Cabo Delgado. Armed conflict events and attacks on civilians generally run from the north to the south of the Cabo Delgado region - with few in the western part of Cabo Delgado (see Maps 3 and 4).

Until July 2021, more attacks on civilians were reported than armed conflict events. However, July figures reverse this trend - with 29 armed conflict events reported - although attacks on civilians remain high. The increase in armed conflict events is **LIKELY** (at least partly) due to the deployment of Rwandan forces who two weeks ago reported they had killed 14 insurgents in over four days, and who have been involved in at least 10 armed conflict events in the northeastern area of Cabo Delgado province since 20 July 2021 (see Map 2). The presence of the RDF has also created tensions between the current ruling party in Mozambique and opposition parties, of which the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) is the most vocal.

**i State actor:** The perpetrator is a member of the state security forces, whether military or law enforcement. This includes incidents where state security forces were supported by private military companies or foreign state actors.

**Non-state actor (NSA):** The perpetrator is part of a named or unnamed armed or unarmed group which is not formally part of the state's law enforcement, military, or security apparatus. In the case of Mozambique this includes all groups opposed to the Mozambican Government, such as Islamist militia, communal militia, and the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo); and other unidentified armed groups.

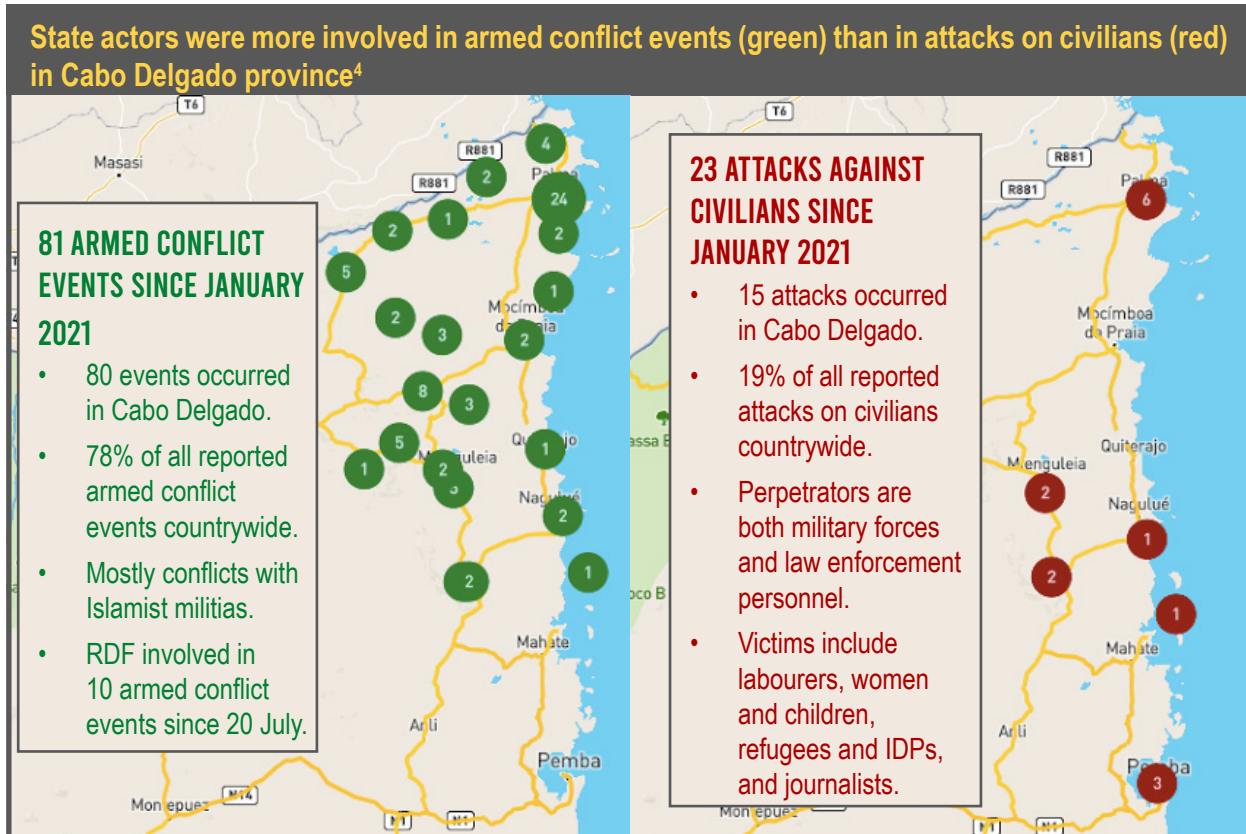
**State (Mozambique forces) and foreign state actors** have been more frequently involved in armed conflict events than attacks against civilians (see Map 3 and Map 4). The majority of armed conflict events involving Mozambique and foreign state actors targeted the Islamist insurgents. Map 3, showing conflict activity by state and foreign state actors, suggests significant levels of counter-insurgency in eastern and northern Cabo Delgado - especially along routes N380/N381, and R763 running along the eastern and northern side of the area. State and NSA conflict events are also seen along the coastline. Civilians and aid staff are therefore at risk from indirect fire (IDF) during counter-insurgency. Between January to April, around a dozen incidents involved the Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) including the attack in Palma back in March (see Vigil Insight Report **15 March** and Alert **25 March**) but no further events have been attributed to the DAG since April.

