

## Two years after the attack on Palma: the timid return of the population, sporadic attacks and the long wait for the resumption of gas projects

- The attack on the town of Palma drew the attention of the international community and put violent extremism in Cabo Delgado on the world map. The Government was forced to change its approach: it gave up its bet on mercenary companies and abandoned the rhetoric against the presence of foreign forces, opening doors for the intervention of Rwandan troops and later SADC. Due to pressure from civil society, the Government began to pay more attention to humanitarian and development issues, to tackle the causes of young people's adherence to violent extremism. Two years later, security, peace and development challenges remain, but there are signs of hope...





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On the 24th of March, Mozambique marked the passage of the second year after the brutal attack on the village of Palma, whose consequences are still visible on the ground and remain fresh in the memory of thousands of victims. Until the early hours of that Wednesday, March 24, 2021, an attack on Palma village, which is less than 50 kilometers from Afungi, where work on the industrial complex of the Mozambique LNG project, led by TotalEnergies, was taking place. There was nothing to suggest an attack on that town, which was gaining new momentum thanks to the establishment of companies linked to gas projects and the presence of hundreds of expatriate workers.

But the unlikely happened. And in the worst way. The violent extremists launched a series of attacks and occupied the village, in a well-coordinated action that surprised not only the civilian population but also the Defense and Security Forces (FDS), whose presence in Palma was significant. Estimates point to dozens of dead civil-

ians, including nationals and foreigners, in addition to the destruction and vandalism of public and private infrastructure, as well as residences<sup>1</sup>.

Thousands of people abandoned their homes, triggering the numbers of the humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado, until then neglected by the Government and the international community<sup>2</sup>. Around 25,000 people sought refuge in Afungi, where the TotalEnergies camp operated, and in Quitunda, specifically in the resettlement village. They were the only places safe and protected by the FDS closest to the village of Palma.

TotalEnergies itself led a campaign to transport victims of the attacks to the capital Pemba, whose population almost doubled with the massive arrival of displaced people. But most had to rely on their strength to escape the enemy's terror. Tens of thousands of people fled on foot and by boat to relatively safe areas, leaving their means of survival behind.

The attack quickly attracted the attention of the major international information chains and

<sup>1</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/EXTREMISMO-VIOLENTO-ATINGE-VILA-DE-PALMA-Ataque-vespertino-lanca-panico-em-Palma-e-ofuscasinais-de-esperanca-no-el-dorado-de-gas-natural.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2MPAHwL7JATvXOAwFDKYQdXgs3qK0nqUmK-y5xDMSKIPwtk3W9XW6xmFY>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Ataque-a-vila-de-Palma-agrava-situacao-de-crise-humanitaria-em-Cabo-Delgado.pdf>



Credits: O Pais

put the Cabo Delgado conflict on the world map. A day earlier, the Government and TotalEnergies had announced the gradual resumption of work at the Afungi complex for April, three months after they had been interrupted due to security threats. At the time, TotalEnergies had demanded that the Mozambican authorities define and implement an action plan to strengthen security in a perimeter of 25 kilometers from the center of oil operations.

In response, the Government declared the area of the project area to be a special security operation zone and reinforced the security infrastructure and FDS contingent to ensure the resumption of construction work on the LNG plant and community development. But the attack on the town of Palma forced TotalEnergies to announce, in April 2021, the withdrawal of Afungi by “force majeure”, interrupting the largest foreign direct investment in Africa, valued at US\$23 billion<sup>3</sup>.

The Government was forced to change its approach towards violent extremism: it abandoned the rhetoric against foreign military intervention and did not renew the contract with the DAG group – a private military company that had operated in Cabo Delgado since April 2020<sup>4</sup>. They then launched a campaign asking for external military support in the fight against violent extremism. Two months later, about a thousand personnel from the Armed Forces and Police of Rwanda landed in Cabo Delgado.

Rwanda’s military intervention was key to the recovery of the strategic township of Mocímboa da Praia, which was controlled by violent extremists after the August 2020 assault<sup>5</sup>. Rwandan troops were also decisive in the recovery of several villages in the districts of Mocímboa da Praia and Palma; rescuing civilians and destroying violent extremist bases. In August of the same year, troops from countries in the region, deployed as

<sup>3</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Ataque-a-vila-de-Palma-agrava-situacao-de-crise-humanitaria-em-Cabo-Delgado.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Governo-deve-privilegiar-investimentos-nas-FADM-e-nao-a-renovacao-do-contrato-com-DAG.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Mocimboa-da-Praia-recuperada-pelos-ruandeses-um-dia-antes-da-entrada-em-accao-das-tropas-da-SADC.pdf>

part of SADC support in the fight against violent extremism in Mozambique<sup>6</sup>, arrived.

The attack on the village of Palma changed the course of the conflict in Cabo Delgado. With the destruction of their main bases in Mocímboa da Praia and Macomia, the violent extremists dispersed into small groups and began to attack the central and southern districts of Cabo Delgado<sup>7</sup>. Montepuez, Meluco, Ancuabe, Namuno, Chiúre and Balama are the districts that started to register attacks. The attack in Acuabe, in June 2022, put Pemba under alert, as it was the first time that violent extremists were within 100 kilometers of the capital of Cabo Delgado<sup>8</sup>.

