

Mozambique

UPDATE

Since *AFM's* report in the May issue, the guerrilla war in northern Mozambique has escalated significantly, as **Al J Venter** explains.

While attacks in northern Mozambique by Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP) were random in the past, they now take place daily from both land and sea. Last March, Mocímboa da Praia and Quissanga, two towns north of Pemba, the capital of the country's gas-rich Cabo Delgado province, were targeted.

Mozambique's insurrection has entered a problematic phase, with Syrian nationals attached to ISCAP in command of several combat units. This information comes from sources both in the capital Maputo and in Pemba.

Recent attacks seem to be well planned and executed, with the jihadists having captured a variety of armoured vehicles (including several Chinese-built five-ton ZBF-05s), large stocks of heavy weapons including mortars, explosives and other equipment, all taken from the Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique (FADM, Mozambique Defence Armed Forces), which remains on the defensive. Army morale, sources say, is "scraping [the] bottom."

In some instances, Arab militants who speak only Arabic are in command.

They make no secret that they are part of so-called Islamic State (IS) and many neither understand nor use local languages or Swahili, which has long been the lingua franca throughout East Africa.

What has also surfaced from intelligence leaks is that close links are routinely maintained between the Mozambique guerrillas and ISCAP elements in Kenya,



Somalia, the Great Lakes and Tanzania, on whom the jihadist force is able to call upon for reinforcements if required – as was the case when the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group arrived in force in Mozambique late last year.

It has also emerged that ISCAP likes to advertise that it's planning to attack a specific town, aware that FADM troops will desert their positions before they move in. In one recent attack, a force of around 30 rebels hit the government's Miangalewa army base at dawn. Using loudhailers, the insurgents ordered the populace to stay in their homes, declaring that they only wished

to kill Mozambique military and police.

Gazelle down

Following the shooting down of a contractor-operated Gazelle helicopter gunship on the Quirimbas Islands in northern Mozambique in mid-April, attacks by government-linked mercenary forces appear to have slowed (see *Attrition*, June, 89-90).

Following this, contractor gunships with 20mm cannon mounted at the port side door strafed a jihadist base in Mozambique's Mueda Plateau area, after which they hit rebel operational centres in Mbau in the Awassi district and

Above: Operated by Mozambique's state security forces, the Forças de Defesa e Segurança (FDS), Bell 206L-3 LongRanger III FA081 crashed in Muidumbe after developing technical problems on August 2, 2019. All six occupants were injured. Pit Weinert Collection **Right:** Civilian aircraft have been called in by the Maputo government to assist with routine patrols in northern Mozambique. Al J Venter Collection



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Right: An aerial view of Lugenda River adjacent to the Tanzanian frontier, where much of the recent fighting has been taking place. Al J Venter Collection



in Muidumbe, all in the embattled north.

Details of the helicopter incident on the Quirimbas Islands are vague, except that the Gazelle was hit by ground fire, crash-landed and its crew was rescued by another Gazelle. Because enemy follow-up action was imminent, it was not possible to retrieve the first Gazelle, which was torched where it lay.

Sources indicate that the current contract providing helicopter gunships is an interim measure, which is why the Maputo government is now talking at length to other private military companies.

Secret war

There is a good deal of confusion about who is actually doing what in Mozambique at present, in large part because most of the irregular forces involved are South Africans, whose government expressly prohibits its nationals and companies from becoming involved in foreign wars. But this hasn't prevented several South African aircraft being ferried northwards out of Durban to Pemba, Mozambique's biggest city in the north.

These include a pair of Gazelles that could be the same pair offered to veteran African mercenary aviator Neall Ellis late last year for US\$700,000 each, which he felt excessive since there are Gazelles on the market for half that price.

Other aircraft now operating in counterinsurgency operations include a Bell 206 LongRanger, a Diamond DA42 surveillance aircraft that has been active in the region

since 2017 (and reported to have a blacked-out Kenyan registration) and a Cessna Caravan that arrived in Pemba this year.

Air crew and some ground units reputedly also involve former South African military personnel previously linked with Executive Outcomes, a mercenary organisation that fought in both Angola and Sierra Leone.

It seems the Quirimbas Islands attack was not as successful as was originally reported. In the opinion of Neall Ellis, who has much experience in this kind of warfare, they were unprepared for a committed and well-trained enemy that has a good deal of military experience east of Suez.

IS successfully ousted Russia's Wagner Group from fighting Mozambique's war. 'Putin's Private Army' as it was described by the London *Times* now appears to have gone home following numerous losses.

Ellis explained that an additional problem with the Quirimbas raid was that no troops were deployed on the ground to sweep the objective and secure prisoners, weapons, documentation and any other items of interest for future operations, an essential component for this kind of action.

From the few reports that have surfaced amid stringent security controls, the contractors went on the attack on the islands before settling in and making a proper intelligence appreciation of both the area and enemy.

Ellis also made the point that a "quick fix" for the war in Mozambique will simply not work. He considers the only real counter to IS advances is to embark on the type of

'Fire Force' operations that were used in the Rhodesian Bush War, involving crack ground troops working with and taken into action by helicopters, including gunships.

Ellis continued: "Any troops involved would have to spend time acclimatising and training for the difficult conditions they are likely to encounter. This would involve several months of training before any force can be operationally effective, one of the reasons why the Wagner Group came [up] short. They did not do the kind of homework linked to the task in hand."

Two outstanding issues remain. The first is time, because IS insurgents are making rapid advances both on land and along the Mozambique coast, which is neither properly patrolled nor defended. The second is money, as the Maputo government seems reluctant to finance the kind of urgent aviation-oriented rescue mission that the war demands. **AFM**

Erratum

There were some factual errors in *AFM's* previous report on Mozambique (*A dirty little war in Mozambique*, May, p78-79). The final paragraph on page 78 should read: "It is interesting to note that Wagner Group had initially been in competition with Eeben Barlow's South African Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection International (STTEPI) for security contracts in Cabo Delgado. Since then, *AFM* has acquired details allegedly linked to the submission made by OAM International that would see the involvement of ground as well as air elements in northern Mozambique should the Wagner Group withdraw."



While the Força Aérea de Moçambique (Mozambique Air Force) retains a small jet fighter force in Maputo, its 'Fishbed' fleet (thought to number six single-seaters and a pair of two-seaters) has not apparently been involved in the counterinsurgency campaign. Alexander Golz