



Aerial view of the Afungi LNG complex, now suspended by TotalEnergies

One year after the brutal attack on the village of Palma: security remains critical and there is still no date for the resumption of TotalEnergies' gas project

- Without any reference by the Government, this week Mozambique marked the passage of one year after the brutal attack on the village of Palma, in the extreme north of Cabo Delgado. It was on the 24th of March 2021, a Wednesday afternoon, that the violent extremists launched coordinated attacks and occupied the village of Palma, located less than 50 kilometers from Afungi, where the construction of the industrial complex of the Mozambique LNG project, led by the French oil company TotalEnergies, was taking place.

- This week, the President of the Republic announced that he has requested international support to finance the military operations to fight against violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, which are estimated at 275 million euros per year. Rwanda has also requested support from the European Union to finance the operations of its troops in Cabo Delgado. The information was revealed yesterday by Rwanda's High Commissioner in Mozambique, Claude Nikobisanzwe, who added that Rwandan troops will remain on the ground until the situation is under control.



Hotel Amarula was one of the places where many civilians were killed during the attack on the village of Palma

The attack on the village of Palma was one of the most violent since the onset of violent extremism in October 2017 and one that attracted world attention, with several international news channels reporting on it. The numbers of human casualties have never been ascertained so far, but estimates point to dozens of civilians killed, including nationals and foreigners who were working in the companies subcontracted to provide services and supply goods in the natural gas project.

Several public and private infrastructures were destroyed; thousands of people abandoned their homes, worsening the humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado. About 25,000 people sought refuge in Afungi, where TotalEnergies' camp operated, and in Quitunda, specifically in the resettlement village. These

were the only safe places and protected by the Defense and Security Forces closest to the village of Palma.

Humanitarian agencies, the Government (through the Defense and Security Forces - FDS) and TotalEnergies itself led a campaign to transport victims of the attacks to the city of Pemba. However, all the entities involved in these operations favoured the employees of the district government, employees of TotalEnergies and other companies linked to the natural gas projects, and employees of the UN humanitarian agencies.

The local population of Palma village who had no professional connection with the natural gas projects had to rely on their own strength to escape the terror of the enemy. There were tens of thousands of people who fled on foot and via boats to relatively safe

areas, leaving behind their means of survival and other hard-earned possessions. Five days after the attacks began, TotalEnergies made its air and sea assets available to help transport the local population from Palma.

The March 24 attack came one day after the government and TotalEnergies announced that work on the Afungi complex would gradually resume in April, three months after it had been interrupted due to security threats. At the time, the French oil company had demanded that the Mozambican authorities define and implement an action plan with the aim of reinforcing security within a 25-kilometer perimeter of the oil operations center.

In response, the government had declared the Mozambique LNG project area as a special security operation zone and reinforced

the security infrastructure and the FDS contingent to guarantee the resumption of the construction works of the LNG plant and the community development programs. But the attack on the village of Palma forced TotalEnergies to announce in April 2021 a withdrawal from Afungi due to “force majeure,” halting the largest foreign direct investment in Africa, valued at USD 23 billion.

Under pressure and at risk of losing investments in the natural gas sector, the government abandoned its rhetoric against foreign military intervention in Cabo Delgado and embarked on a campaign to request external support for the fight against violent extremism. In parallel, it did not renew the contract with the DAG group - a private military company that had been operating in Cabo Delgado since April 2020.

In early July 2021, while Mozambicans were waiting for SADC troops to arrive, the Rwandan government announced the deployment of 1,000 Armed Forces and Police staff to Cabo Delgado. The Rwandan military intervention was crucial in the recovery of the strategic municipal town of Mocímboa da Praia, which was controlled by violent extremists after the August 2020 assault. Rwandan troops were also decisive in the recovery of several villages in the districts of Mocímboa da Praia and Palma; in the rescue of civilians and in the destruction of bases of the violent extremists.

Despite significant advances on the ground - including the recovery of district villages, administrative posts, and small towns by the joint forces of Mozambique, Rwanda, and SADC - security in northern Cabo Delgado remains critical. Violent extremists have launched sporadic attacks mainly in the districts of Macomia and Ibo (specifically on Ibo Island), increasing doubts about the resumption of the LNG project in Afungi, whose security perimeter is currently guaranteed by Rwandan troops.

In late January, the President of TotalEnergies, Patrick Pouyanné, was confident about the resumption of the Mozambique LNG project, which has been suspended for almost a year. On a visit to Mozambique, he made it clear that there were still no concrete dates for the resumption of the project. “I am optimistic that I can return to Mozambique, but next time not to Maputo. My next visit will be to Palma, Mocímboa da Praia, in Mueda, and



when I see that life is back to normal, which means restoring state services and the population, only then can the project resume. My goal is still to resume in this year of 2022”, said TotalEnergies’ top representative ¹.

