



DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ILLEGAL EXTRACTION OF RESOURCES

The hidden face of the war in Cabo Delgado

Contextualization

The establishment of the terrorist groups al-Shabab and the Islamic State with claims to establish the Islamic Law, the corporate interests of the oil industry and the lobby of Erik Prince, a former operative of the American military elite, now at the head of a private business proposal to pacify Cabo Delgado, are considered so far by academics, press and the civil society as the motivations explaining the armed insurgency in the potentially richest province of Mozambique.

By far, heavy drug trafficking and the illegal extraction of resources are framed in the equation. However, as documented by international reports and frequent police seizures, the coast of Cabo Delgado has been an important drug corridor in East Africa since the 1990s, a position recently

expanded after Tanzania and Kenya repressed the trafficking networks, pushing them into Mozambican waters.

One of the largest drug seizures in the country's history occurred in that province in 1997, when 12 tons of hashish were seized, part of it on the beach and another container on the way to Nacala. In December last year, in the middle of the insurgent war, two ships carrying two tons of heroin were intercepted by the Navy and the Defense and Security Forces after being stranded at sea, resulting in the detention of 25 foreigners.

Cabo Delgado, on its more than thirty islands, is a transit point, but also uses cabotage and land transport system to drain drugs to Nampula, the distribution hub for strategic destinations.

The Mozambique Financial Information Office (GIFIM) uses independent research calculations estimating that the drug that passes through Mozambique is worth US\$600 million per year, an economy higher than the amount disbursed by the cooperation partners, as well as the revenues from some of the main export commodities. Of this amount, \$100 million is left on the web of corruption in Mozambique, composed of influential politicians linked to Frelimo, local drug lords and state officials assigned to the Police, Migration and Customs.

More than religious fundamentalism and the dispute of oil multinationals, it is quite obvious that today drug cartels are the ones who profit most from the war in Cabo Delgado, as the already weak sea

surveillance has become practically non-existent, with all the forces focused on halting the increasingly concerted and regular advance of the Islamic state and al-Shabab terrorists.

For several years now, the Navy, for lack of means, has been the branch of the armed forces with more men on land than at sea. That is why, for three years, armed gangs have been entering the sea, destroying and plundering the districts along the coast of the province, with the state unable to stop them.

While trying to resolve the war on the battlefield, the area of the Indian Ocean along Cabo Delgado has strengthened its role as a viaduct for the smuggling of narcotics and the consequent illicit enrichment of mafia elites and networks of traffickers. In addition to drugs, the war has diverted attention from the illegal extraction of natural resources, a criminal practice associated with illegal immigration in the north of the country.



Smuggling paradise

Cabo Delgado province is located in the northern region of Mozambique and corresponds to 10.34% of the national surface with about 4,760 km² of inland waters. Its limits are, to the north, the Rovuma River which serves as the natural border with the United Republic of Tanzania, with a territorial extension of about 250 Km; to the south the Lúrio River; to the west the Lugenda, Luambeze, Ruaca and Mewo Rivers separate it from Niassa Province and to the east it has the Indian Ocean, which bathes its entire eastern coast with a length of 430 Km.

The border with Tanzania is the gateway for illegal immigrants from Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, who are attracted by the illegal extraction of timber and precious stones, especially gold and ruby. The illegal mining network enters Cabo Delgado from

the Inamoto area, in the administrative post of Quionga, in Palma district, a depopulated piece of land, with several entry and exit areas that are uncontrolled by Migration and Customs authorities.

Illegal immigrants cross the Rovuma River by small boats. On land, they take public transport or rent cars, predominantly Toyota Land Cruiser, and go to Palma-sede, a distance of about 45 kilometers. From here the groups split according to interests, going mainly to Montepuez and Nampula, areas with valuable gemstones and informal commerce respectively.

Another window of entry into Mozambique from Tanzania is the historic district of Mueda, but poor access roads, the long distance from the mining areas, and the tight control at the border discourage illegal immigration, placing Inamoto as the favourite

route for foreigners seeking easy wealth.

Used by networks that facilitate the transport of foreigners fleeing war and famine on their land in search of security and work, Cabo Delgado province is also a gateway to South Africa. Migration authorities often neutralize groups of illegal immigrants, and it is estimated that more than six thousand were expelled last year in Cabo Delgado alone.

