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Issue Brief

Rising Terrorism in Mozambique

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S*ummary*

In recent years, there has been a rise in terrorism in Mozambique. Al Shabab, an ISIS affiliate, has launched several attacks in Cabo Delgado, a province in the north of the country. The terror attacks have left several people dead and hundreds of thousands displaced in the country. The extensive international concern for these terror acts is driven to some extent by the impact on the mining and natural gas sector of the country, which has attracted massive investments by international majors. The linkage of the Al Shabab group with existing organised crime networks in the region complicates the matter further. Given its close ties and the large stake in the hydrocarbon sector in the country, India should support the efforts of Mozambique government and the SADC to counter the scourge of terrorism.

In recent years, Sub Saharan Africa has witnessed a rise in terrorism with Nigeria, Mali and Somalia as some well-known hotspots in the region. Terrorist activities do not seem to have stopped even during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, in fact they have now been detected in places which were considered relatively stable in recent years, such as southern Africa. In Mozambique, violent attacks by the extremists have left thousands dead and around 8,00,000 displaced.¹ Since July 2021, troops from Rwanda and the regional grouping called the Southern African Development Community (SADC), have been deployed in the country to deal with the mounting violence. The rising terrorism in Mozambique is a matter of concern both for the region and the international community.

Cabo Delgado, a region well-known in Mozambique as the cradle of the liberation struggle against the Portuguese rulers and birthplace of Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), the ruling party, is now a centre of extremism and terrorism. An extremist group called Al Shabab (unrelated to Al-Shabaab, a terror group based in Somalia), also known as Al Sunnah Wa Jamaah (ASW), is responsible for recent terror attacks in the region. This organisation came into limelight as a religious group and it was only in 2017 that it launched the first terror attack.² In 2020, the United States designated Al Shabab or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-Mozambique as a terrorist organisation.³

The members of this group are mainly unemployed Mozambican youth from the Muslim Mwani ethnic group, whereas the leadership consists of committed Jihadists many of whom are from neighbouring Tanzania and other east African countries. Their demands include rule through Sharia law, rejection of formal education, healthcare, state authority and any taxes imposed by the state.⁴ The motivation for joining the group may be shaped by lure of the ideology and to some extent linked to local grievances such as their economic exclusion, and forced displacement amid the discovery of rubies and natural gas in the country and also resentment against the influence of elites drawn

¹ **“Mozambique Insurgents Train Child Soldiers”**, *News24*, 29 September 2021.

² **“Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado”**, International Crisis Group, Report No.303, 11 June 2021.

³ **“State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique”**, U.S. Department of State, 10 March, 2021.

⁴ Saide Habibe, Salvador Forquilha and João Pereira, **“Islamic Radicalization in Northern Mozambique: The Case of Mocímboa da Praia”**, Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE), Maputo, Mozambique, 2019.

from President Filipe Nyusi's Catholic Makonde ethnic group in the region.⁵ There is much we still don't know about the funding mechanisms of this terror group. It could be connected to the illicit economy, but not dependent on any one funding source.

Why Does It Matter?

The rise of terrorism in Mozambique has led to serious concerns at the regional and international levels, driven by several factors. First, Al Shabab is the only terrorist group with connection to the ISIS in Southern Africa. Until recently, acts of terror conducted by extremists in Southern Africa were confined to Tanzania and Zanzibar. Al Shabab initially emerged as a religious group influenced by the teachings of Abdul Rago Mohamad, a Kenyan cleric, who before his assassination in 2012 was sanctioned by the United Nations and the United States as a known supporter of Al Qaeda and Somalia's Al Shabab group.⁶ After Abdul Rago's death, his followers continued his work in Tanzania.⁷ In 2013, the Tanzanian authorities launched a crackdown on their operations in Kibiti district close to Mozambique border and in the northern city of Tanga.⁸ Subsequently, it was reported that in 2015 these extremists migrated to Cabo Delgado, which coincides with the time Al Shabab set up training cells in the region.⁹ A number of these foreigners joined the Al Shabab leadership and helped them launch their first armed attack in Mocimboa da Praia port in Cabo Delgado in 2017.

