



Militancy/Terrorism

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Mozambique SITUATION UPDATE: Militants overrun Muidumbe District, move toward Mueda, as brutal tactics reflect ideological motives against Makonde, Frelimo heartland

Executive Summary

- Militants overran and destroyed much of Muidumbe District in recent weeks, which aligns with their repeated, well-organized, and large-scale targeting of administrative posts or districts over a period of days. However, events in Muidumbe were especially brutal, including reports of militants gathering at least 50 civilians to behead them at a football field.
- This is likely a result of the area's ethnic Makonde identity, which is largely Christian and a pillar of the Frelimo liberation movement and now ruling party. This reflects a deliberate ideological motivation and further suggests the militants will mobilize toward the nearby Mueda town, at the center of the Makonde homeland.
- Authorities attributed an attempted prison break in Mizeze, Metuge District to the militants, though their involvement remains somewhat in doubt due to the location and lack of any nearby events preceding the incidents. However, this suggests security conditions even close to Pemba are deteriorating.

Please be advised

The following notable security incidents were reported in Cabo Delgado Province:

Map #	District	Locale	Date	Brief Description
1	Palma	Pundanhar	October 31	Militants attack village again, kill one ill soldier, burn houses, loot local health unit
	Palma	Pundanhar	November 3	FDS claims to kill 33 militants in offensive operation, reopen road between Palma, Nangade districts
2	Muidumbe	Magaia	October 31	Militants attack,

3	Muidumbe	Namacande	October 31	burn village in coordinated effort to overrun Muidumbe District, security forces retreat Militants attack district capital, seize control for second time since April, IS claims responsibility for killing, wounding 'a number' of soldiers
	Muidumbe	Namacande	November 1	Civilians flee village as attack continues
4	Muidumbe	Nchinga	October 31	Militants attack, burn village in coordinated effort to overrun Muidumbe District, security forces retreat
	Muidumbe	Muatide	October 31	Militants attack, burn village in coordinated effort to overrun Muidumbe District, security forces retreat
5	Muidumbe	Muatide	November 5	Militants gather villagers hiding in nearby forest, behead at least 50 at Campo de Madjedje football field
	Muidumbe	Nangunde	October 31	Militants attack, burn village in coordinated effort to overrun Muidumbe District, security forces retreat
6	Muidumbe	Nangunde	October 31	Militants attack, burn village in coordinated effort to overrun Muidumbe District, security forces retreat
7	Muidumbe	Muambula	October 31	Militants attack, burn village in coordinated effort to overrun Muidumbe District, security forces retreat
8	Muidumbe	24 de Marco	November 1	Militants attack, burn village in second day of incursions in Muidumbe District

	Muidumbe	24 de Marco	November 2	Militants behead five adults, 15 boys during traditional ceremony in forest
9	Muidumbe	Namacule	November 1	Militants attack village on second day of incursions in Muidumbe District
10	Muidumbe	Namande	November 1	Militants attack village on second day of incursions in Muidumbe District
11	Muidumbe	Nampanha	November 1	Militants attack village on second day of incursions in Muidumbe District
	Muidumbe	Nampanha	November 4	Militants attack village, burn homes
12	Muidumbe	Miteda	November 2	Militants target village, civilians flee
13	Muidumbe	Liyautua	November 2	Militants target village, civilians flee
14	Muidumbe	Matambalale	November 2	Militants target village, civilians flee
	Muidumbe	Matambale	November 11	Militants overrun village, dislodge security forces
15	Muidumbe	Lutete	November 2	Militants target village, civilians flee
16	Muidumbe	Litapata	November 2	Militants target village, civilians flee
17	Macomia	Nanjaba	November 6	Militants burn village, behead two people, kidnap six women
18	Macomia	Napala	November 6	Militants burn houses, kill three people when returning to their camps after ambush in Nanjaba
19	Macomia	Nambine	November 7	Militants attack, behead one man, abduct two women
20	Metuge	Mieze	November 10	Unidentified assailants attempt to attack Mieze prison, guards thwart assault



