

VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN CAPE DELGADO

Armed attacks hit Niassa and South Africa prepares the 2nd Infantry Battalion to reinforce the SADC Mission

- At least 100 young people were kidnapped by a group of unidentified armed men during the attack that took place on Saturday morning (27 November) in the locality of Naulala, about 60 kilometres from Mecula District, in Niassa Province. Besides kidnapping young people to an unknown destination, the group set fire to residences and commercial establishments, looted food products and medicines at the local health centre. So far, no deaths have been reported.



According to the Notícias (one of the Mozambican press media), in its Tuesday 30 November edition, the attackers set fire to a vehicle belonging to the Niassa Special Reserve and four other motorbikes. Due to the atmosphere of insecurity, most residents of the locality of Naulala have taken refuge in the town of Mecula, where they were housed in a local school, without access to food. Other residents have taken refuge in the forests of the Niassa Special Reserve, the largest conservation area in Mozambique.

Notícias reports that some families are abandoning their homes and looking for other districts in Niassa Province, namely Marrupa, Majune, Maúa, Metarica, Cuamba and Mecanhelas. Both the Government of Mecula District and the Provincial Command of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM) have not yet made any statement on the armed attack, which may represent the expansion of violent extremism to Niassa Province. However, it is known that a contingent of the Defense and Security Forces (FDS) was sent to Naulala to reinforce security.

Mecula is part of the Niassa Special Reserve and is on the border with Tanzania (across the Rovuma River) and on the border with Mueda, one of the districts of Cabo Delgado Province which is the scene of violent extre-

mism. Sources told Notícias newspaper that when a Border Guard force arrived in Naulala on Saturday, the group responsible for the attack reportedly fled towards an area near the Lugela River, on the border with Cabo Delgado Province.

In February 2020, Mecula was the target of an attack carried out by so far unknown armed men, causing the death of eight (8) people and the injury of 15 others. Some attackers were captured, including an individual who in 2017 was reported missing in Macomia, one of the districts of Cabo Delgado buffeted by violent extremism. At the time, the General Commander of PRM, Bernardino Rafael, warned that some young people from Mecula were being recruited to join the extremist groups responsible for the attacks in the northern districts of Cabo Delgado¹.

The attack on Saturday is the first outside Cabo Delgado since Rwandan troops arrived (in July) and the SADC Mission Force (August) to help the FDS in the fight against violent extremism. The conflict in Cabo Delgado erupted in October 2017 and in the last four years has expanded to all districts in the north of the province, causing three thousand deaths, forced displacement of about 800,000 people, as well as the destruction of public and private infrastructure (including thousands

of homes) and disruption of major natural gas investments from the Rovuma Basin.

The attack in Mecula comes two months after the joint forces of Mozambique, Rwanda and SADC recovered several areas that were under the control of the violent extremist groups, including the strategic municipal town of Mocímboa da Praia, which had been occupied for a year. The joint forces destroyed several insurgent bases and recovered various weapons and means of communication.

For example, last week the SADC Mission announced the killing of 11 insurgents, including two operational commanders, namely Rajabo Fiquir and Abu Qitali, and the recovery of weapons, notably RPG 7 launchers, PKM machine guns, AK47 rifles and grenades. The constant announcements of victories by the joint forces raised expectations among displaced families to return to their areas of origin.

Meanwhile, the armed groups have dispersed into the forests of Cabo Delgado and in recent weeks have been carrying out violent attacks in several villages in the districts of Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia, Mueda and Nangade, which shows that there are still no security conditions for the return of displaced families.

2nd Infantry Battalion waiting for Cyril Ramaphosa's direction to go to Cabo Delgado

South Africa is set to increase the number of troops deployed to Cabo Delgado with the imminent send of the 2nd Infantry Battalion, according to a publication by DefenceWeb², a portal specialised in defence and security matters. The 2nd Infantry Battalion is a motorised infantry unit of the South African Army that was formerly based in what was the South African enclave in then South West Africa, now Namibia. After Namibia's independence in 1990, the 2nd Infantry Battalion moved to Zeerust in South Africa's North West Province.

Recently, this battalion finished its jungle warfare training in Entabeni in Limpopo Province, a choice that was based on the need to adapt the force to the dense forest combat environment it will encounter in Cabo Delgado. "The objective of the jungle warfare training was to validate the combat readiness of the battalion to be a robust, versatile and aggressive force to sustain and overcome any eventuality and operate in a hostile



¹ <https://cartamz.com/index.php/crime/item/5604-ataque-a-mecula-no-niassa-um-dos-integrantes-do-grupo-e-natural-de-macomia>

² <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/2-sai-readying-for-samim-deployment/>

environment, day and night,” said Commander Nombuso Mhlongo³.

Prior to the jungle training phase, this Infantry Battalion underwent training at the Army Combat Training Centre in August and September. “Not all the training objectives were achieved in this period. The remaining training ones were carried out at the Entabeni Training Area ”⁴.

In the document quoted by DefenceWeb, the South African National Defence Force says the weather conditions at Entabeni provided a practical, real-world experience for soldiers training for jungle conditions. “Training objectives included orientation, techniques for crossing obstacles such as rivers and streams, survival techniques as well as evasion and escape, foot patrols, infiltration into dense bush terrain and navigation in dense vegetation using compass and GPS devices ”⁵.

The South African Armed Forces stress that the immediate action exercise training confirmed that all exercises, including weapons handling, section leader commands and situation analysis were carried out correctly. “The soldiers practiced rapid and accurate shooting at unexpected targets by day and night, offensive platoon exercises in the jungle, quick kills, ambushes and attacks.”

In addition to jungle warfare training, the soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Battalion received training in matters related to armed conflict law; negotiations, civil-military coordination, sexual exploitation and abuse, environmen-



tal awareness and resilience.

The deployment of the 2nd Infantry Battalion to Cabo Delgado is dependent on orders from the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the South African National Defense Force. South Africa, the region’s largest

economic power, has promised to send up to 1,495 troops of various specialties (land, naval and air forces, including intelligence and logistics personnel) to Cabo Delgado, but as of the date of the official launch of the SADC Mission, 09 August, it had only deployed 270 men.

³ <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/2-sai-readying-for-samim-deployment/>

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