The Expansion of Radical Islam in Africa - Mozambique as a Case Study

Dr. Eitan Azani and Dr. David Duchan

January 2020
The Expansion of Radical Islam in Africa - Mozambique as a Case Study

Preamble

2020 was a good year for radical Islamic terrorist organizations in Africa. While the rest of the world tried to contain and curb the Covid-19 pandemic as well as work frantically toward a vaccine, the former’s activity expanded and claimed the lives of thousands, turned hundreds of thousands into refugees in their own countries and further destabilized governments’ rule in vast regions in the continent. The cycle of violence has expanded to include more countries.

De facto, as opposed to the common opinion that north Africa (the Maghreb), the Sahel region together with Nigeria (Lake Chad) and Somalia (in the Horn of Africa) are conspicuous fighting theaters for radical Islamic organizations, the entire continent (including its eastern and southern regions) is mired in fighting kinetic terrorism and subversion by radical Islamic organizations that are not always connected to one another. In this document we will discuss the obvious question - why is it so? We will review the background and the main reasons for this phenomenon and focus on Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado province’ case, which threatens the country and the entire region’s stability.

The above question has several answers, none of which is simple. Prior to attempting to provide them, we should note one historical fact - Africa’s story has always been laced with violence and wars.

Background

African countries that gained independence in the 1960s roll into a war dynamic that over time and events that have transpired affected the continent’s security situation and shaped it. At first, the national liberation wars set the tone. The second half of the twentieth century was typified by rise of demands for independence of armed groups that resorted to violence to liberate themselves and cast away the colonialist/imperialist forces that ruled their country as well as exact revenge on collaborators with the latter. Case studies such Cameroon, Madagascar, Kenya, Angola and Algeria provide a lot of insight and are significant in this context. The violent wave ruled. Military and civilian coups became a common sight in the continent and
drove some countries into a state of inertia wherein bloodshed, revenge and extreme violence became routine.

During the last 50 years, Africa has seen more than 70 coups in 26 different countries, 60% of those in French speaking countries. Additionally, several countries had to contend with isolated or isolationist armed movements that claimed sovereignty and autonomy while using terrorism and guerilla warfare: Casamance in southern Senegal, Eritrea in North West Ethiopia, Katanga in in the southeastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Azawad in northern Mali and Ambazonia in Cameroon provided prime examples for such claims. A genocide, such as the one that took place in Rwanda and cost the lives of more than 1.5 million Tutsi between April and July 1994 is also an example of the lethal inter-ethnic and inter-faith conflicts that take place in Africa. Other examples would be clashes between the Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi, Kikuyu and Lous in Kenya, Bete and Dioula in the Ivory Coast, Nuer and Dinka in South Sudan, Bayangu and Bororos in Cameroon and Seleka and Antibalaka in the Central African Republic.

It is safe to say that radical Islamic terrorism is another facet of said historic violence. Terrorism put down roots in various regions in Africa and replaces the civil wars of yester years. The flourishing of radical Islamic terrorism is connected to multiple causes, primarily: (i) socio-economic (poverty, unemployment, famine, diseases and drug trafficking); (ii) political (2011 Arab Spring, weak central government and lack of control in distant parts of the country); (iii) geo-political connections (reexamination of the post WWI borders, the expanding Chinese and western presence evoked strong post-colonial emotions, development of gray areas); (iv) the emergence of global jihad, its establishment in Africa, its dissemination through Dawah arrays formed in Africa. The above, as well as additional reasons contributed to the emergence of the Salafi organizations in Africa. These organizations directly threaten the peace and stability in the continent, and indirectly threaten Europe and beyond.

Hassan al-Turabi, the leading ideologist of political Islam in Africa, who provided refuge to Osama Bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders when he served as the acting leader of Sudan in the 1990s, described the situation very well. Al-Turabi explained in an interview that: “the Islam that is rapidly spreading in Africa these days is a different kind of active Islam - it is not a private
version of the lethargic Sufism. It enters into policy, economy, culture and education”¹. In other words, the next world philosophy, the grand discourse that will replace the failed communism, will be Islam - the radical one, of course².

Islam in Africa provides solutions for grave social issues that plague the countries and stem from the fact that the social basis in Africa is tribal and the competition among tribes is destructive and lethal. Political Islam, per the radicals, touches on all aspects of life - it is all encompassing. In a Muslim society, there are no separate entities for church and state and the idea of such separation is meaningless. Church and state are one entity. Political Islam enables one to overcome divisions that are connected to one’s origins. Islam has the answers to the ramifications of fitting people into a post-colonial state structure, a fit that destroyed social tribal systems and old traditions, drew new borders and prioritized large tribes in connection with a control of the state’s resources³.