Military instability in the province has made the entry of illegal immigrants and the illegal extraction of natural resources easier, as the attention of the authorities, press and society in general is focused on armed conflict. The United Nations estimates that the war has displaced 211.000 persons and there are reports of insurgents and illegal immigrants camouflaged as victims of the war.

The Indian Ocean: The drug viaduct

If in the fresh waters of the Rovuma River the entrances to Mozambique are marked, even if the infiltration of immigrants is not controlled, the same cannot be said of the dozens of access points that the Indian Ocean gives to the province of Cabo Delgado. These access points have been transformed by drug cartels into warehouses that link the producer to the consumer.

The province is divided into seventeen districts - Ancuabe, Balama, Chiúre, Ibo,

Macomia, Mecúfi, Meluco, Metuge, Mocímboa da Praia, Montepuez, Mueda, Muidumbe, Namuno, Nangade, Palma, Pemba and Quissanga. Part of these districts is crossed by the sea, making up the Quirimbas archipelago with more than thirty islands, which serve as areas of call and ports of cabotage taking the drug to land.

The coastal area of Cabo Delgado is long and has no state control. The beaches are calm and are crossed by dunes,

which allows drugs to be hidden and drained by small boats. The biggest seizures occur on the island of Ibo, at the beaches of Quissanga and in Pemba, but the inability to monitor does not allow to measure whether seized drug is more than that which passes in disguise.

The port of Nacala is pointed out as one of the outflow centres, with heroin being the main drug in Mozambique, coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Typically,

the drug travels in containers mixed with other goods.

The southern route of the drug produced in Afghanistan and Pakistan seems a very long and expensive diversion, but 10 kilos of heroin can cost five dollars at production sites and yield up to 20 000 dollars when sold in a modern world capital.

The drug is also taken to South Africa, from where it leaves to the destinations of consumption, namely Europe and the United States of America. Over and over again, South African authorities make seizures at their border after the drug passes through the Ressano Garcia border post in Maputo.

One of the major seizures was in May 2019, when three Mozambicans were arrested on the N4 road in Kaapmuiden, near Nelspruit, the capital of Mpumalanga. They possessed heroin valued at R60 million, about four million US dollars.

In June this year, two Mozambican truck drivers who had passed the Ressano Garcia border were intercepted soon afterwards on the South African side with



more than 200 kilograms of heroin.

The regularity with which the seizures occur is indicative that drug trafficking is

a routine business in Mozambique, but often finds no protection in the neighboring country.

Nampula: The habitat of drug lords

Various publications on drug trafficking note that from Cabo Delgado the goods follow, by small boats or vehicles, to the province of Nampula, the real centre of the heavy drug business in Mozambique and home to drug lords and drug traffickers.

The United States of America and England, according to GIFIM, have drawn the attention of the Mozambican authori-

ties to the distortions of the economy in the north of the country, mainly in Pemba and Nampula, mentioning that organized crime introduces "dirty money" into the national financial system.

The hustle and bustle at Pemba Airport, the connections to rich districts such as Montepuez and Palma and the dynamics in Nacala and Nampula City seem to find no justification in their basic economic

structures, namely agriculture, fishing and trade.

Mozambique is not a market for heavy drug consumption, as it is a low-income country. The Annual Drug Report, published last week by the United Nations, highlights that heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine are consumed in developed, high-income countries with purchasing capacity.

Drug and the insurgency

Mozambique's influence on organized crime and drug trafficking led the United Nations to open its office dealing with the problem in Maputo in 2019 at the request of the Mozambican government. César Guedes, a Peruvian-Canadian with 20 years of work experience at the United Nations, was made head of the office in Maputo. He had headed the office in Pakistan and Bolivia, two major unions for the industrial production of heroin and hashish.

The opening of the United Nations Office on Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking in Mozambique is a sign that the dynamics of drug trafficking, institutional

promiscuity and money laundering are significant and lack a more structural and international approach.

This office confirms the view that heroin trafficking from Afghanistan to Europe is one of the main reasons for the conflict in Cabo Delgado. Information obtained by the organization indicates that drug production has practically tripled in the last ten years, and Mozambique fits into one of the trafficking corridors that passes through the east coast of Africa.