Other Developments

- On October 29, the Commander-General of the police announced that Mozambican defense and security forces (FDS) destroyed six militants camps as well as associated vehicles and supplies and killed over 100 militants in a three-day security operation targeting the group's "Syria" base in Cabo Delgado's Mocimboa da Praia District. However, the Interior Minister's statement later placed the number of militants killed at about 22.
- The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for attacking three villages in Tanzania's Mtwara Region close to the Mozambican border on [October 28](#).
- Reports from November 3 indicate that at least 12 civilians were injured by rocket fragments in Mandimba, located about eight km from the Nangade District capital and seven km from the Rovuma River, after Tanzanian forces launched rockets over the border to target militants on October 29.

Assessments & Forecast

- Recent weeks have seen the complete overrunning of Muidumbe District, with attacks on at least 16 villages, [including its capital Namacande](#), and the destruction of a significant amount of the district's infrastructure. Muidumbe had been relatively quiet since mid-May when the last series of attacks took place in Miangalwea, though security operations had been reported in the district periodically. Although militants have continued attacks in other parts of the province, this fits a general pattern of a heavy concentration of forces working in coordination to target a particular district or cluster of villages. This was seen in late September and early October when militants made a distinct push to clear out the villages of Macomia District's Mucojo Administrative Post, which they have sporadically worked to reinforce in the weeks following. This illustrates the organization and planning that the militants are capable of, as well as their frequent ability to execute such plans without much resistance from security forces.

2. However, the destruction of Muidumbe District has seen one significant departure from similar militant operations in Macomia and elsewhere, which is the large-scale use of scorched earth tactics and extreme levels of brutality. The reports that the militants collected at least 50 civilians hiding in the forests outlying the village and brought them to the football field in Muatide to be beheaded is highly unusual. Although beheadings have been reported throughout the insurgency, the deliberate organization of a brutal event of this scale is new. This comes in stark contrast to the militants' reported behavior in Mocimboa da Praia and Macomia districts, where they were reported to instruct civilians to shelter in mosques, gave aid and supplies to other civilians, or simply paid civilians to depart their home villages without interference. This is unlikely to be a coincidence and reflects a specific strategy, likely as a result of ethnic and religious affiliation.
3. To this point, Muidumbe District and its northwestern neighbor Mueda District are at the center of the ethnic Makonde heartland, which is said to have arisen on the Mueda Plateau. The Makonde are largely Christian in Cabo Delgado, which makes them a natural target of jihadists. Perhaps more importantly, the Makonde are a prominent ethnic group that represent a core part of the Frelimo liberation movement, now the ruling party, with President Filipe Nyusi being an ethnic Makonde himself and a native of Mueda District. In that sense, the militants targeting this region represents a broader ideological victory for an anti-government armed group. Given the short distance between the captured Muidumbe villages and Mueda town, it appears likely that the militants will mobilize in that direction in the coming days. This would also serve a strategic purpose in seizing control of a town at a major crossroads for central Cabo Delgado, as Mueda sits on a north-south road to Montepuez and connects to Nangade and thus Palma as well. Seizing these areas particularly ahead of the heavy rains will put them at a significant advantage.
4. Finally, the attack on the prison in Mizeze, Metuge District was reportedly attributed to the militant group by the justice ministry, but their affiliation remains somewhat in doubt. While the militants would be capable of organizing such an attack, it has been rare that they make an effort against a more significant target in areas without communicating their motives by conducting smaller attacks in the vicinity in the days prior. Militants have not conducted a direct attack in Metuge District since April and have also been fairly limited in their activity in neighboring Quissanga in recent weeks. While this does not rule out their involvement, it is also possible that authorities are alleging a notable act of organized crime to be part of the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. Nonetheless, this is an indication of the broad decline in security even in areas in close proximity to Pemba.

Recommendations

1. Avoid all travel to northern and eastern Cabo Delgado Province in light of the threat from the ongoing Islamist insurgency.
2. Refrain from overland travel particularly in Cabo Delgado's Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia, Muidumbe, Palma, and Quissanga districts given ongoing security threats and poor infrastructure.