



15 April 2024

## Cabo Ligado Monthly: March 2024

[Cabo Ligado](#) — or ‘connected cape’ — is a Mozambique conflict observatory launched by ACLED, Zitamar News, and MediaFax.

### VITAL STATS

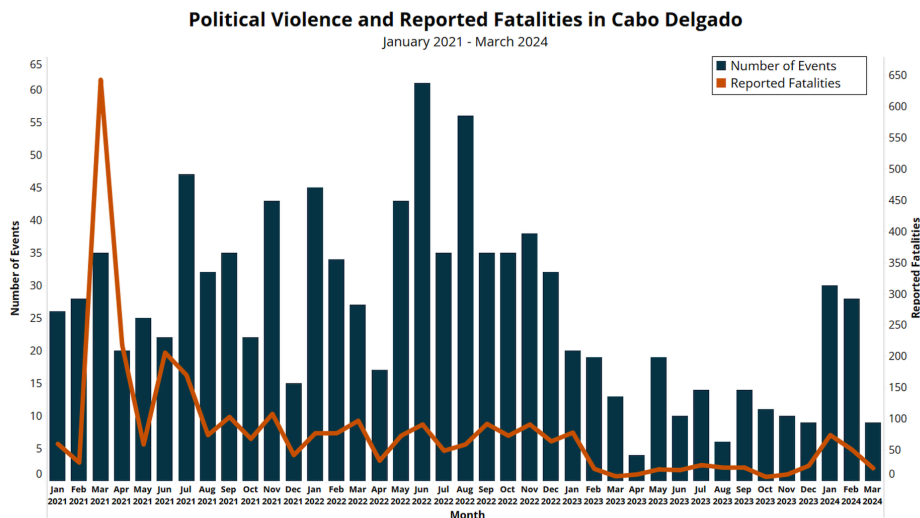
- ACLED records nine political violence events in Cabo Delgado in March, resulting in at least 21 reported fatalities.
- Four of these events were incidents targeting civilians, perpetrated by ISM, FADM, or the Naparama militia

### VITAL TRENDS

- Violence in Cabo Delgado province in March decreased by over half compared to February 2024
- The Naparama militia was involved in two events, killing three election officials in one incident, and clashing with ISM in the other
- ISM involvement in political violence events recorded by ACLED fell from 25 in February to just six in March, likely due to Ramadan.

### IN THIS REPORT

- Revision to fatalities from 2021 attack on Palma
- Chai: The insurgency’s perennial base
- US releases 10-year peace and stabilization strategy for Mozambique



# MARCH SITUATION SUMMARY

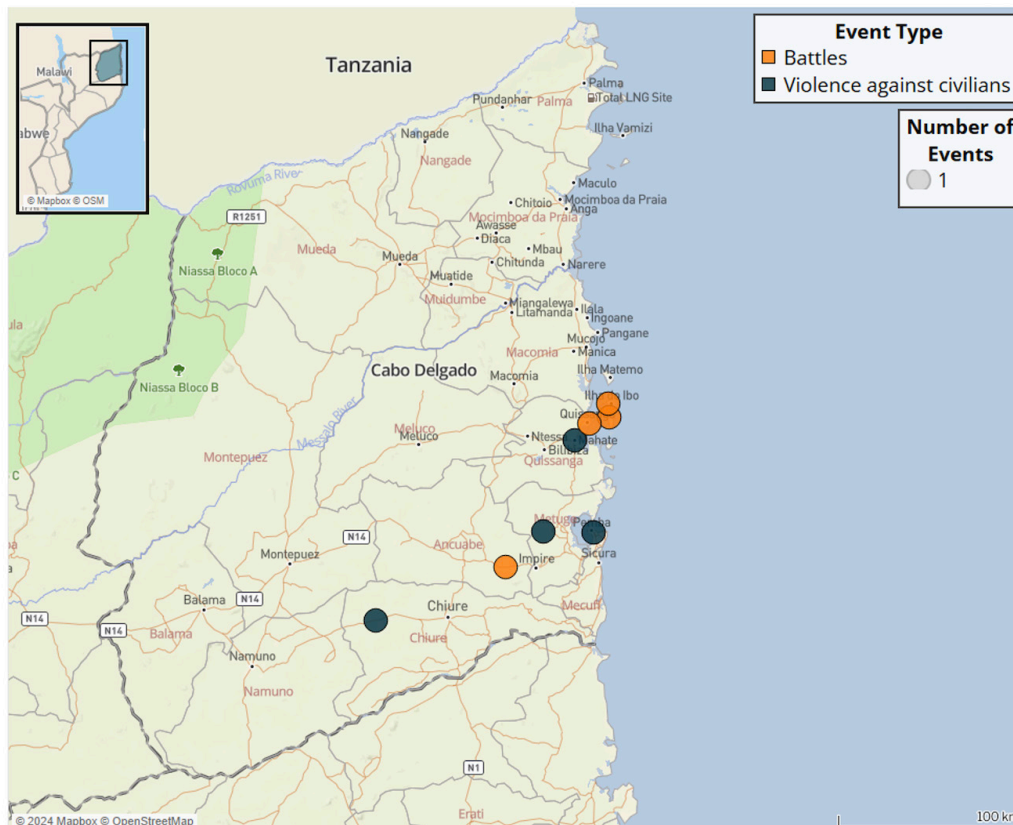
Islamic State Mozambique's (ISM) occupation of Quissanga district headquarters was the most notable development of the month. The group entered the town on 2 March and, according to Governor Valige Tauabo, had left by 19 March. ISM met no resistance in entering the town. They established themselves there and in two neighboring villages, giving them control of a nine-kilometer stretch of coast for 17 days.

