

NEW APPROACH TO THE CONFLICT?

Armed Forces begin to gain visibility in the operational command in Cabo Delgado

Since the beginning of the armed insurgency in October 2017, Filipe Nyusi has always relied on the special police forces, namely the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR) and the Special Operations Group (GOE). The presence of personnel from the branches of the Mozambique Armed Defense Forces (FADM) was minimal.



In addition to the massive presence on the ground, the police were or still are in the operational command hierarchy of the Defense and Security Forces (FDS) stationed in Mueda, the birthplace of the President of the Republic. Police Commander General Bernardino Rafael leads the Northern Operational Command Post, and his first deputy, Assane Fikir Nyto, is Deputy Police Commissioner. Another deputy police commissioner with weight in Cabo Delgado's operational command is Francis-

co Quiasse Miquidade, UIR Commander.

Until December last year, the Commander General of the Police was the man who always appeared in the press to talk about operations against the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. He was also a prominent figure in the visits of the FDS Commander-in-Chief (Filipe Nyusi) to the areas affected by the conflict. At the political level, it was the Minister of the Interior, Amade Miquidade, who reported on the situation, sometimes accompanied by the Minister of Defense,

Jaime Neto.

This police-dominated structure continued even after the National Defense and Security Council (NSDC) concluded on 23 April that the attacks in Cabo Delgado constituted an external aggression perpetrated by terrorists. With the declaration that Mozambique was being targeted by external aggression of a terrorist nature, it was expected that the government would pass the operational command to the FADM, the entity responsible for defending

the national territory and the vital interests of the country against all forms of threat or aggression, including of a terrorist nature, according to Law 17/97 of 1 October, which approves the Defense and Security Policy.

In its article 7, Law 17/97, of 1 October, defines National Defense as “the activity developed by the State and the citizens, which aims to ensure independence and national unity, preserve the sovereignty, integrity and inviolability of the country and to guarantee the normal functioning of institutions and the security of citizens against any threat or armed aggression”. In article 8, however, the law establishes that the military component of the National Defense is assured by the FADM and the non-military by other state bodies.

However, the FADM have always acted marginally and with little visibility in Cabo Delgado’s operational command. Proof of this is that since the conflict began, the FADM Chief of Staff, Lázaro Menete, has never spoken on the operations against the insurgency. The protagonists are always police officers, who often appear to announce the “repelled attacks,” the occupation of enemy bases and the recovery of zones.

But this year things seem to be changing. Early this January, the press reported Major General Eugénio Mussa’s address to the FADM personnel deployed in Cabo Delgado. Speaking at the Army graduation, Eugénio Mussa declared that 2021 must be the decisive year to end the insurgency. It was the first time that a senior FADM official had appeared in the press talking from Cabo Delgado about counter-insurgency



Major-General Eugénio Mussa

operations.

It seems Major General Eugénio Mussa is the new strong man at the Northern Operational Command Post¹, which, if confirmed, means that Philip Nyusi is slowly returning power to the FADM. This apparent turnaround in the response to the insurgency comes at a time when the perception of the President’s lack of confidence in the FADM is growing.

But the emphasis placed on the Police in

the leadership of operations in Cabo Delgado was also seen as a strategy to control, through the General Command of the Police, the business of war, such as the hiring of the South African mercenary company Dyck Advisory Group (DAG). In fact, it was through Bernardino Rafael that the mercenaries who had previously fought poaching in the national conservation areas entered the fight against armed insurgency. The revelation was made by DAG’s owner, Lionel Dyck, who, in an interview², said that he was approached by the “Mozambique Police Chief” in September 2019 about the possibility of helping fight the insurgency in Cabo Delgado.

It was in the presence of DAG mercenaries that the insurgents intensified the attacks and occupied three district headquarters (Quissanga, Muidumbe and Macomia) and the municipal town of Mocímboa da Praia. Since the April assault, Quissanga has remained a completely abandoned village, both by the population and the state authorities. The municipal village of Mocímboa da Praia has been occupied by the insurgents since August 2020, when it was attacked for the second time in five months.

Violent extremism in Cabo Delgado has already caused more than two thousand deaths and forced the displacement of nearly 600 thousand people, causing the worst humanitarian crisis in recent decades in Mozambique. An extraordinary SADC summit is planned for January to discuss the security situation in the region, with a focus on Mozambique.

¹ <https://jornalnoticias.co.mz/index.php/politica/100046-afirma-comandante-eugenio-mussa-insurgencia-deve-acabar-em-2021>

² <http://africaunauthorised.com/?p=3383&fbclid=IwAR2AVbfzBqZjZW5L6usjVmexoSTP3oIWD8c5MrOY-I8zKL2AnVVZU7TJQY>



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