After the colonial era, in the 1960s, corrupt regimes emerged and were based on tribal, ethnic and religious affiliation. These regimes were also based on the support of the military and security forces that had to contend with the bare necessities (employment, education, infrastructure, healthcare...) among minorities (mostly Muslim in distant provinces) or among those who weren’t connected to the ruling party. The above fixed in certain countries such north eastern Nigeria or Mali, the notion that Islam and sharia provide an answer to all needs, including the legal ones, especially in light of the lack of effective state organs presence, intentional discrimination or lack of ability to govern. Islamic terrorism in Africa presents the new face of insecurity in Africa today. Long after serving as a means to claim political independence and sovereignty, radical Islam’s terrorism found a warm bosom in Algeria with the formation of the Sufi Underground for Preaching and Escalation (GSPC) that became al-Qaeda in the Maghreb

² The term “Political Islam” is connected to the tendency of certain radical movements to present politics as Islam’s main arena and their desire to reestablish a califate that per them has existed in the distant past. The term itself describes conservative or fundamentalist political ideology that governs society, economy and laws of the country
³ Due to poverty, discrimination, alienation and political persecution, many Africans in different countries seek solace in Islam and even adopted extreme ideologies that serve as Petrie Dishes for the growth of terrorism. The terrorist organizations on their part, preach the people that their troubles began once the western concepts have been implemented in their country following the colonialism and that Islam – alongside toppling over governments that do not embrace radical Islam – is the answer to their misery.
(AQIM) in January 2007. This group’s actions inspired the spread of other sub-regional terrorist groups in the continent. With the exception of South Africa that these days seems relatively safe from jihadist danger, despite its proximity to Mozambique, the rest of the continent is threatened by terrorist groups desiring to realize their dream - building a real Ummah for Muslim faithful, one that is clear of infidels.

If the common goal of all these Islamist groups is to from an Islamic order then it is obvious that the entire continent presents a certain uniqueness of jihad. In other words, the Maghreb Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Central Africa and the great lakes all experience a kind of terrorism that is unique in its core, manifestation, means and actors.

**Major Arenas and Radical Islamic Organizations Active Therein (Partial List):**

1. Somalia - al-Shabab that is affiliated with al-Qaeda.
2. Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) - Macina Liberation Front (FLM), Katiba Serma, Ansar Dine, Ansaroul Islam, Islamic State of the Greater Sahara ((ISGS), AQIM Sahara, Al Mourabitouon, Katiba Salahedinne. All are either formally or informally associated with a consortium of groups linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) known as Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).
3. Nigerian and Lake Chad - Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa (ISWA)
5. Central Africa - Seleka
6. Mozambique - Ahlu Sunnah wa Jama’a (ASWJ), Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP).

**Mozambique Arena**

Mozambique is a former Portuguese colony (gained its independence on July 25th, 1975). Mozambique developed as two different entities divided by the Zambezi River. The north relies on agriculture, its residents along the coast are influenced by the Swahili culture. The south is dependent on South Africa and on gold trade. The country is considered poor (GDP per capita

---

4 The GSPC, an Algerian terrorist faction in the Algerian civil war, was formed in 1998 by Hassan Hattab, a former area commander for the GIA-Armed Islamic Group. After his removal from GIA in 2003 the group pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, became its Maghreb extension and changed its name.
is approx. $1,200), many of the residents of Maputo, the capital city, have no idea how life in
the Northern provinces looks, where the population is even poorer than they are. Maputo is
located some 1,700 Km from Pemba, the capital city of the Cabo Delgado province.

As of October 5th, 2017, Mozambique is contending with an Islamic uprising in the northern
province of Cabo Delgado. Mozambique’s population is approx. 37 million, of which approx. 20%
are Muslims⁵. That said, Cabo Delgado is predominantly Muslim (approx. 55% of the 2.5 million
Mwani tribe are Muslim). Cabo Delgado is the poorest province in Mozambique despite the
wealth of natural resources. The latter should, with a proper government investment and
administrative transparency, develop the energy industry in the province and immensely
improve the quality of life of the residents. De facto, those who enjoy the fruits of this wealth
are the ruling elite that reside in Maputo almost 2,000 km away. Once the natural resources
were discovered in Cabo Delgado, the Mozambique aggressively started to show its presence in
the province. Rather than coming up with plans for public infrastructure developments, building
hospitals, schools, communication etc., it chose to split the wealth with western conglomerates
and acted violently and arbitrarily against the local population that protested the above division
of wealth. An example of the governments’ disparagement of the local population may be
observed in its decision to grant a mining license to international conglomerates in the
Montepuez district while disowning entire agricultural communities rendering them unable to
grow their own food⁶.

The discovery of massive marine natural gas reservoirs (among the largest in the world) in the
past decade has caused energy giants (such as Statoil, Petrobras, Exxon Mobile, Total, shell,
ENI⁷) to enter the space, collaborate with the ruling elite and deepen the societal gap in the
province and among others. It has also caused the uprooting thousands of people from their

⁵ Mozambique is divided into 10 provinces and in addition, the capital city of Maputo is considered a province as
well. The provinces are divided into 129 districts.
⁶ Anne-Marie Bissada, Mozambique: Can Cabo Delgado’s Islamists insurgency be stopped? (29.7.2020).
⁷ The reservoirs along the Mozambique coast are among the largest in the world. For expansion see:
https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Energy-and-Resources/dttl-er-deloitte-
guide-oil-gas-east-africa%20-08082013.pdf;
Mozambique - Oil & Gas Privacy Shield framework,
https://www.privacyshield.gov/article?id=Mozambique-Oil-Gas
homes, all of which increased the sense of deprivation, alienation and anger among the locals vis a vis the central government and the energy giants.