On some occasions, extremists forced the interruption of work on extractive industry projects located in the southern districts of the province<sup>9</sup>. Ruby extraction in Montepuez has been stopped due to the threat<sup>10</sup> of attacks. The province of Nampula, which was previously one of the main places for recruiting young people into violent extremism, began to register attacks in the northern districts, such as Memba and Eráti<sup>11</sup>. The intervention of the FDS, supported by troops from SAMIM and Rwanda, managed to contain the expansion of violent extremism outside Cabo Delgado and reduce the frequency of attacks.

## Displaced families return to areas of origin, but security challenges persist

At the moment, security conditions are tending to improve in the districts affected by violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, with a record of return of displaced populations to their areas of origin. Rwandan troops lead the transfer of families who had taken refuge in Quitunda to their areas of origin in the town of Mocímboa da Praia<sup>12</sup>.

The “repopulation” of the towns of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, including some nearby communities, aims to respond to one of the conditions set by TotalEnergies for the resumption of work on the Mozambique LNG project. In addition to restoring security, the French oil company demands the return of populations to normal life, including the reopening of public and private services, as well as the

safe movement of people and goods<sup>13</sup>. Now, an independent assessment of the humanitarian situation in the region is underway, carried out by the specialist in humanitarian action Jean- Christophe Rufin. The independent assessment was commissioned by TotalEnergies to determine whether there are conditions for resuming the Mozambique LNG<sup>14</sup> project.

Unlike the “tranquility” experienced in the villages, it contrasts with the reality of some villages further away from the district capitals of Palma, Mocímboa da Praia and Macomia. For example, in mid-March, at least four civilians were shot and beheaded during a raid by violent extremists on the village of Mitope, 50 kilometers from the municipal town of Mocímboa da Praia. The March 14 attack was the second in

<sup>6</sup> [https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/COMBATE-AO-EXTREMISMO-VIOLENTO-EM-CABO-DELGADO\\_-Dez-dias-de-pois-do-lancamento-oficial-da-missao-tropas-da-SADC-ainda-nao-comecaram-a-combater-1.pdf](https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/COMBATE-AO-EXTREMISMO-VIOLENTO-EM-CABO-DELGADO_-Dez-dias-de-pois-do-lancamento-oficial-da-missao-tropas-da-SADC-ainda-nao-comecaram-a-combater-1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Incidentes-de-Mieze-aumentam-receios-de-novas-tentativas-de-as-salto-a-cadeia-local-para-libertar-extremistas-violentos.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Ataque-em-Ancabue-deixa-Pemba-em-alerta-e-ameaca-agravar-a-crise-humanitaria-em-Cabo-Delgado.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Seguranca-volta-aos-distritos-do-gas-conflito-desce-para-sul-de-Cabo-Delgado-e-ameaca-projectos-de-grafite-rubis-e-energia-solar.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Cinco-anos-depois-extremismo-violento-atinge-Montepuez-e-ameac%C3%A7a-o-nego%C3%A7o-miliona%C3%A7o-de-rubis.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Com-foco-na-ajuda-humanitaria-Sociedade-civil-discute-mecanismos-de-contenc%C3%A7%C3%A3o-do-extremismo-violento-em-Nampula.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/ruanda-lidera-transferencia-de-deslocados-de-quitunda-para-mocimboa-da-praia-para-pressionar-o-re-gresso-da-totalenergies-2/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/ruanda-lidera-transferencia-de-deslocados-de-quitunda-para-mocimboa-da-praia-para-pressionar-o-re-gresso-da-totalenergies-2/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Afinal-em-que-se-ira-basear-o-relatorio-do-perito-independente-contratado-pela-TotalEnergies1.pdf>

less than two weeks in that village, a situation that shows that not all Mocímboa is safe<sup>15</sup>.

As the publication Cabo Ligado, edition of March 27 to April 2<sup>16</sup>, writes, violent extremists are now following a strategy of trying to win the 'hearts and minds' of civilians along the coast of Cabo Delgado. "Groups of insurgents arrived in the village of Luchete in Mocímboa da Praia and Pangane in Macomia on 25 March, assuring residents that they came in peace to buy food and other supplies. The group in Pangane consisted of 30 to 50 men, a source said. Another source told Cabo Ligado that a large

concentration of insurgents was observed in the Quiterajo forests, in Macomia, and that fishermen often see them moving along the beach in this area"<sup>17</sup>.

Insurgents were also sighted in the villages of Limala, Marere and Calugo, in the southern district of Mocímboa da Praia. "They haven't attacked anyone yet, but they often instruct locals to go to the market and buy supplies on their behalf, threatening them with violence if they don't cooperate." Coastal villages of Macomia and Mocímboa da Praia are registering the return of displaced families.

<sup>15</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Ao-contrario-da-aparente-seguranca-na-vila-ataques-continuum-nas-aldeias-de-Mocimboa-da-Praia.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.cabologado.com/portugues/cabo-ligado-27-marco-2-abril-2023?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.cabologado.com/portugues/cabo-ligado-27-marco-2-abril-2023?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)


<sup>17</sup> [https://www.cabologado.com/portugues/cabo-ligado-27-marco-2-abril-2023?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.cabologado.com/portugues/cabo-ligado-27-marco-2-abril-2023?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)



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