The current successes of the combined Mozambique and Rwandan troops have often been met with concern by local civilians, some of whom have remained **skeptical over the advances**, with some alleging that the Mozambique police have caused acts of violence against local villages during their fight against IS militants in the area. Concerns have also been raised over potential war crimes and Human Rights abuses by both the Mozambique and Rwandan Army and also IS. **Aid organisations working within communities are advised to liaise with tribal elders or community leaders where possible** (see Mitigation Measures).

At least 23 attacks on civilians have been attributed to the Mozambique military and police forces across Mozambique over the past months, of which 15 occurred in Cabo Delgado province (see Map 4). Attacks by Mozambique security forces are heterogeneous, ranging from bank robberies and sexual violence to civilian killings. There is also evidence that civilians have been beaten whilst in custody, another fallout from the current counter insurgency exercise. In addition, security forces have also fired at aid workers or beneficiaries on two occasions since January 2021 (see Map 1).

The majority of the attacks against civilians in Cabo Delgado perpetrated by Mozambique security forces occurred along the coast rather than inland, with four incidents reported inland in the period from January to July 2021 (see Map 4). These four incidents were concentrated around the main road towards Mienguleia - N380 - where civilians, including women, were assaulted or killed by Mozambique security forces, although their involvement in some of these incidents has not been confirmed. Civilian arrests and the use of excessive force by state actors are **LIKELY** to increase as IS moves throughout Cabo Delgado while trying to avoid contact with troops and to attempting to raise funds through kidnap for ransom.

**Aid organisations will therefore find it harder to plan operational activities as IS moves will be erratic and UNLIKELY to follow known strategic tactics.** Use of mitigation measures (see those suggested above) are advised.



**Map 3: Armed conflict events involving Mozambique and foreign state actors.**

**Map 4: Attacks on civilians by Mozambique state actors.**

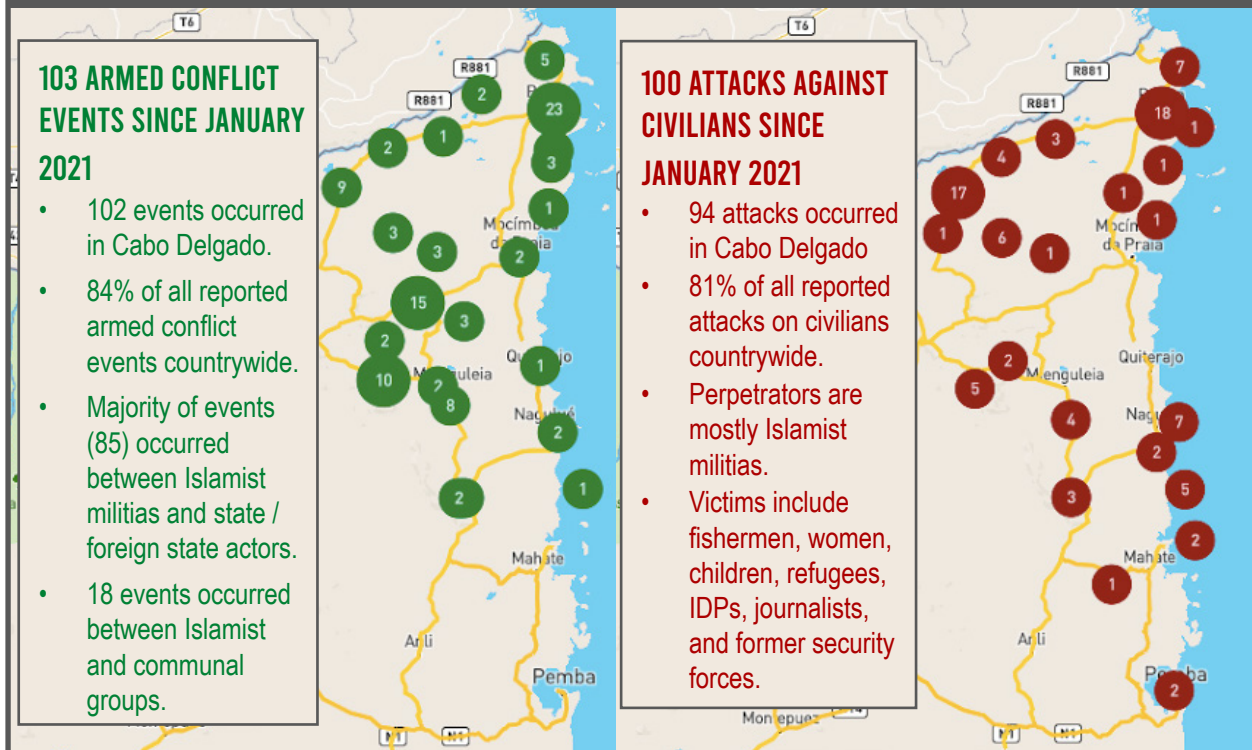
<sup>4</sup> These maps are based on data from **ACLED**. Dots show the location and number of incidents that occurred in Cabo Delgado province between 01 January 2021 to 30 July 2021. ACLED data accessed on 09 August 2021.