Two weeks ago, the Director of TotalEnergies in Mozambique, Maxime Rabilloud, in the company of the Governor of Cabo Delgado, Valige Tauabo, visited the port of Mocímboa da Praia to assess the conditions of that infrastructure in order to decide on the restart of dragging activities. The objective is to allow the access of cargo vessels in that port to supply the northern districts of Cabo Delgado and, in the future, the natural gas project². The port of Mocímboa da Praia, the only one in northern Cabo Delgado, was one of the infrastructures targeted by violent extremists during the August 2020 armed attacks that culminated with the occupation of the municipal village for a period of one year.

Last week, the central government acknowledged that conditions were still in place for the safe return of displaced families to their areas of origin. “Some prejudice still persists on the part of public officials. We understand that there is a trauma due to what they went through and we recognize the urgent need for rehabilitation of infrastructure and allocation of means of work, especially circulating ones, including ambulances,” said Margarida Talapa, the Minister who headed a delegation of the Council of Ministers that worked

in northern Cabo Delgado³.

She confirmed that the movement of the population of Mocímboa da Praia who took refuge in the Afungi peninsula in Palma has not been executed yet, due to the lack of conditions for that purpose. According to the newspaper Carta de Moçambique ⁴, Margarida Talapa also referred to the existence of what she called “failures in the consolidation of security in areas affected” by violent extremism.

This week, the President of the Republic announced that he has asked for international support to fund the military operations to fight against violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, valued at 275 million euros per year. “We asked so that our friends can help us, because the operations that are now underway [in Cabo Delgado] are very, very expensive. It’s approximately 275 million euros a year. So we need support from all those who can, to the extent that they can,” said Filipe Nyusi ⁵.

Mozambique still needs 290 million euros to create real capacity for the defense of Mozambique, through training and reskilling of troops for the country to be autonomous “to maintain peace” after the withdrawal of foreign forces from Rwanda and SADC. Last February, Nyusi asked for support from the European Union to finance the military intervention of Rwanda and SADC in Cabo Delgado. This Saturday, Rwanda also announced it had asked for support from the European Union to finance the

¹ <https://www.rfi.fr/pt/mo%C3%A7ambique/20220201-mo%C3%A7ambique-presidente-da-total-confiante-quanto-%C3%A0-retoma-de-projectos-de-g%C3%A1s>

² <https://zitar.com/totalenergies-mozambique-head-visits-mocimboa-da-praia-port/>

³ <https://cartamz.com/index.php/politica/item/10202-ataques-em-cabo-delgado-governo-diz-ser-cedo-ainda-para-o-regresso-da-populacao-as-suas-aldeias>

⁴ <https://cartamz.com/index.php/politica/item/10202-ataques-em-cabo-delgado-governo-diz-ser-cedo-ainda-para-o-regresso-da-populacao-as-suas-aldeias>

⁵ <https://cartamz.com/index.php/politica/item/10271-combate-ao-terrorismo-em-cabo-delgados-nyusi-pede-apoio-de-275-milhoes-de-euros>

operations of its troops in Cabo Delgado. The information was revealed by the Rwandan High Commissioner in Mozambique, Claude Nikobisanzwe, who added that the Rwandan troops will remain on the ground until the situation is under control⁶.

Meanwhile, Mozambique's failure to con-

demn the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops is generating some coolness in relations with the West, including with the European Union. It was expected that Mozambique, a state that defends the principle of national sovereignty and the right to self-determination of peoples, would condemn the

Russian aggression of Ukraine, as well as the flagrant violation of human rights, especially the right to life of thousands of Ukrainian civilians. The cooling of relations with the West may affect the promises made by the European Union to support the fight against violent extremism in Cabo Delgado.


⁶ <https://www.opais.co.mz/terrorismo-em-cabo-delgado-ruanda-ja-pediu-apoio-financeiro-a-uniao-europeia/>



EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Property: CDD – Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento
Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Editor: Emídio Beula
Author: Emídio Beula
Team: Emídio Beula, Dimas Sinoa, Américo Maluana
Layout: CDD

Address:
 Rua de Dar-Es-Salaam Nº 279, Bairro da Sommerschild, Cidade de Maputo.
 Telefone: +258 21 085 797

 CDD_moz
E-mail: info@cddmoz.org
Website: <http://www.cddmoz.org>

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