



Militancy/Terrorism

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Mozambique SITUATION UPDATE: SADC recommends deploying nearly 3,000 troops to Cabo Delgado, as French energy company declares 'force majeure' on April 26

Executive Summary

- Small-scale incidents continue in Palma, including those perpetrated by security forces, further driving displacement and distrust of the government. This has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis as authorities wrangle with external agencies over the distribution of aid.
- The French energy giant on the Afungi Peninsula officially declared a “force majeure” and confirmed the withdrawal of all personnel from its site. This presents a challenge to the government due to its economic importance and this may force President Filipe Nyusi to accept some form of foreign military intervention.
- The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) recommended a force deployment with air and naval assets and nearly 3,000 troops, which is a large-scale undertaking for the region. In addition to Nyusi's reticence, the actual execution of such a deployment has many challenges and questions in terms of SADC resources and would take months at best to become operational.

Please be advised

Security & Humanitarian Situation

- There were several continued incidents in Palma, Cabo Delgado Province in recent weeks. This included militant attacks on residences on the outskirts of the town on April 23 in which several people were killed and homes burned. Gunfire was further reported on April 25, though the circumstances were unclear.
- Reports from April 27 suggested that soldiers were setting fire to residences in the town. This came alongside other reports of fires in Palma and persistent rumors of insecurity perpetrated by members of the defense and security forces.
- According to the International Organization of Migration (IOM) on April 23, nearly 25,000 people have been registered as displaced from Palma, with 4,000 of those fleeing Palma in mid-April.
- Reports from April 28 indicate that external humanitarian aid delivery to Palma has been blocked by the Mozambican government over disagreements regarding who should distribute the aid. The government reportedly insisted on distributing all supplies, though a previous convoy of supplies was unable to be unloaded when there were no government agents to receive it.

LNG Project

- In a statement on April 26, a French energy company declared “force majeure” on its liquefied natural gas (LNG) project on the Afungi Peninsula and confirmed the complete withdrawal of its personnel from the site.
- Subsequent reports suggest that the French company suspended its operations with the Mozambican government but has not officially terminated its contracts with other suppliers and service providers.

SADC Technical Report

- The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) was set to reconvene an Extraordinary Troika Summit to discuss the report of its Technical Assessment Team on April 29, but the meeting was postponed after Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi was quarantined. However, the team’s report, dated April 21, was leaked.
- The report revisited the attack on Palma, affirmed the militants’ continued control over Mocimboa da Praia, and suggested that the current lull in attacks is due to the onset of Ramadan.
- The team proposed several courses of action. Their final recommendation is to immediately deploy air, naval, and ground forces to support Mozambican counterinsurgency operations and provide logistical and training capabilities. This would include at least 12 aircraft, three light infantry battalions, and two special forces squadrons, with the total force numbering 2,916 people.

Assessments & Forecast

1. Although the government has repeatedly insisted that it has secured Palma, the continued incidents and departure of civilians underscores the presence of militants as well as deteriorated conditions overall. It is likely that the militant presence in the Palma area is fairly small but even limited, harassing attacks against civilians as well as security forces serves to undermine the government’s aims to project its presence in the area. The general lull in attacks appears to be intentional on the militants’ part, with the SADC and other sources speculating that this is due to Ramadan. Previous years have seen no particular correlation between the number of attacks, or lack thereof, with the holy month. Militants, like everyone else in the region, may also be disrupted by difficult weather as Tropical Storm Joho brought further rain to Cabo Delgado. Attacks are thus expected to resume into May.
2. Government behavior continues to alienate the population in Palma, particularly reports that security forces have been involved in looting as well as arson of homes and shops. This comes in tandem with reports that authorities have sought to prevent civilians in the Palma area, including on Afungi Peninsula, from fleeing south and west, seeking to have them return to Palma as a reflection of a security victory. The continual registration of displaced civilians in other parts of the province is reflective of the unstable conditions. This is further exacerbated by inaction surrounding the delivery of humanitarian aid amid reports of disputes with aid agencies that likely mistrust the government’s ability to handle the logistical task and with minimal corruption. The prolonged lack of assistance to both Palma and Afungi will drive further crisis and displacement in the coming weeks.
3. In these conditions, the French energy company’s declaration of “force majeure” was somewhat expected. While the company has frequently affirmed its recognition of the government’s security efforts, the prolonged failures in Palma and within the 25 km radius of the LNG site would have led to a loss of confidence. Estimates vary regarding how long a shutdown could last, but given the economic importance of the project, the government has vested interest in stabilizing the area to facilitate their return. This declaration may be partially intended as leverage to force Mozambique to accept more foreign assistance, whether from the US, EU, or SADC. President Nyusi is

reportedly slated to attend a France-Africa summit in Paris in May and could use the opportunity to pursue French military support in Cabo Delgado to help facilitate the return of the energy company.

4. The SADC's recommended force deployment is significant in size and scope. The number of proposed ground forces likely comes close to the number of Mozambican troops dispatched to Cabo Delgado and would also add assets that Mozambique does not have in terms of naval and air power. This would suggest a large-scale undertaking and is likely controversial among Nyusi and the Frelimo government. Although Nyusi acquiesced to the SADC technical team, he has steadily deflected all attempts at regional military intervention thus far. He is likely to take the delay of the Extraordinary Troika summit to further refrain from making public commitments.
5. Furthermore, the SADC's proposed force deployment would face other constraints in terms of logistics and funding. The SADC has no standby force in place, with only some existing shared doctrine, training, and coordination mechanisms. Although a joint force is part of the SADC's official functions in terms of regional peacekeeping, this has not been tested to the extent of the deployment that is being recommended by the technical assessment team. There are substantive questions regarding which countries would contribute troops and materiel, whether or how they will receive external funding, and if multiple southern African countries are able to operate under this framework for a prolonged period. It is also unlikely that any individual SADC country has the resources or capability to fully execute such a deployment on their own. These issues suggest that even if President Nyusi did accede to SADC intervention, it would take months at the earliest to fund, organize, and launch operations.

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.