Cabo Delgado suffers from high rates of illiteracy and child poverty - only 0.3% of the children receive high school education. The government of Mozambique has been neglecting and ignoring Cabo Delgado - socially and economically - for decades, so much so that it picked the nickname Cabo Esquecido (Forgotten Cape). In terms of accountability, the Mozambique government failed miserably in Cabo Delgado. It did not protect, develop, promote, guarantee or realize the social and economic rights of the Cabo Delgado residents. It invested very little in education, healthcare, water and sanitation systems, infrastructure, public transportation and communications. As a result, among Mozambique’s 10 provinces Cabo Delgado is ranked at the bottom of all human development indices.

Cabo Delgado residents had to rely on using their land and whatever other resources available to them to provide food and employment. Regarding education, the locals’ solution was to send their children to the Islamic madrassa in mosques where the imams advocated jihad and the liberation of the province from the rule of the central government. It is a historic fact that the local imams have been getting their education in neighboring Tanzania for over a century. Moreover, there is constant exchange between the countries of local religious communities from either side of the border.

Cabo Delgado’s history points to systematic neglect by the central government. Additionally, the province was badly hit by tropical cyclone Kenneth (April 2019) and repeatedly suffered from floods in recent years.

ASWJ (Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama’a - supporters of tradition), a jihadi Islamic organization affiliated with the local al-Shabab (but not with the Somali al-Shabab) has been carrying out multiple terror attacks on villages, towns, military installations and soldiers, tourism sites and tourists and gas production installations since 2017. ASWJ Members are likely close with the Tanzanian, Kenyan and Somali Salafi circles and are believed to be between 350-1,500 strong, organized in dozens of cells along northern Mozambique’s coast and in Cabo Delgado.
Most of the ASWJ members are of the Mwani, an ethnic group that has been living for decades with a sense of deprivation and neglect. Alongside the Mwani, the Makonde ethnic group is thriving and holds the reins of government.

Over the course of three years of fighting in the ten northeastern districts of Cabo Delgado the country has lost control over three and a half districts: Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia, Quissanga and the eastern part of Muidumbe. All district seat towns that have been taken over by ASWJ were robbed, burned or destroyed, including administration buildings, stores, banks and permanent structures.

The height of the attacks was the taking of key territories and ports, which signifies the lack of presence and governability of the central government on the one hand and harming key economic export components and prevention of international investments in the country, both important for the central government, on the other hand. The attacks claimed the lives of more than 2,000 people so far, and have uprooted over 570,000 in Cabo Delgado\(^8\).

A report by The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, featured a fact-finding mission that attempted to explain the reasons for the eruption of the violent conflict in Cabo Delgado and point to the central government’s loss of control in the region.

The report ties ASWJ to a dynamic illegal economy that has been developing in the region as well as its neighbors. ASWJ funding is based on smuggling various merchandise, drugs, animals and humans. Per the report, the central government’s attempts to disrupt this trade are doomed to fail because its own officials have been involved with it for years. The reports openly point to known figures from the Frelimo ruling political party that colluded with criminals and have been openly benefiting from the illegal trade. The report discusses and monitors the ties

---

\(^8\) See from the president of Mozambique: Militant attacks force 570,000 to flee homes in northern Mozambique, president says, *The Star (16.12.2020).*
with neighboring Tanzania and points to the expansion of that illegal trade and the risk it poses to the entire region⁹.

**Similarities with Other African Arenas**

Cabo Delgado became the twin of three north eastern Nigeria states (Borno, Yoba, Adamawe) where Boko Haram has been active since 2010 and Macina in Mali where the FLM (Front de Liberation du Macina - a radical group connected to the jihadi movement Ansar Eddine) has been active since 2015. The FLM is led by Hamadoun Kouffa, a Muslim preacher famous for his venomous critique of the state and the local elites that rule and discriminate among the residents and neglect the periphery.

The conspicuous common characteristic of both Sahel and West Africa arenas is a spillover of the uprising to neighboring countries which required the formation of a joint military force under the auspice of the UN and the superpowers to contain, defeat and eradicate the radical Islamic movements for fear of losing Federal (Nigeria) or government (Mali) control in the areas where the organization controls and wherein it implemented sharia laws, en route to form an Islamic Caliphate.

For example, in the Nigerian case, from a murderous terror activity in the Nigerian north east, Boko Haram expanded to take over territories in neighboring countries such as Cameroon, Niger and Chad, first as hideout from the Nigerian army and later as a function of its logistics and survival needs (ammunition, food, fighters). The internal conflict in Nigeria became a regional affair and directly involves four more countries (Niger, Mali, Cameroon, and Chad) and indirectly countries such as Burkina Faso, Togo, Ivory Coast and Ghana.