Al Shabab's linkage with ISIS came to light after the organisation claimed responsibility for an attack launched by the terror group in Mozambique in 2019.¹⁰ The influence of ISIS is also visible in the style of attacks. In 2017, Al Shabab targeted government infrastructure including polling stations during elections, and officials. However since 2019–2020 their attacks have become brutal, killing thousands and kidnapping scores of civilians and destroying entire townships.¹¹ These happenings influenced the US to designate Al Shabab as an affiliate of ISIS.

⁵ Sérgio Chichava and Chris Alden, **“Cabo Delgado and the Rise of Militant Islam: Another Niger Delta in the Making?”**, *SAIIA Policy Briefing*, No. 221, October 2020.

⁶ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Emelie Chace-Donahue and Colin P Clarke, **“The Evolution and Escalation of the Islamic State Threat to Mozambique”**, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 13 April 2021.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ No. 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jason Burke, **“Isis Claims Sub-Saharan Attacks in a Sign of African Ambitions”**, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2019.

¹¹ **“In Bid to Boost Its Profile, ISIS Turns to Africa's Militants”**, *New York Times*, 7 April 2020.

Second, Cabo Delgado is a province rich in natural resources such as rubies and natural gas. In 2009, vast ruby deposits were discovered in the province. Montepuez, the second largest town in the region has world's largest ruby mine and manages 40 per cent of the world's supply of the precious stone.¹² The mining operations are controlled by Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM), a joint venture company formed in 2011. The ownership is shared between the locally owned company Mwiriti (25 per cent) and London-based mining conglomerate Gemfields (75 per cent).¹³

Mozambique's natural gas deposits are also located off the Cabo Delgado coastline. As per the latest estimates, Mozambique has 100 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves,¹⁴ which makes it the third-highest holder of proven natural gas reserves in Africa, after Nigeria and Algeria. The country is predicted to become one of the top ten exporters of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) in the next decade.¹⁵ Some of the world's largest oil companies are involved in the country's natural gas sector, such as Total (France), Eni SpA (Spain), BP (UK), Shell (the Netherlands), Mitsui (Japan), ONGC Videsh, Oil India and BPCL (India), Sasol (South Africa) and CNPC (China). The discovery of rubies and offshore oil deposits had raised hopes of the local people for a better life and jobs, but the rise of terrorism has dashed these hopes. Moreover, the escalation of violence has raised questions about the future of huge investments made by foreign companies and have even put them at high risk.

The third issue relates to linkage of Al Shabab with organised crime. Al Shabab may be linked to illicit local economy, the clandestine networks dealing with timber, rubies and narcotics. A report by the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE), Mozambique suggests that local elites linked to Al Shabab control much of the illegal timber trade in the Cabo Delgado region. Al Shabab is also linked with businesses involved in illegal trade of minerals, particularly rubies.¹⁶ This illicit network involves foreign gemstone traders and small-scale moneylenders in cities of Mocimboa da Praia and Pemba in Cabo Delgado. Similarly, heroin trafficking has been flourishing in Cabo Delgado since the end of the Mozambican Civil War. The trafficking of heroin produced and shipped from Afghanistan and Pakistan along a network of routes via East and Southern Africa has

¹² Estacio Valoi, **"The Blood Rubies of Montepuez"**, *Foreign Policy*, May 2016.

¹³ Wim Vertriest and Sudarat Saeseaw, **"A Decade of Ruby from Mozambique: A Review"**, *Gems & Gemology*, Vol. 55, No. 2, Summer 2019.

¹⁴**"Mozambique"**, US Energy Information Administration, July 2020.

¹⁵ Luís Fonseca, **"Mozambique Set to Become Gas-exporting Giant"**, *African Business*, 11 March 2020.