Defense Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM) navy vessels were unable to prevent ISM from making away by sea to Mucojo with considerable loot, including an ambulance, motorbikes, computers, building materials, and foodstuffs.

Elsewhere, events illustrated the extent to which state authority has been eroded in the province. On 6 March, residents of Sambene village in Mecufi district torched the houses of neighborhood leaders, believing them to be behind the ongoing cholera outbreak affecting the region. There have been 10 similar events in the past six months in Mozambique. Two days later, the Naparama militia in Chiúre district killed three election workers from the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration, apparently mistaking them for ISM fighters.

## Political Violence in Cabo Delgado

March 2024



# NEW FATALITY ESTIMATE FOR THE 2021 ATTACK ON PALMA, MOZAMBIQUE

*By Methodology Team, ACLED*

On 24 March 2021, an Islamist militia affiliated with Islamic State launched a coordinated attack on the city of Palma in Mozambique. Battles between the Islamist militants and security forces lasted for about two weeks before state forces regained control of the area.

In the aftermath of the attack, anecdotal reports of killings appeared, such as those at the [Amarula Hotel](#), but a comprehensive fatality estimate [did not materialize](#). In an effort to paint a more accurate picture of the scale of the assault, investigative journalist [Alex Perry](#) conducted a [survey](#) of more than 13,000 households to gather information from locals who lived through the attack. Recognizing the value of Perry's data on the Palma attack, ACLED has incorporated this new data into its dataset to provide a more accurate fatality estimate – bearing in mind all the general considerations on [fatality estimates](#).

Before incorporating Perry's survey data into the ACLED dataset, ACLED evaluated the raw data and consulted Perry on the methodology employed for his research. ACLED also engaged other experts on the context, including ACLED's partner [Zitamar News](#). The sections below lay out the steps and considerations ACLED undertook to incorporate Perry's data.

## *Key Changes*

*Correction Period and Geographical Scope:* The data corrections span from 24 March to 5 April 2021, the period over which [the attack took place](#). Corrections were limited to events in Palma district, with the exception of one event in Macomia.

*Publication Date:* The corrected data were published on 8 April 2024.

Summary of changes to ACLED data after incorporating Perry's survey data:

- **Fatalities:** Based on Perry's survey, 664 additional civilian fatalities were added to ACLED's original 137 fatalities, bringing the total fatalities of the assault to 801 fatalities (including both civilians and combatants).
- **Events:** A total of 16 events were updated to incorporate the new fatality information. Also, one new 'Abduction/forced disappearance' event was coded.
  - The notes of the updated events have a standard phrase as follows (bolded):
    - *On 29 March 2021, members of the Mozambican Defense and Security Forces supported by Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) helicopters clashed with members of an Islamist militia in Palma (Palma, Cabo Delgado), in an attempt to retake the area. At least 42 civilian fatalities were added based on the Perry survey.*
  - All events updated with Perry's survey data have "Alex Perry" listed in the Source column.

## *How ACLED incorporated Perry's survey data*

Perry's survey data identified a total of 1,402 victims, including 1,193 who were killed or are missing (presumed dead) and a further 209 who were kidnapped.

- Of these, ACLED only included fatalities reported as shot or beheaded, as these were backed by either witness testimony or the identification of bodies. Additionally, these fatalities had enough information to be attributed to specific events already coded by ACLED.
- The majority of fatalities excluded from Perry's data consists of fatalities from drowning and missing people whom Perry presumed dead. ACLED considers accidental drownings as indirect fatalities and therefore does not include these in its data. The accounts of the missing people could not be verified as fatalities or be attributed to existing ACLED events or coded as new events and were thus not included.
- Some additional fatalities were excluded due to potential double counting. ACLED identified potential duplicates by comparing information about the victims (e.g. names, age, gender, location, cause of death).

In order to attribute Perry's fatality data to specific ACLED events, ACLED compared Perry's data against the events already coded to specific locations within the date range of the attack. The fatalities from Perry's data were then integrated into the nearest corresponding ACLED event. Since Perry's data does not include information about whether or not the victims were killed as part of an Armed clash or an Attack, ACLED is not able to code new events based solely on Perry's fatality data. Accordingly, ACLED excluded some fatalities from Perry's survey that were reported in Pemba, which ACLED was unable to attribute to the attack on Palma.

## CHAI: THE INSURGENCY'S PERENNIAL BASE

*By Tom Gould, Zitamar News*

The center of ISM activity in Cabo Delgado province has been in flux throughout the conflict. Still, despite the concentration of forces on the Macomia coast since January, a stubborn insurgent presence in the forests of western Macomia has persisted since 2018.