The inclusion of three more countries into the Boko Haram’s (led by Abubakar Shekau) and ISWAP’s (the organization that split from Boko Haram in 2016, pledged allegiance to ISIS who installed Abu Musab al-Barnawi as its leader) Islamic terrorism circle required the regional

---

leader to recalculate their course of action, share intelligence and fight together to block Boko Haram’s destructive expansion in the region.

The solution was the formation of a multinational force (Multinational Joint Task Force - MNJTF) which is comprised of soldiers and units from five countries (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger), however its success is only partial. MNJTF has been intermittently involved in the fighting since 2015. However, it suffers from lack of consistent funding for its upkeep, ego clashes among generals from different countries and its fighting efficacy is highly doubtful.  

Several radical Islamic organizations are active in Mali and they “export” their Salafi ideology to neighboring countries and attempt to recreate history. The five leading organizations in this failed state are: Ansar Dine, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mujao), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Signed-in-Blood Battalion and the Islamic Movement for Azawad (IMA).

The Mujao, that disengaged from AQIM has been operating in northern Mali since 2011 in an effort to disseminate jihad in western Africa. Simultaneously, its goal is to hit all French interests in western Africa and drive France out of the region.

The Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) unilaterally declared in April 2012 that the Azawad region was a sovereign state ruled by sharia law. The Tuareg’s (AKA the Blue People due to their attire which mostly blue capes) revolt in the region drove out the Mali army which comprises some 60% of the Mali territory.


11 The Tuareg revolted several times against the central government, yet in February 2013 Azawad forego its claim for independence and asked the Mali government to start negotiations on the future status of the Tuareg. In June 2015 the large rebel coalition in Mali signed a peace treaty with the government. The treaty, heavily negotiated and endorsed by Algeria, is meant to stabilize a vast desert area in northern Mali, where the Tuareg have revolted multiple times since the 1960s and has been used as a refuge for AQIM fighters. The treaty acknowledged that the Azawad issue is a political problem that needs a solution and that the treaty needs to be further reviewed in the transition period.
January 2015 saw the emergence of the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) which aims at restoring old glory and reinstalling the Islamic Macina Republic that existed between 1818-1863 in the Segou, Mufti and Timbuktu regions. The old kingdom was ruled by the Fulani tribe and the religion of the land was Islam. Radical Islamic takeover of these territories means only one thing - the disappearance of Mali as a state actor.

Due to the government’s difficulties to fight the subversion and at its behest as well as within the protection of French interests (as an ex-colonial force in the region), a French contingency operated in the region between January 2013 and July 2014 within the Serval Operation. The operation was successful, and the regime did not collapse. The military operations continue to date under the name Operation Barkhane. The main goal of the prolonged French involvement is to provide direct support for the G5 Sahel forces through training and introduction of new technologies. As aforementioned, G5 Sahel is an inter-state joint task force (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania) that was established in 2014 and fights alongside the French contingency.

Much like the state of affairs in Nigeria, the lack of central government governability and the locals’ alienation from the ruling elite that exploits the region’s resources for their benefit with total disregard to the poor provinces and their residents, is very much evident in Cabo Delgado. The uprisers’ narrative, beyond a demand for fair and equitable division of resources and development of local infrastructure, also includes the desire to establish a purely Islamic state ruled by sharia laws.

The Military’s Preparedness for Counter Subversion

The Mozambique army’s forces stationed in Cabo Delgado suffered from lack of weapons and equipment. Moreover, they lacked the basic training required to fight subversion and terrorism. Being familiar with the lay of the land, crucial to success in fighting, was conspicuously weak among them and that coupled with the poor quality of the fighters and the latter’s lack of

---

12 For expansion see: [https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/dossier-de-reference/operation-barkhane](https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/dossier-de-reference/operation-barkhane)

13 For expansion see [G5 SAHEL - Accueil](https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/dossier-de-reference/operation-barkhane)
determination and willingness to bear arms against the uprisers led to the result that in Mozambique, much like Nigeria, the battles between the warring parties often ended with the Mozambique soldiers abandoning their weapons and bases or alternatively deserting their positions and defecting to the other side, which won them rewards and benefits.

Such has been the case in two significant incidents in 2020: in Mocimboa in August and in Quissanga in March\(^\text{14}\). The uprisers killed many soldiers, burned and destroyed the police HQ and forced many soldiers to run for their lives.

**An Invitation to Negotiations - But with Who?**

Much like the former Nigerian president Jonathan Goodluck who tried after the 2014 girls’ abduction in Chibok to negotiate with the leaders of Boko Haram (an attempt that failed - as the president said that “the government could not have negotiated with faceless people”\(^\text{15}\) so did the Mozambique president, Filipe Nyusi. On September 16\(^\text{th}\), 2016 he said that his government was open to conduct a dialogue with the uprisers but since they had a “faceless” leadership he wasn’t sure if he had a partner to negotiate with on the uprisers’ side: “if they show their faces, we shall go and talk to them\(^\text{16}\)”.

