



CENTRO DE INTEGRIDADE PÚBLICA  
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## TRANSPARENCY AND POLITICAL INTEGRITY

# Politico-Military Conflict in Cabo Delgado



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## Insurgents step up attacks in Cabo Delgado during the post-election violence in Maputo

- If the post-election instability lasts, there is a risk that the insurgents will take advantage of security vulnerabilities and expand attacks to more provinces

The month of October saw an increase in insurgent attacks in Cabo Delgado, while the government was focused on combatting the demonstrations against electoral fraud in Maputo. The rising trend of attacks is continuing in November, with an average of at least one attack every two days.

Mocímboa da Praia, Muidumbe and Macomia districts have been the main targets of attacks in this period, and there are signs that the insurgents are moving to the south of Cabo Delgado, with reports of attacks in the central district of Meluco last week.

The increased number of attacks in Cabo Delgado in the election context was a predictable risk, based on what happened in the 2019 general elections. However, during the election campaign, and up until voting day, there were not many attacks. It is the post-election period that is showing a considerable increase in the insurgent threat.

This text analyses the risk of the armed insurgency in Cabo Delgado increasing, taking advantage of the vulnerabilities created by the post-election instability in Mozambique, caused by the electoral corruption of the Frelimo Party in collusion with the National Elections Commission (CNE) and the Electoral Administration Technical Secretariat (STAE). This is part of the work of the Centre for Public Integrity (CIP) of monitoring the response of the government to the conflict in Cabo Delgado.

### Fear of “coup d’etat” changed the security focus to Maputo leaving Cabo Delgado vulnerable

The increase in insurgent attacks in Cabo Delgado, during the election period, was predictable since the insurgents would take advantage of the global attention on the elections to wage propaganda for their attacks<sup>1</sup>. Precisely because of the likely increase in attacks, the Government should have drawn up a strategy to boost security in Cabo Delgado during the elections.

The government response included stationing Rwandan troops in Macomia district, where the main bases of the insurgents have been located since they were driven out of Mocímboa da Praia in August 2021.

The government response had effects. During the election campaign and the voting there were no large scale attacks by the insurgents. The last major attack occurred in May, when the insurgents invaded the Macomia district capital.

The mass demonstrations, and particularly the threat of a major march on Maputo on 7 November made the Government switch its security focus to Maputo, fearing a coup d’etat, according to the words of Frelimo Political Commission member, Alcinda Abreu<sup>2</sup>, who was really expressing the opinion of the government.

1 Nhamirre, B. (ed.) (2024). Perspectivas de governação do ano 2024: riscos a monitorar em ano de transição do poder. CIP. Available at <https://www.cipmoz.org/pt/13/02/2024/perspectivas-de-governacao-do-ano-2024-riscos-a-monitorar-em-ano-de-transicao-do-poder/> (consulted on 9 November 2024)

2 Cuco, A. (7 November 2024). Frelimo relaciona manifestações com golpe de Estado e interesses externos. O País. Available at <https://opais.co.mz/frelimo-relaciona-manifestacoes-com-golpe-de-estado-e-interesses-externos/> (consulted on 9 November 2024)

Since the Government had not forecast post-election violence on the large scale that occurred between 21 October and 7 November, it was obliged to transport men and equipment from Cabo Delgado to Maputo, to block the coup d'état or the taking of power by unconstitutional means, according to Defence Minister Cristóvão Chume<sup>3</sup>.

On Thursday 7 November, the streets of Maputo were invaded by a military contingent, which helped the public security police, the riot police (UIR), plain clothes police of the National Criminal Investigation Service (SERNIC) and even members of the State Security and Intelligence Service (SISE).

The insurgents thus took advantage of this unexpected situation to carry out more attacks in Cabo Delgado.

The media reported an increase in attacks in Cabo Delgado in October<sup>4</sup>, with the insurgents launching multiple incursions against military and civilian targets, including the use of improvised explosive devices<sup>5</sup>.

The most daring insurgent attacks occurred exactly in the period when there were demonstrations against election fraud in Maputo which met a violent response from the police, as the press and the videos and photographs circulating in social media reported.

On 23 October, the insurgents attacked the village of Awasse, in Mocímboa da Praia district, located on the main highway, National Road EN 380, where they murdered three people and burnt down houses. On the following day (24 October), the insurgents attacked Mumu village, also located on EN 380, about 20 km from Mocímboa da Praia town. Both attacks were later claimed by Islamic State. On 26 October, three bodies were found in Macomia district on the banks of the Messalo river, with signs that they had been beheaded. The victims, all men, had been described as missing. On 29 October, a passenger transport vehicle detonated an explosive device in the Mbau administrative post, in the south of Mocímboa da Praia. The Islamic State claimed the attack two days later through a publication on its propaganda channels<sup>6</sup>.