Toward the end of March, Cabo Ligado received a flurry of reports describing three insurgent camps located in the Chai administrative post, one east of Chai village, one east of Litamanda village, and around Namarussia village. In the fertile lands east of Chai, insurgents have been observed cultivating crops, including maize, peanuts, beans, and cassava. Women, children, and elderly and disabled people are believed to be held there, according to local sources.

Local sources have also heard that insurgents are planning to attack the villages of Miangalewa and Xitaxi in Muidumbe district on the other side of the Messalo river with the intention of cutting off the N380 highway linking the north and south of Cabo Delgado. Insurgents have often falsely advertised targets, notably during their southern offensives in October 2023 and January this year, when they [announced](#) their intention to free comrades from Mizeze prison, which never came to fruition. Nonetheless, security forces will have to prepare for the possibility of such attacks, especially as these bases pose a real threat to the security of the N380, on which insurgents have been active as recently as February when they clashed with Local Forces in Litamanda village to the north and set up a road block near Nguia to the south.

Security forces have been struggling to dislodge insurgents from the Chai administrative post since 2018, when three incidents of political violence were reported in the area. There was only one such incident confirmed in Chai in 2019, but insurgent attacks escalated to 22 events in 2020 and 20 events in 2021, before climbing again to 41 events in 2022. There were 16 violent incidents reported in 2023, and there have been seven so far this year. The persistent nature of insurgent activity in the area suggests it is something of a stronghold that ISM can retreat to when it is forced out of other areas.

The geography lends itself well to this, as insurgents can live off the land, which is both hilly and heavily forested, making it difficult for security forces to penetrate. Mozambican troops and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) launched an offensive to root out insurgents from Chai in January 2023, which showed signs of success. However, the fact that a sizable insurgent group has embedded itself in the area once again demonstrates the challenge facing security forces in holding this territory despite short-term tactical victories.

## US'S 10-YEAR PLAN FOR MOZAMBIQUE

*By Peter Bofin, ACLED*

In 2020, the United States State Department launched the US 10-year [Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#) (SPCPS). Arising from the Global Fragility Act of 2019, the strategy aims to promote “peaceful, self-reliant nations that become strong economic and security partners” for the US. In doing so, the strategy is a means of coordinating US government support towards conflict prevention and stabilization.

Work in Mozambique has been in train since 2022, though the [SPCS 10-year plan](#) to 2032 for Mozambique was only released in March this year. The strategy’s initial focus is on northern Mozambique with a view to expanding coverage in the medium to long term. The plan is notable for its emphasis on diplomatic engagement at different levels and the importance of US support to the security and justice sector. The volatility of the situation is seen in just how much has changed since the plan was finalized.

Considerable effort has gone into developing the new approach. The plan stresses that wide-ranging consultations were undertaken at all levels in civil administration, political leadership, security sector, and civil society. This is to be continued, with a commitment in the plan to “enhance staffing and access in-country,” to take account of the volatile nature of the conflict.

The strategy has four facets: political, economic, security, and social. The security and justice sector is seen as key to defeating “ISIS-Mozambique.” To this end, the plan aims to build capacity to protect citizens and to support the security and justice sector to be more accountable and identify and prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations.

The need for improved capacity in the Defense and Security Forces (FDS) is unquestioned. Limited capacity has resulted in the FDS being unable to “conduct large-scale operations, protect citizens, or hold cleared territory,” according to the 10-year plan. The current struggle to control the Macomia coast is a vivid example of that. Control of Mucojo village has [changed hands](#) at least twice since December 2023.

The need for improved accountability is also clear. Over the course of the conflict, ACLED records that over 14% of political violence events involving the FADM have been incidents of civilian targeting. For 2023, 10 such events have been recorded with a further seven events in the first quarter of 2024. Of those seven civilian targeting events, four have been in Macomia district, for which ACLED records at least 15 fatalities.

Since the plan was drawn up, much has changed. The plan identified “significant changes in the international military presence ... as a major inflection point.” The [ongoing withdrawal](#) of SAMIM troops is just such an inflection point. Another change has been the deployment of Tanzania People’s Defence Force (TPDF) troops in Nangade district [since October 2022](#) on a bilateral basis, and not as part of SAMIM. While reducing the number of international actors in the province, SAMIM withdrawal may not necessarily make coordination in the security sector more straightforward. The remaining international forces in Mozambique will be

TPDF and the Rwandan Security Forces. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, these forces are on opposite sides in the ongoing conflict in the northeast. TPDF is currently deployed there with the Southern African Development Community Mission in DRC to support DRC government actions against the Rwanda-backed [March 23 Movement](#) militia.

Another inflection point will be the October 2024 election. While a Frelimo victory is almost certain – the party has ruled since independence – President Filipe Nyusi will have stepped aside. The conduct of the municipal elections in October 2023 and the [resultant violence](#), suggests that this year’s general election results are likely to be contested, reflecting “the long-standing divisions within Mozambican society and local mistrust of government and security actors” that this ambitious plan seeks to address.