¹⁶No. 4.

increased considerably in recent years.¹⁷ In this regard, Cabo Delgado is a key point in the narcotics trade routes. There are fears that Al Shabab's control over Cabo Delgado coastlines has resulted in taking a cut from the illicit narcotics trade as transit fees or taxes,¹⁸ which means that the possibility of narcotics trade partly funding terrorism exists.

The fourth issue relates to the Mozambican government's response to stem the tide of terrorism. The fact that the Mozambican security forces could not prevent the extremists from taking several strategic towns in the region, such as Palma, the northern port of Mocimboa de Praia and others indicates their weakness. The President Filipe Nyusi led government had deployed both the national police, the Unidade Intervenção Rápida (UIR) and the Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique (FADM) to fight the terrorists in Cabo Delgado. However, years of neglect have left the armed forces ill-equipped to deal with this rising militancy. Therefore, Mozambique government turned to Private Military Companies (PMC) for support. Initially, there were reports of consultations with Blackwater fame Erik Prince's private security firm and South African Eben Barlow's Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection International (STTEP).¹⁹ Nevertheless, the contract went to Russian PMC, Wagner group. However, the Wagner group couldn't manage for long in the difficult terrain and was replaced by South African Dyck Advisory Group.²⁰

Subsequently, the widespread violence led the Mozambican government to request Rwanda to deploy troops in the Cabo Delgado province. Simultaneously, growing Al Shabab attacks in Tanzania and threat of the militancy spilling over other parts of the region led the SADC approve troop deployment in Mozambique.²¹ These deployments have led to success and the Mozambique government has been able to regain some territory from the Al Shabab in Cabo Delgado. Recently, the SADC has extended the troops deployment in Mozambique.²² No doubt, their presence is essential for containing the terrorists.

¹⁷ Simone Haysom, Peter Gastrow and Mark Shaw, **“The Heroin Coast: A Political Economy along the Eastern African Seaboard”**, *Enact Research Paper*, June 2018.

¹⁸ **“Insurgency in Mozambique: A Drug Problem”**, *LEXAfrica*, 31 May 2021.

¹⁹ Andrew McGregor, **“Why Mozambique is Outsourcing Counter-Insurgency to Russia: Hidden Loans and Naval Bases”**, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 16, No. 53, 4 November 2019.

²⁰ Chris Alden and Sérgio Chichava, **“Cabo Delgado: ‘Al Shabaab/ISIS’ and the Crisis in Southern Africa”**, Policy Centre for the New South, *Policy Brief*, May 2021.

²¹ Arnaldo Vieira, **“SADC to Deploy Troops to Fight Insurgency in Mozambique”**, *The East African*, 9 July 2021.

²² Amanda Khoza, **“Sadc Leaders Extend Deployment of Troops in Mozambique”**, *TimesLive* (South Africa), 5 October 2021.

Implications for India

India has close and historical ties with Mozambique. This friendship is reflected in the fact that in 2015, President Filipe Nyusi, an alumnus of IIM Ahmedabad, chose India as his first destination to visit in Asia.²³ During this visit he called for greater economic cooperation between the two countries. Similarly Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his tour of Africa in 2016 with a visit to Mozambique.²⁴ Both countries consider their partnership as important and beneficial.

The current conflict in Mozambique has implications for India's security, given close cooperation between the two countries in energy, food and maritime sphere. Indian companies have invested heavily in the energy sector in Mozambique and by some estimates these investments amount to almost a quarter of India's total investments in Africa.²⁵ The most important investments have been in the natural gas and coal industries. India is the biggest investor in Rovuma Area-1 natural gas project operated by French oil major Total in the Cabo Delgado region. OVL and Oil India Limited acquired 20 per cent stake in the project in 2014 while BPCL bought 10 per cent stake in 2008.²⁶ Earlier this year, due to the deteriorating security situation, Total declared force majeure and has withdrawn all personnel from the country.²⁷

Indian companies have a major presence in the coal mining sector in Tete province located in north-west of the country. In July 2014, International Coal Ventures Private Ltd, a consortium of five Indian Public Sector Undertakings (SAIL, NMDC, RISL, CIL and NTPC) purchased a 65 per cent stake in the Benga coal mine sold by Rio Tinto. Tata Steel owns the balance 35 per cent stake in the mine.²⁸ Other Indian companies with a presence in the coal mining sector include Jindal Africa, Coal India Ltd, Essar, etc.

