

US says Mozambique has no action plan to counter violent extremism

- The US State Department notes that Mozambique does not have a national action plan to counter violent extremism, as recommended by the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism.

The United States of America (US) considers that Mozambique is part of the so-called "terrorist safe havens", a reference to places where terrorists are able to organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train, transit and operate in relative safety, due to inadequate governance capacity, lack of political will or both. "ISIS-Mozambique enjoyed considerable freedom of movement and was able to take and hold villages in Cabo Delgado province while threatening valuable natural gas facilities. Both the Mozambican government and regional partners struggled to respond effectively to the threat and by the end of the year ISIS-Mozambique enjoyed free rein in much of Cabo Delgado."

According to the 2020 report released by the State Department, Mozambique has no counterterrorism strategy to guide operations, and defense and security entities lack the training, equipment and capacity generally to proactively detect, deter or prevent acts of terrorism. "Although law enforcement entities operate as part as a joint task force with military counterparts, coordination, strategic planning, inter-ministerial communications and information and intelligence sharing remain significant challenges."

Border security in Mozambique is another problem addressed in the US State Department report. Terrorists cross the porous border with Tanzania, which serves as a recruitment and transit point for criminal organizations. "Representatives of the governments of Mozambique and Tanzania convened meetings following the 2020 attacks in Tanzania that resulted in the deaths of Tanzanian citizens. In November, the Mozambican and Tanzanian police comman-



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Violent extremism is already reaching some districts of Niassa province

ders signed a memorandum of understanding to conduct joint counterterrorism operations, increase intelligence sharing and extradite suspected terrorists." Under the MoU, Tanzania announced the extradition to Mozambique of 516 people arrested for alleged cooperation or involvement in attacks in Cabo Delgado.

The US State Department also says that Mozambique does not have a national action plan to counter violent extremism, as recommended by the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism. Still, the Government recognises the need for a holistic response to terrorist violence, which includes community engagement in addition to security activity. "In 2020, Mozambique launched the Agency for the Integrated Development of the North (ADIN). ADIN's mandate does not explicitly mention countering violent extremism, although it aims to support long-term development priorities that would address grievances and youth recruitment."

The report notes that Mozambique experienced a significant increase in terrorist activity in 2020. "ISIS-Mozambique carried out hundreds of attacks in northern Mozambique and at least two in Tanzania. In 2020, ISIS-Mozambique-related violence resulted in approximately 1,500 deaths, over 700 of civilians, and the internal displacement of over 500,000 people. ISIS-Mozambique attacks have increased in

frequency, complexity, and geographic scope, threatening the development of liquefied natural gas projects."

Meanwhile, the US acknowledges that the Government of Mozambique continued security operations against ISIS-Mozambique in 2020 and made several arrests of suspected terrorists. "Reports indicated that the Government of Mozambique has contracted with two South African private military companies to provide counterterrorism training and operational support and has increased outreach to bilateral partners for assistance."

With limited exceptions, ISIS-Mozambique conducted several attacks in almost every week in Cabo Delgado province. The attacks have evolved to include complex, multi-faceted assaults and attacks resulting in the destruction of public infrastructure, control of strategic roads and sustained occupation of district headquarters, in addition to smaller-scale resupply assaults and against civilians.

"Reports of kidnappings and forced displacement increased substantially in 2020, especially in coastal areas. In 2020, there were limited and irregular reports of ISIS-Mozambique distributing food and cash to civilians. ISIS-Mozambique conducted increased attacks against security forces: in the second half of 2020, greater numbers of deaths resulted from force-on-force combat events than violence against civilians. ISIS-Mozambique fighters of-

ten wear police or military uniforms, including weapons and equipment stolen from defense and security forces. Access restrictions and limited reporting on violence make details of attacks difficult to verify."

The State Department listed the main attacks that occurred in 2020: On 24 January, ISIS-Mozambique attacked the administrative post of Mbau, Mocímboa da Praia district, killing 22 members of the defense and security forces and injuring civilians; on 25 March, they attacked and occupied the district headquarters of Quissanga, destroyed administrative buildings and displayed the ISIS flag; On 8 April, in the locality of Xitaxi, Muidumbe district, they beheaded and killed between 50 and 70 civilians, mostly youth; between 9 and 11 August, yet they attacked and occupied the strategic municipal town of Mocímboa da Praia, and reports indicated between 60 and 90 casualties in the security defence forces, more than 100 people injured and up to 40 missing.

ISIS-Mozambique maintained control of the town of Mocímboa da Praia until early August of this year; between 31 October and 8 November, they conducted a series of attacks on villages in Muidumbe district. They occupied the district headquarters, destroyed government buildings, and killed several members of the defence and security forces. ISIS-Mozambique beheaded around 50 civilians during the attacks, attracting international attention.



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