**Governmental Corruption**

Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) Mozambique ranked 146 out of 180 in 2019 and shared this spot with Nigeria. Mali, for instance, was ranked 130. In 2012, Mozambique ranked 31\(^\text{17}\). It is common knowledge that in Africa the discovery of natural resources brings trouble rather than promise. The manifestation of that trouble is by the central government and other interested parties’ take over the newly discovered resources, discriminatory and unequal distribution of said resources and totally ignoring those who are not

\(^{14}\) See ts/392971/mozambique-militants-launch-several-attacks-in-cabo-delgado-october-16-23

\(^{15}\) Rafiu Ajakaye, Is Nigeria’s Boko Haram a 'faceless' group? "Who do they have in detention? Do they have ghosts of Boko Haram there?", AA (27.5.2014).


\(^{17}\) see https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/mozambique
in the inner circle. This “party” is being attended not just by the governments but also by western multinational conglomerates (see Nigeria, Angola, Congo...)\(^\text{18}\).

In Africa, the allegiance is not to the state. This is a new institution, in existence only as of the 1960s. Prior to that, the African countries were European colonies and prior to that they were tribal territories. The tribes are yet to pledge complete allegiance to state and the latter is perceived as an obscure instrument in the hands of the president and the military. The average African is committed to himself and his family and alongside that he is committed to his tribe and acts in accordance with his chief’s instructions - committed to his ethnic group. This form of behavior is not considered as wrong among most societal strata and the elites and in most African countries this is a legitimate behavior.

**Human Rights Violations**

The governments of Mozambique and Nigeria responded to the terror threats posed by the radical Islamic organization while systematically ignoring humanitarian laws and international human rights. Military and security activities in Mozambique and Nigeria were characterized by arbitrary mass arrests, detaining with the detainee’s inability to communicate their status, executions with no competent court order, torture and other kinds of abuse, arresting journalists, confiscating their equipment, denying access to the conflict region.

The fighters of different ethnic origin and faith operating in the Muslim space in Mozambique are concerned for their lives and tend not to consider the plights of civilians they encounter during their fights. Slaughter, looting and rape are commonplace. In September 2020, clips showing the Mozambique army soldiers butchering civilians saw light, same as in Nigeria. The

---

\(^{18}\) Corruption in Africa is at its height. Nepotism and inefficiency are prevalent in African governments. In some countries, the leaders have stolen so much that it drove the country into an economic crisis and even bankruptcy (e.g. Zimbabwe during the Mugabe era; Gambia in Yihyaa Jammeh’s era; Central African Republic in Francois Bozize’s era). Since the African countries are ruled by heads of state and close cronies who control import/export permits, business and building permits, all business goes through their hands and grants of permits is likely accompanied by bribery. Any multinational corporation looking to conduct business in the country is sucked into the corruption rabbit hole.
government denied and explained that they may have been unintentional hits on civilians and that the slaughter was perpetrated by imposters.

**Differences between Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jammah (ASWJ) and Other Islamic Organizations in Africa**

Unlike Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabab in Somalia and all the organizations in Mali under the umbrella of JNIM, ASWJ in Mozambique currently does not have the same ideological and expansion aspirations that characterize the other organizations on the continent, i.e. taking over the countries and converting them into Islamic theocracies. At this stage there are few indicators that show that ASWJ wishes to expand its influence (that has grown strong in the province in the past three years) beyond Cabo Delgado. The establishment in the periphery, albeit in a central and strategic district of the periphery, serves ASWJ’s initial intention to destabilize the central government and force it to change its priorities in terms of the distribution of the country’s resources.

That said, the main goal of ASWJ in Cabo Delgado is the strict implementation of sharia law in the province. In the long term, if ASWJ will indeed put down strong roots in the province and in light of its strengthening ties with other regional terrorist organizations and armed criminal gangs in the border zones, it is not out of the realm of possibility that ASWJ will expand its influence and set out to take over the entire Mozambique territory to make it an Islamic law state. Should that happen, it will enable ISIS to widen its expansion strategy in central and eastern Africa, way beyond the Sahel.

**Connections with Terrorist Organizations around the World**

Much like Boko Haram in Nigeria and the ISIS extension ISWAP that are affiliated and connected with terrorist organizations in other countries, the Sahel organizations are mostly connected to al-Qaeda or ISIS. The ties among the organizations, beyond the shared religious ideology,

---


enables the transport of fighters from one theater to another, shipping munitions, training, sharing information on fighting techniques and tactics, and financing methods that work around the global banking system and avoid its tracking and monitoring measures.

The connection to ISIS enables ASWJ to overcome the limitations of a small Islamic organization operating in a distant corner of the globe and obtain, through ISIS, a platform and dimension in the global arena.

**ASWJ’s Activity**

ASWJ built training camps and mosques to preach Wahhabi fundamentalism that radically interprets Islam\(^\text{21}\). ASWJ funds itself through the illegal trade and smuggling of products such as timber, ivory, rubber and coal. Together with criminal partners from Tanzania and the Lake Victoria region, ASWJ traffics heroin. It also conducts a terrorizing campaign against local populations that includes attacks on local public structures\(^\text{22}\).

Simultaneously, the organization spreads its vision of Islam and offers the rural population, mostly Muslim, financial aid while using its economic weakness to fortify its support base. Since the province is poor and less developed than the rest of the country, ASWJ fuels the anger and resentment of the local population towards the central government.

