



TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

The geographical expansion of the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado and the reaffirmation of its regional dimension: the case of the Niassa Special Reserve



The evolution of the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado has revealed an increasingly complex dynamic, characterized by the gradual displacement of terrorist attacks into areas previously considered safe — namely the central and southern parts of the province, and more recently, into adjacent regions in Niassa Province.

This geographical shift presents an added challenge for Mozambican defense and security forces and their international allies, exposing the fragility of territorial containment strategies based on the protection of strategic perimeters, and highlighting the need for an integrated, regionally focused approach.

The limitations of the current military deployment: selective security and peripheral fragility

The military presence in northern Cabo Delgado — particularly in the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Palma, Muidumbe, and Macomia — has been reinforced by Rwandan troops and the Rapid Reaction Forces (QRF) of the Mozambican Defense and Armed Forces (FADM), specifically financed and trained to combat violent extremism. The security strategy has prioritized the protection of major natural gas extraction projects, especially in the coastal areas near the Rovuma Basin, effectively creating a kind of “security corridor” to guarantee the resumption of economic

operations, notably the Mozambique LNG Project led by TotalEnergies.

However, this model of selective security has contributed to the exposure of other, less protected regions, allowing terrorist incursions to spread to the interior and southern zones of Cabo Delgado, as well as into areas of the neighboring Niassa Province. This redistribution of attacks suggests a strategic adaptation by the insurgents, who are exploiting territorial gaps and the limited state presence in less militarized areas.



The territorial reconfiguration of the conflict: recent empirical evidence

The pattern of conflict expansion had already been signaled since 2022, with attacks recorded in Mecula district (Niassa) and Memba (Nampula), resulting in thousands of displaced people and the temporary suspension of tourism and conservation activities. Even before these inci-

dents, in 2021, analysts had highlighted the importance of recruitment networks crossing administrative borders, with a particular focus on young people from the provinces of Niassa and Nampula, feeding the insurgent ranks in Cabo Delgado¹.

¹ Forquilha, S. & Pereira, J. *Afinal, Não É Só Cabo Delgado! Dinâmicas Da Insurgência Em Nampula E Niassa*. IDEIAS, Boletim n° 138, IESE: Maputo, 09 De Março De 2021. Disponível em: https://www.iese.ac.mz/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ideias-138_SFJP.pdf



More recently, the attacks carried out in the Niassa Special Reserve — one of the country's largest natural ecosystems, spanning the provinces of Niassa and Cabo Delgado — have reinforced the regional character of the conflict and exposed the vulnerability of protected and economically significant areas, such as conservation

tourism zones.

On April 19, 2025, violent extremists invaded the concession area of the company Kambako Safaris, in the part of the reserve located in Cabo Delgado. According to national media reports², the attackers executed staff members, set fire to tourist infrastructure, looted goods, and de-

² <https://cartamz.com/destaque/42663/ataques-terroristas-saque-e-rapto-e-resgate-em-kambaku/>

stroyed logistical equipment, including a small aircraft. The attack culminated with a ransom demand of three million meticaís, which was rejected by authorities, followed by the destruction of the main camp between April 23 and 24.

This episode — confirmed by official sources

in Niassa Province and acknowledged by the United States Embassy — demonstrates that the extremist threat continues to maintain an active presence and operational capacity in regions far from the traditional conflict theater — the Northern Operational Theater (TON).

Implications for national security and the economy

The expansion of the conflict into conservation and tourism areas raises serious concerns not only in terms of human security but also for the economic sustainability of regions that rely on the rational exploitation of their natural resources. The Niassa Special Reserve, with its enormous potential for ecotourism and biodiversity conservation, is also a source of state revenue and a showcase of security and stability for foreign investment. Armed instability in these areas undermines the country's image

and could trigger a domino effect in other peripheral regions.

Furthermore, these attacks reiterate the urgent need for a coordinated, interprovincial, and transregional response that acknowledges the diffuse and interconnected nature of terrorist cells. Defense strategies based solely on the protection of areas of high economic interest are insufficient and potentially counterproductive, as they foster perceptions of abandonment and marginalization in other parts of the country.

Conclusion: A new phase of the conflict and the need for a regional approach

The armed conflict in Cabo Delgado can no longer be understood as a phenomenon confined to a single province. Its cross-border and interprovincial nature compels the Mozambican state to design coordinated responses with the authorities of Niassa and Nampula, strengthening surveillance in sensitive areas and investing in preventive strategies centered on local communities.

The incursion of violent extremists into protected areas such as the Niassa Special Reserve marks a turning point in the conflict, urgently requiring a reassessment of national priorities regarding security, territorial development, and social cohesion. The future stability of northern Mozambique depends not only on the military containment of attacks but also on the state's ability to foster an effective, legitimate, and equitable presence across its entire territory.





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