



Militancy/Terrorism

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NOV

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Mozambique Alert: Suspected militants kill four police officers in attack in Mecula, Niassa Province on November 25

Please be advised

- Reports from November 29 indicate that a vehicle carrying cash for the salaries of a wildlife reserve was ambushed and attacked by unidentified armed assailants in Mecula District in Niassa Province on November 25. Four police officers escorting the vehicle were reportedly killed.
- The incident reportedly caused panic among local residents, some of whom fled their homes out of fears of additional attacks.
- Unconfirmed reports indicate that this led to additional clashes between the assailants and security forces the next day.
- The assailants have not been identified by local reports, and the attack has not been claimed.

Assessments & Forecast

1. This may be the first militant attack reported in Niassa Province since the insurgency began in neighboring Cabo Delgado Province. While there have been previous violent incidents in the province, and even in Mecula District, these have ultimately been reported to be criminal attacks. This suggests the possibility that this is likewise a criminal incident that has received outsized attention due to the particular sensitivity to militancy in this region of the country. However, some of the same factors that contribute to the heightened concerns in eastern Niassa Province are likewise indications that this could have been perpetrated by militants.
2. Most notably, this incident comes as militant activity has increasingly spread westward in Cabo Delgado into Mueda District, where attacks had been sparse until recent weeks. This is the result of multinational military operations by Rwandan and Southern African troops that have dismantled militant bases and targeted cells in Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia, and Muidumbe districts. This has forced the militants to disperse and either seek to set up camp elsewhere or remain mobile to evade capture. Consequently, at least one cell of militants has been reported in the Mueda forests, where they have targeted villages in Mueda and Nangade districts. It is possible that they looked to the west to Niassa Province, suspecting that the security forces would be less prepared for an attack there as compared to Cabo Delgado.
3. The choice of target is also consistent with the militants' other activity. The militants have been looting villages in search of resources especially as they have lost their bases amid the dry season. Robbing a vehicle with cash would help them to resupply. Moreover, the specific targeting of police officers escorting the vehicle aligns with their general pattern of focusing on attacking security forces and other representatives of the government.
4. This further aligns with reports over the past two years that the militants have been seeking to recruit in Niassa and Nampula provinces. Mecula District specifically is an area where militants have established more extreme religious centers from which to radicalize and recruit the local population. Residents from this area may have joined the insurgency in Cabo Delgado and are now returning, or other militants fleeing from Cabo Delgado could be seeking shelter among sympathizers in Niassa. **FORECAST:** Even if this incident is ultimately confirmed to be criminal in nature, these circumstances nonetheless reflect the heightened potential for the growth of militancy in eastern Niassa Province. Small-scale militant attacks and village raids remain possible particularly in Mecula District bordering Cabo Delgado in the coming months.

Recommendations

1. Maintain heightened vigilance in eastern Niassa Province along the border with Cabo Delgado Province due to the increased potential for militant activity.
2. Avoid all travel to northern and eastern Cabo Delgado Province in light of the threat from the ongoing Islamist insurgency.
3. Refrain from overland travel particularly in Cabo Delgado's Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia, Muidumbe, Nangade, Palma, and Quissanga districts given ongoing security threats and poor infrastructure.