**NSAs** were involved in armed conflict events and attacks on civilians to a similar extent (see Map 5 & Map 6). Again, the northeastern and eastern side of Cabo Delgado was at particular risk from incidents involving NSAs, with incidents involving NSAs being especially intense along the N380/N381, R763, and also along the coast. Beyond Palma city, the area surrounding Mienguleia is a key area of activity for NSAs - with roughly 33 combined conflicts and attacks on civilians in the area.

Armed conflict events involving NSAs (see Map 5) are geographically spread similarly to those involving Mozambique and foreign state actors as they largely constitute the same events. Armed conflict events involving NSAs were especially prevalent in Palma city and along some of the main roads in the northern area of Cabo Delgado (N380/381, R763). Data also suggests that although IS militia do fight against communal militia units, incidents between state actors and IS are more common, with only 18 out of 104 incidents comprising conflicts between Islamist militants and communal militia. Use of mitigation measures (see above) is advised in order to decrease risk to aid operations.

Around 80 percent of all reported attacks on civilians were attributed to NSAs (see Map 6). Within Cabo Delgado, almost all attacks on civilians by NSAs are perpetrated by Islamist insurgents. Elsewhere in Mozambique, other NSAs, notably Renamo also perpetrated violence against civilians. As with the armed conflict events, attacks on civilians in Cabo Delgado run from north to south, both inland and along the coast but also affect islands. Notably Palma city, and its surrounding areas including along the R763 have witnessed frequent attacks on civilians. At particular risk are fishermen and other labour groups (e.g., railway workers, truck drivers), refugees and IDPs, former security forces, and women and children, in addition to other ordinary civilians who are seemingly indiscriminately targeted during attacks on villages. **Aid beneficiaries will therefore LIKELY continue to see threats both direct and indirect in the next three to six months by NSAs, particularly by IS insurgents** (see mitigation measures above).

**NSAs were involved in armed conflict events (green) and attacks on civilians (red) in Cabo Delgado province to a similar extent<sup>5</sup>:**



**Map 5: Armed conflict events involving NSAs**

**Map 6: Attacks on civilians by NSAs**

<sup>5</sup> These maps are based on data from **ACLED**. Dots show the location and number of incidents that occurred in Cabo Delgado province between 01 January 2021 to 30 July 2021. ACLED data accessed on 09 August 2021.



## PREDICTIONS

- With the loss of Mocimboa da Praia, IS will move further towards an insurgency rather than peer to peer conflict (ie, a nation state against another). Indeed Rwanda's Brigadier General Pascal Muhizi noted that the port was taken without much of a fight with the militants now having regrouped and spread in small pockets of resistance throughout the Cabo Delgado. Further attacks against civilians, especially in rural villages are **LIKELY** as are attacks against military patrols and checkpoints - meaning that the civilian death toll may rise, with local INGO staff also at risk. The risk will increase as air strikes and "boots on the ground" will be necessary - leading to an increased use of checkpoints and checks on civilian/vehicle movement, leading to delays in aid supplies.
- The war is far from over as insurgencies take time to control and deconflict. Indeed on 06 August the US declared two leaders of the IS group in Mozambique as **state sanctioned terrorists**. The fact that the Mozambique government had ignored the Cabo Delgado area, and indeed cleared the Palma area so that Total could extract gas, increased resentment against the government.
- The early deployment of the Rwandans, who are not part of the SADC, has led to some tension with the SAMIM troops. This - and President Paul Kagame's reputation of an overly aggressive nature towards internal and external rivals, and his link to the **Pegasus Spyware** debacle especially with regards to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa - may also pressure the current African alliance.
- Rwandan troops are well trained and seen as one of the better trained special forces in Africa with the capability to pressure IS where needed. However, though trained by both the US and French, in more recent times training has been carried out by the Chinese. A lack of human rights training has been emphasised by EU/UK/US forces.
- Although the SAMIM will also provide additional ability to dominate the ground, using special forces will be the Main Effort towards the insurgency, and the current numbers of Special Forces may be stretched to deal with small pockets of IS units.
- The government has appealed to the local population to work with the Mozambique and foreign state forces - however the previous resentment against the government's lack of focus on Cabo Delgado, including clearing areas around Palma (see above), and the support for the opposition (who overall oppose the deployment of foreign troops) in the affected areas could see tensions rise between local communities and the foreign state actors, leading to further conflict between civilians and foreign state actors.

### You may be interested in

**Country** page

**Data:** Available on HDX

Threats and violence against **education** in Mozambique in 2020

Threats and violence against **health care** in Mozambique in 2020.

This document is published by Insecurity Insight and is part of Vigil Insight.

The report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Insecurity Insight and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. government.

Insecurity Insight. 2021. 'Mozambique: Vigil Insight Situation Report 19 August 2021.' Switzerland: Insecurity Insight. <https://bit.ly/MozSitRep19Aug2021>