Mozambique is vital for India's food security. Reducing food insecurity is important for the growth of human capital and economic development of the country. Although India

²³ **“Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi Moots Strong Economic Partnership with India”**, *Economic Times*, 6 August 2015.

²⁴ **“PM Modi Arrives in Mozambique as Part of 4-nation Africa Visit”**, *Hindustan Times*, 7 July 2016.

²⁵ **“India-Mozambique Economic and Commercial Relations”**, High Commission of India, Maputo, Mozambique.

²⁶ **“ONGC, Oil India and Bharat Petroleum to Invest \$6 Billion in Mozambique”**, *Economic Times*, 13 April 2015.

²⁷ **“Total Declares Force Majeure on Mozambique LNG Project”**, *TotalEnergies*, 26 April 2021.

²⁸ **“ICVL to Resume Operations in Mozambique Mine in a Few Months: SAIL”**, *Business Standard*, 2 February 2017.

is the largest producer and consumer of pulses in the world, the growing demand and supply gap has pushed India to import pulses from various countries, including Mozambique. In 2016, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mozambique, India had signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoU) for import of *arhar* (pigeon pea).²⁹ Over the years, India imported a large amount of pulses from Mozambique to meet the domestic requirement. Incessant conflicts in Mozambique have cast a shadow over uninterrupted supply of pulses from the country to India.

Mozambique has immense importance in maritime sphere too, mainly due to its location off the Mozambique Channel, a vital choke point in the Indian Ocean. Indian Navy has designated Mozambique Channel as part of its primary area of maritime interest.³⁰ Mozambique's strategic importance to New Delhi is reflected in the growing defence ties between the two countries. Mozambique and India share common concerns, such as piracy, terrorism and drug trafficking. It is well known that in the past, Mozambique invited Indian Navy for coastal maritime surveillance. This was during the year 2004 when it hosted the African Union (AU) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) Summit in Maputo. India has also responded promptly on Mozambique's call for disaster relief. In 2020, Indian Navy was the first responder when Cyclone Idai struck Mozambique coast. The close security cooperation with Mozambique is also reflected in the visit of India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Maputo in 2019. This was the first-ever visit of an Indian defence minister to the country. The visit was noteworthy, as India handed over two fast interceptor boats, which are essential for enhancing coastal security of the country.

Conclusion

The combined efforts of Mozambican armed forces and the troops from Rwanda and SADC countries have had some impact in curbing terrorism in the country, however, despite military action, terrorist attacks have not stopped and still linger in the embattled Cabo Delgado region. There are fears that the terrorists may relocate and spread the conflict to other parts of the country. The long-drawn conflict has brought the country's economy, in particular, the growing natural gas sector, to a standstill. Development of the natural gas sector is crucial, both for the revival of the country's

²⁹“**Agreements between India and Mozambique**”, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 10 July 2019.

³⁰ **Indian Maritime Doctrine 2009**, Ministry of Defence (Navy), India, Integrated Headquarters, 2009.

economy and the realisation of investments made by Mozambique's external partners, including India.

The situation in Mozambique is complex and there is a need for a comprehensive policy to tackle the situation. While the Mozambican government has launched a military offensive, it should also enhance development initiatives in the besieged region and address the socio-economic grievances of its people. On its part, India may support regional efforts for a comprehensive and coordinated response to the Mozambican crisis. Bilaterally, it may assist the Mozambican government by enhancing development cooperation and training of the country's armed forces. Given India's long-standing relations with the country and deep economic interests, it is hoped that stability will return to Mozambique at an early date.

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