In October 2017, ASWJ launched its first armed attack when it simultaneously raided three police stations at the port of Mocimboa da Praia and killed 17 people\(^\text{23}\).

---

\(^{21}\) The Wahabia is conservative Sunni ideology that interprets the Islam verbatim. Its founder was Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahab from Najd in the Arabian Peninsula. Its followers call upon others to return to the purity of Quran and adopt the lifestyle of Muhammad and his followers. The Wahabi Dawah array influenced the growth of global jihadi organizations who use violence as a major tool. The latter have adopted various interpretations of the ideology to promote their organizational goals.


\(^{23}\) Agencia Lusa, Norte de Moçambique alvo de insurgentes com visão radical do Islão, diz líder muçulmano, *Deutsche Welle*, 11 October 2017. [https://www.dw.com/pt-002/norte-de-mo%C3%A7ambique-alvo-de-insurgentes-com-vis%C3%A3o-radical-do-isl%C3%A3o-diz-l%C3%ADder-mu%C3%A7ulmano/a-40910044](https://www.dw.com/pt-002/norte-de-mo%C3%A7ambique-alvo-de-insurgentes-com-vis%C3%A3o-radical-do-isl%C3%A3o-diz-l%C3%ADder-mu%C3%A7ulmano/a-40910044)
ASWJ provided an explanation to its attacks for the first time in a clip it posted in April 2020. The clip features an unidentified leader that accuses the government in Maputo of “unfairly” treating the poor and delivering profits to the “managers”. The leader in the clip proclaimed “an Islamic government, not an infidel one, will restore the pride to the poor and do justice by them”. To win the public’s sympathy, ASWJ distributed food, medicine and fuel it stole.\(^{24}\)

**ASWJ Activity between 2017-2020**

ASWJ expanded its territorial hold in Cabo Delgado and even stepped up its voyage of violence while using more lethal means and more sophisticated modus operandi. This voyage of violence claimed the lives of over 2,000 people, most of whom were civilians, and uprooted more than 570,000 from their homes.

In 2017, ASWJ concentrated its activity around the city of Mocimboa da Praia. Its expansion to other settlements and villages in the vicinity Macomia, Mitumba, Nangade, Palma, Quissanga, Ancuabe, Ibo and Meluco was made possible due to the central government’s incompetence and lack of effective military resistance. In some of the villages, ASWJ operatives have been observed looting together with locals whatever they could and distributing the spoils among themselves (mostly food and money).

By 2020, the frequency of ASWJ’s attacks has increased significantly. In 2017, there were three attacks, in 2018 there were 19 attacks, 2019 saw 34 attacks and in January - April 2020 there were 43 attacks. To date the average is over 20 attacks per month.\(^ {25}\) The attacks are being executed systematically and include looting and torching villages, abductions, and slaughter/beheadings. Indiscriminate attacks are directed at civilians, government officials, law enforcement and of course the military.

At its first threat assessment, the Mozambique central government’s decision makers underestimated ASWJ and determined they were just local criminals. The military that was sent


to handle the problem had to deploy in Cabo Delgado and confront ASWJ fighters - unsuccessfully\textsuperscript{26}. Muslim residents, including the Muslim religious leadership in Mocimboa da Praia claim that signs of radicalization among the youth in their communities started to manifest in 2014. They reported to the authorities an increasing indoctrination of extreme ideologies among the youth, a process that was started by extreme elements that entered Mozambique. The Maputo authorities did not do a single thing until the beginning of the uprising in the province on October 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2017\textsuperscript{27}.

The government’s initial response included heavy military presence, deployment of an intelligence array that penetrated the local communities and scare tactics. Hundreds of people, including women and children were arrested and incarcerated. Journalists and researchers were prohibited from entering the conflict area that was closed off to the media. However, all of the above didn’t manage to stop the uprising\textsuperscript{28}.

The inability to provide safety and security to the residents and the low capabilities of the military forces, forced the authorities to turn to private security companies, i.e. mercenaries. Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) from South Africa, Wagner Group from Russia and even the American Blackwater (that even supplied two helicopters in mid-2019) were hired. The mercenary presence only increased ASWJ fighters’ motivation and the latter successfully employed guerilla tactics against said mercenaries\textsuperscript{29}.

\textsuperscript{26} Alex Vines OBE, "Why The Insurgency in Northern Mozambique Has Got Worse", Chatham House, 1 April 2020, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/why-insurgency-northern-mozambique-has-got-worse.
\textsuperscript{27} David M Matsinhe and Estacio Valoi, The genesis of insurgency in northern Mozambique Institute for Security Studies (2019).
\textsuperscript{29} In October 2020, the Russian Wagner Group (that per reports has strong ties to President Putin and effectively operates as proxy army for Russia) arrived at Cabo Delgado with a 200 fighters’ contingency. It seems that they couldn’t adjust to the conditions on the ground and had to leave in November after having sustained heavy casualties. The South African force, that included attack helicopters, is still present on the ground however his contribution is nominal. See: John Campbell, The Military-First Approach in Northern Mozambique is Bound to Fail, CFR (23.11.2020). https://www.cfr.org/blog/military-first-approach-northern-mozambique-bound-fail
The ASWJ-ISIS Connection

The fighting tactics and the use of advanced equipment such as drones teach that ASWJ learned Boko Haram and ISIS’ methods of operation. From an organization that operated with machetes and light weapons, ASWJ transitioned to use advanced weaponry with higher lethality. The assessment is that the ISIS connection guarantees funding and weapons from Libya30.