In November insurgent attacks continued to intensify, while the Government was trying to block the “coup d'état” in Maputo.

Data collected from local sources indicate that, in the first two weeks of November, there were several

insurgent attacks, including an attack against Rwandan troops in Manica village, in Macomia; the capture of two citizens in Mandela village, in Muidumbe district; attack and burning of houses in Mbau village, in Mocímboa da Praia; attack on Tabata village, in Muidumbe district, and an attack against members of the Local Force militia, also in Muidumbe.

In this period, there were also signs of the insurgents moving to the southern part of Cabo Delgado province, for on 7 November insurgents raided the village of Minhonha, in Meluco district, where they kidnapped three adolescent girls and looted food. Minhonha is a village located on the Messalo river, in Meluco district, in the centre of Cabo Delgado.

## **Government focus will remain on Maputo, increasing the risk of the spread of the insurgency**

The Government is aware of its unpopularity and of the great support that Venâncio Mondlane enjoys, including among residents of elite neighbourhoods in the capital, such as Polana Cimento.

In the Government's assessment, the mass demonstrations in the capital, even if peaceful, represent a greater threat to political power than the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. So Maputo will remain the focus for the security apparatus.

The priority for the Rwandan forces stationed in Cabo Delgado is to protect the natural gas projects in the Afungi peninsula, in Palma district, and to create a security perimeter around the gas and the ruby and graphite mining projects in Montepuez, Ancuabe and Balama<sup>7</sup>. Hence the focus for the Rwandan troops will be the districts of Palma, Mocímboa da Praia, Montepuez and Ancuabe and, to a lesser extent, Macomia.

This situation risks the spread of the insurgency, first within Cabo Delgado province, and later to other provinces. Nampula, considered as one of the main bases for insurgent recruitment, could be the first province to be the target for expansion of the insurgent attacks, but if the mass demonstrations continue for a long time, the insurgents could gain ground and attack other provinces.

3 Lusa (5 November 2024). Ministro da Defesa moçambicano aponta sinais de “intenção firme e credível de alterar” ordem constitucional. RTP Notícias. Available at [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/ministro-da-defesa-mocambicano-aponta-sinais-de-intencao-firme-e-credivel-de-alterar-ordem-constitucional\\_n1612730](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/ministro-da-defesa-mocambicano-aponta-sinais-de-intencao-firme-e-credivel-de-alterar-ordem-constitucional_n1612730) (consulted on 10 November 2024)

4 Nhantumbo, A (8 November 2024). Guerra de baixa intensidade. Savana ed.1609. Maputo

5 Martins, S e Severiano, M (1 November 2024). AUMENTO DO USO DE EXPLOSIVOS PODE MUDAR O RUMO DO CONFLITO EM CABO DELGADO. The Mozambique Times. Available at <https://moztimes.com/blog/aumento-do-uso-de-explosivos-pode-mudar-o-rumo-do-conflito-em-cabo-delgado/> (consulted on 9 November 2024)

6 he Mozambique Times (5 November 2024). Briefing Mensal sobre a Ameaça Terrorista no Norte de Moçambique. Available at <https://moztimes.com/blog/briefing-mensal-sobre-a-ameaca-terrorista-no-norte-de-mocambique/> (consulted on 9 November 2024)

7 CIP (2024). Análise da situação de segurança e socioeconómica dos retornados em Cabo Delgado. Available at <https://www.cipmoz.org/pt/2024/09/30/analise-da-situacao-de-seguranca-e-socioeconomica-dos-retornados-em-cabo-delgado/> (consulted on 10 November 2024)

Venâncio Mondlane promised to announce on Monday 11 November, the fourth phase of the demonstrations, which he said would be more severe than the current ones. If this happens, it will benefit the insurgents.

It is important that the Government find a rapid and peaceful way of solving the post-election violence and ends the mass demonstrations, since the vulnerability of the country's security will increase as the demonstrations continue.

The response to the demonstrations by resorting to police violence is proving ineffective. The demonstrators, mostly young men, are willing to confront the police, even at the risk of their own lives. The Mozambican government does not have the capacity to face several foci of insecurity for a long period. This could not only damage national security but could also affect the security of the neighbouring countries.



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