Let's look at recent statements to the Lusa Agency from the UN Office on Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking in Mozambique:

"Here, they apparently find a country that has a unique strategic location to facilitate

drug trafficking. What these countries offer is ease of passage. It's not a sophisticated thing, but they have huge borders and the authorities are not at every point. And the traffickers know this... It's an outside situation with undercover groups that want to do harm to countries that have always lived together peacefully. They have a dangerous agenda, not in line with the reality of the countries; it is a criminal and illegal agenda to do their own business in a difficult situation. It is in times of crisis that traffickers and those who are connected to the illegal economy are best prepared to develop their illegal businesses. Ships large and small, outside the cyclone season, arrive little by little. It is a long but safe journey where a lot of money is made."

Uncontrolled borders

The statements of the representative of the UN Office on Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking show weaknesses in controlling Mozambique sea space, a situation that makes it (sea space) permeable not only to drug trafficking, but also to the development of piracy actions and plunder of its sea resources.

There are many situations that show the vacuum that the coast of Cabo Delgado is in. In 2010, a national flagship vessel called "Vega 5" was hijacked at the bank of Sofala, six hundred miles off the coast of Inhassouro in Inhambane province, and for days it sailed the Mozambican waters undisturbed towards Somalia with no State means to stop it. The vessel was refitted but recovered by the Indian military authorities a year after it was taken over by the pirates.

Domestic and international illegal fishing is another factor revealing lack of surveillance capacity. The Ministry of Fisheries estimates that illegal fishing on the Mozambican coast causes an annual loss of US\$ 60 million to the public purse. There are often reports of international vessels invading Mozambican waters for fishing and waste disposal.



Major sea surveillance has been carried out irregularly through joint military missions with several partner countries, but the flimsiness of the action does not allow an intervention capable of containing the disorder in Mozambican waters.

The seizures that have occurred are fortuitous, resulting from inadvertent traces along the drug value chain in Mozambique. For example, the two boats seized

in December last year ran aground at sea in Pemba – a situation that awakened the authorities. In Nampula, there are cases of drugs found in homes and with local fishermen.

This points to lack of responses capable of identifying traffic routes at their origin, which would allow more effective combat and dismantling of groups that facilitate the movement of drugs.

Covid-19 transfers drugs to Cabo Delgado

The Annual Drug Report warns that Covid-19 has increased the use of sea transport for heroin trafficking as the countries' restriction measures to prevent the disease have included the suspension of flights and closure of land borders, as well as tightening up on migration control.

These factors have shifted drugs from air and land to sea, with the sea taking on the role of a bridge between areas of produc-

tion, passage and consumption. As a result of the pandemic, more farmers in Pakistan and Afghanistan have adopted illicit cultivation, either because state authorities may be less able to exercise control or because more people may have to resort to illegal activities due to the economic crisis.

The UN document points out the southern route and the Indian Ocean that passes through Mozambique, as areas to which

drug cartels have turned. The trafficking route is defined according to the porosity of the borders and the inability of the country's authorities to monitor them.

This change may mean that drug trafficking flows along the coast of Cabo Delgado may have increased, which is evidenced in part by the two seizures in a span of one week in December last year of two vessels containing two tonnes of hashish.

Conclusion

Lack of means for sea surveillance, as described above, leaves an important part of the Mozambican coast bare, which is used as a highway by drug trafficking networks. Coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan, drug bypasses the countries with the tightest control and searches for empty routes even if the distances are long.

This is an established pattern in the Mozambican coastal area, which has made it a drug corridor since the 1990s. It is a pu-

blic concern that there is not a strategic intervention to prevent and fight sea and land border fragilities.

With the intensification of the war in Cabo Delgado, which took on the appearance of guerrilla warfare and became more difficult to contain, migration and border control and surveillance became more fragile. This opened space for traffickers to bolster their action, all the more so because Covid-19 led to the disruption of air transport and restricted the move-

ment of people, pushing drug onto sea routes.

Just like drugs, illegal extraction of natural resources, i.e. precious stones and wood, is now carried out unhampered, encouraging illegal immigration and the deterioration of State power in the country.

Drug business in Mozambique only works because there is a State sheltering power, which orders free passage and has no interest in consolidating the institutions of defense and security.

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