ASWJ is identified with ISIS’ Central Africa Province (ISCAP), an organization active in the eastern districts of the Democratic Republic of Congo. As of June 4th, 2019, when ISCAP claimed responsibility for its first terror attack in Mozambique (Mitopy) and posted photos of the loot, the Islamic State is the one that declared that ASWJ was a partner organization and one of its African extensions. To ISIS, ASWJ’s operations are the proof for its presence and influence in this region. The cooperation, as far as it exists, is manifested in the fields of communications, logistics and training31. As far as ISIS is concerned, the region is ISCAP territory and that is why ASWJ fighters flew the black ISIS flag when they attacked the police station in Mocimboa da Praia on March 3rd, 2020.

ASWJ’s connections is not just with ISIS. The organization also has strong ties to another radical Islamic organization called the Forces Democratiques Alliees (ADF), active in the Democratic Republic of Congo32.

The Tanzanian Connection

Counter subversion activity by the Mozambique army supported by international assistance cannot quash the uprising in Cabo Delgado33. The Cabo Delgado uprising is concentrated in

30 The collapse of the Qadhai regime in 2011, largely at the behest of the west, turned this territory into fertile ground for all jihadi organizations. The Libyan army’s huge caches of weapons, including anti tanks missiles, surface to air missiles etc. have been looted by the armed militia and gun traders.


32 In July 2019, ASWJ pledged allegiance to ISIS’ Central Africa Province (ISCAP)

33 The gas installations, either land or marine, have the best Mozambique army assigned to them for protection, at the request of the multinational energy conglomerates that have invested billions of dollars in Mozambique. The outcome of the above was that second-rate forces far less equipped were sent to handle the Cabo Delgado uprising. See: The conflict in Mozambique is getting worse, The Economist (26.8.2020).
districts that border Tanzania. Tanzania’s role as a refuge provider, place to recruit fighters, training and passage provider for radical forces is known and confirmed by intelligence. Therefore, one may say that Swahili is the Lingua Franca of eastern Africa jihadists, as well as Congo and other places. A close cooperation between Mozambique and Tanzania may be a precondition to succeed in quashing the Cabo Delgado uprising.

Filipe Nyusi, the Mozambique president, recently stated, during a state of the union address, that his government was aware as early as 2012 of the Cabo Delgado youth’s Islamic radicalization process. Nyusi declared: “the radicalization originated with a Tanzanian citizen called Abdul Shakulo that incited residents of Cabo Delgado to disobey government’s laws to enroll Muslim children to public schools because they had to study in madrasas”. Per Nyusi, the central government managed to contain the incidents in Cabo Delgado until the first attack in 2017. The president clarified that he intended to expand the international cooperation on counterterrorism while preserving the Mozambique national interests.

To that end, the government is committed to expand the military and better train and equip the soldiers. Per the president: “we must develop our skills. We have to be on the front line to protect our country”\(^{34}\).

Indeed, on December 3\(^{rd}\), 2020, Mozambique and Tanzania executed, much later than they should have, a joint MOU and agreement to fight radical Islamic violence that ravages both countries. The military alliance arrived about a month after some 300 ASWJ fighters raided Kitaya (Tanzania) and butchered its residents\(^ {35}\). The MOU and agreement were executed by the Tanzanian and Mozambique police chiefs in an effort to quiet the unrest of the local population on both sides of the border\(^ {36}\).

---

\(^ {34}\) From president Nyusi’s state of the union address on December 16\(^ th\), 2020.

\(^ {35}\) Sophie Snelen, Les djihadistes du Mozambique portent leur guerre en Tanzanie Le Temps (17.11.2020).

The Regional Threat and the Need for Cooperation

As a rule, the Mozambique government was reluctant to cooperate with its neighbors to quash the Cabo Delgado uprising. Mozambique’s security strategy that saw the uprising as a mere criminal activity stressed the need to reinforce border security to prevent free passage of jihadi and terrorism elements. Defense Minister, Neto, said that Mozambique needed “only heightened alert at the border to prevent criminals from entering our territory”\(^\text{37}\).

After the August 2020 attack on Mocimboa da Praia, the Tanzania army (Tanzania Peoples Defense Forces) launched a counter subversion operation in the border zone close to the Ruvuma River in the Mbinga Province, a heavily wooded area where, according to the army’s leaders, many criminals hide.\(^\text{38}\).

In mid-May 2020, President Nyusi appeared on TV and for the first time requested assistance from neighboring countries. “When it comes to terrorism you cannot fight alone, this is the experience we have now. We must share forces, not just in the region but apparently for Africa’s sake”. He said these statements after he met the leaders of Botswana and Zambia in Harare (the capital city of Zimbabwe), discussed cooperation and mutual military assistance in the fighting.\(^\text{39}\).

Mozambique is a member of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), a regional organization intended mainly for economic cooperation. On a virtual conference (due to Covid-19) on august, 17\(^\text{th}\), 2020, the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, proposed that SADC would assist Mozambique in its fight against the uprising, however he didn’t go into details as to what this assistance would look like - “support Mozambique in addressing the terrorism and violent attacks”.\(^\text{40}\).


\(^{38}\) “TPDF to launch a manhunt along the border with Mozambique,” Citizen, August 11, 2020 https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/tpdf-to-launch-a-manhunt-along-the-border-with-mozambique-2714318

\(^{39}\) Godfrey Marawanyika, Matthew Hill, Mozambique Wants Africa’s Help to Fight Islamic State Insurgency Bloomberg (20.5.2020).

The U.S. is concerned with the regional situation and the lack of regional coordination of the fighting and containment of the radical Islamic uprising that threatens to create a void that would be filled by the tentacles of the Radical Islam octopus. Maj. Gen. Anderson, Commander, Special Operations Command Africa, mentioned in August 2020 that “other countries in the region will have to deeply and thoroughly deal with the problem and help Mozambique to contend with the phenomenon. Like Tanzania, Malawi [...] terrorists know no borders, they will cross borders and seek refuge where they can to keep disrupting regional stability”\textsuperscript{41}.

On December 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2020 the Malawi president, Lazarus Chakwera, decided to dispatch a military contingency from the Malawi Defence Force (MDF) to Mozambique to assist the latter with its counter subversion activity. The force started operations on December 15\textsuperscript{th}. It should be noted, Malawi “suffers” quite a lot from Mozambique refugees entering its territory\textsuperscript{42}.

The Radical Islam Threat to the Republic of South Africa

The Islamic terrorism threat to southern Africa and the Republic of South Africa (RSA) in particular is real - in some of the countries it exists with high intensity (Mozambique, Tanzania), it knocks on the RSA doors because it took hold north of it in countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania, Congo, Uganda and the Central African Republic\textsuperscript{43}.

Apart from the possibility that the Islamic organizations will sink RSA deep into the radical Islamic terrorism swamp, it is expected that economic and other western interests will be


\textsuperscript{43} RSA’s population is approx. 60 million, of which approx. 3% are Muslim. The Islamic revival in RSA started in the 1950s when preachers at the west cape tried to recruit followers. They drew their religious inspirations from modern Islamic movements in Egypt and Pakistan. In December 1970 the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) emerged. The Iranian revolution in 1979 had a massive influence on the South African Muslims and brought about the emergence of mass movement (Qibla) whose goals are to promote the ideas and goals of the Iranian revolution in RSA and convert RSA into an Islamic state under the slogan “One solution – the Islamic revolution”. For expansion see: Na’eeem Jeenah, Fighting fire with fire, Impact International, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs Vol. 26, No. 9, 1996, p. 9; ISS, Violent extremism in South Africa Assessing the current threat, Report 7, May 2017. https://media.africaportal.org/documents/sareport7-v2.pdf
harmed as chaos such as that taking place in the Sahel is not out of the realm of possibility in this case.

**Summary**

Radical Islamic jihadi organizations have a great potential to establish themselves in Africa.

First, many African countries are Muslim and in others there are radical Islam sympathetic Muslim communities, whose sympathy stems from the fact that they are at the bottom of the social ladder in their countries, discriminated against, oppressed and humiliated.

Second, many African countries are led by governments whose position on human rights is dubious.

Third, coups, opposition, oppression and silencing one’s rivals are only some of the tools used by the above rulers and their supporters.

The above created a governmental vacuum that manifested itself by lack of governability and inability to enforce the law. This void was uninterruptedly filled by organized crime elements that traffic drugs, run guns, trade in diamonds, metals, ivory, prostitution, human trafficking and more, all under the watchful eye of the rulers and in cooperation with corrupt politicians.

Jihadi radical Islamic terrorist organizations identified this fertile ground, ripe for establishment of their presence and expansion, they identified the governmental void, the lack of governability, the neglect of the Muslim communities and the tension between the Muslims and Christians, the availability of weapons and mainly many locals’ willingness to join their cause in an attempt to escape their plights.

Thus, Mozambique, rich with natural resources and a prime tourism destination, turned into a fighting theater against radical Islam which threatens to collapse that country. Moreover, the entire region is under real and severe danger and the spillage of terrorism into neighboring countries is a matter of time.
African leaders acknowledge the increasing threat of terrorism to their countries. Their responses, for now, are minor and weak. The faster they internalize the severity of the threat the faster they will understand that they are required to establish and formalize cross-border military, diplomatic and economic cooperation, all to effectively battle the spread of radical Islam in their countries.

The Writers

Dr. Eitan Azani, Research Department Head, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya

Dr. David Duchan, Research Fellow, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya
Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism.

ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy. ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.