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TERRORISM IN MOZAMBIQUE: ANSAR AL-SUNNA AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

GÖKTUĞ SÖNMEZ | M. ENES ARSLAN



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TERRORISM IN MOZAMBIQUE: ANSAR AL-SUNNA AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

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INTRODUCTION

Africa stands out among other conflict areas around the world as one of the regions where political violence is most prevalent in terms of the number and intensity of incidents. From ethnic tensions to civil wars, from terrorist incidents to kidnappings, the region often experiences a vicious circle of violence as a result of the lasting effects of a colonial past. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data, Africa was the only continent where political violence increased in 2020 with 17,200 different violent incidents recorded, an increase of almost 25% compared to the previous year.¹ While North African countries continue to suffer from the effects of the Arab Spring, terrorist organizations are gaining more and more ground in Sub-Saharan Afri-

ca. In fact, according to the Global Terrorism Index published annually by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), 7 of the 10 countries where terrorism increased the fastest in the 2019-2020 period are in Sub-Saharan Africa.² Data of the same index show that ISIS, one of the most effective terrorist organizations in the world, is trying to regain influence in the Middle East, in South Asia and mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this context, one could foresee that Africa as a whole, with different forms of violence and conflict dynamics, will constitute one of the most important items in the global security agenda in the upcoming decades.

It is observed that a major part of the conflicts in Africa tend to take place or intensify

¹ Clionadh Raleigh and Roudabeh Kishi, "Africa: The Only Continent Where Political Violence Increased in 2020," *The Mail & Guardian*, 1 February 2021.

² Catherine Philp, "Africa Becomes New Focus for ISIS Terrorism," *The Times*, 5 November 2020.

According to the Global Terrorism Index published annually by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), 7 of the 10 countries where terrorism increased the fastest in the 2019-2020 period are in Sub-Saharan Africa.



The political map of Mozambique.

in areas of strategic importance³. Following a major discovery of natural gas reserves in its northern regions in 2011, Mozambique, which has received an investment amounting 20 billion dollars by the French company Total for liquefied natural gas, currently has the second largest gas reserves in Africa and stands as an example in this

regard. The natural gas reserve discovered in the Cabo Delgado province in the north of Mozambique, which made the country one of the richest in Africa, has caused many international companies to turn their attention to this region. Major companies such as Total, ENI, and Exxon Mobil are investing in the region, although the investments have

³ Gökhan Kavak, "Terör ve Dış Müdahale Tartışmalarının Gölgesinde Mozambik'teki İnsani Kriz," Star, 8 February 2021.

slowed down due to terrorism and the global pandemic.⁴ For example, the investment made by the French company Total in the north of Mozambique—one of the poorest countries in the world—is Africa's largest private investment amounting 20 billion dollars⁵ and is seen as a beacon of hope for the future.⁶ This investment, which stood out as the most important foreign investment in the country, was frozen, however, due to terrorist activity and also in accordance with France's grand Africa strategy.

Having gained its independence from Portugal in 1975 and experienced a civil war between 1976-92, Mozambique had a 25-year period of non-conflict after the civil war. Nevertheless, it frequently made headlines in the international arena because of the terrorist activities of Ansar al-Sunna⁷, which emerged in 2017 and intensified its activities in several years. The movement, which used to exist as a religious group that fled to Mozambique from Kenya toward the end of 2015 and restructured itself by joining the radical Salafist youth there, started to take up arms in the north of the country.⁸

The terrorist group carried out its first recorded act in October 2017, when a group of 30 members killed 17 people, including 2 policemen, in the Mocimboa Da Praia region of Cabo Delgado province in north of the country and since then, Cabo Delgado has been among the world's conflict zones. In this process, the group also maintained its dominance on the field for a certain period of time; and by using the socio-economic problems in the country to its advantage, it significantly expanded its manpower pool with promises of job and money. There are figures of Somalian- and Tanzanian-origin besides Mozambicans in the administration of the organization. More than 50 of the 400 people evaluated for membership in the organization came from countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Somalia. As part of its frequent methodical attacks on civilian elements, the organization burned thousands of houses, workplaces, schools, places of worship, government buildings, killed thousands of civilians, and succeeded in taking some parts of the country under control from time to time through terrorist attacks. It is

It is estimated that Ansar al-Sunna is responsible for the death of more than 2,500 people, the forced displacement of more than 700 thousand people, and for the severe starvation that nearly 1 million people suffered from. This problem in Mozambique continues to grow and is becoming with each passing day a more significant issue of humanitarian crisis, international terrorism and natural resources, and also lays the groundwork for the intervention of international actors in the region.

⁴ Kavak, "Terör ve Dış Müdahale Tartışmalarının Gölgesinde Mozambik'teki İnsani Kriz."

⁵ "About the Mozambique Liquefied Natural Gas Project", Total Web Page.

⁶ "Total Suspends \$20BN LNG Project in Mozambique Indefinitely", El Cezire, 26 April 2021.

⁷ Patrick Tucker, "Mozambique Is Emerging as the Next Islamic Extremist Hotspot," Defense One, 6 July 2020.

⁸ "Mozambique: Can Cabo Delgado's Islamist Insurgency Be Stopped?," The Africa Report, 29 July 2020.

estimated that Ansar al-Sunna is responsible for the death of more than 2,500 people⁹, the forced displacement of more than 700 thousand people¹⁰, and for the severe starvation that nearly 1 million people suffered from¹¹. This problem in Mozambique continues to grow and is becoming with each passing day a more significant issue of humanitarian crisis,

international terrorism and natural resources, and also lays the groundwork for the intervention of international actors in the region. The security threat in the country has regional and global repercussions due to both the external links of the organization and the forced migration, adding a rapidly-deepening international dimension to the issue.

⁹ "Mozambique Gas Project: Total Halts Work After Palma Attacks," BBC News, 26 April 2021.

¹⁰ "Friends Face Dangers Alone After Fleeing Cabo Delgado Attacks," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 19 May 2021.

¹¹ Michelle Gavin, "Crisis in Mozambique Is Grabbing the World's Attention," Council on Foreign Relations, 14 May 2021.

TERRORISM AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN MOZAMBIQUE



A Mozambican cyclist is on its way to market with large bags of coal for meeting his daily needs.

Portugal's influence as a former colonial power continues to be felt in Mozambique, a south-eastern African country with a population of approximately 30 million. The Portuguese presence in the region was first seen when trade relations were officially established in 1505 after the expedition of Vasco da Gama in 1498 to Mozambican shores. As Portugal started to get hold of the outlying regions, the relationship of the two countries acquired a colonial character. After Mozambique's independence in 1975, their ties remained at the economic level and Portugal preserved its presence.¹² With its military presence and defense agreements, Portugal's current mode of relationship with Mozambique implies a desire for the former colonial mode of relationship in a new and more acceptable form. In the country, whose official language is Portu-

guese, 56% of the population is Christian, 19% is Muslim, and the remaining 25% is made up of people with regional beliefs or unknown religious preferences.¹³ It is seen that the Muslim population in north of the country complains about being neglected by the state they perceive to be a "socialist, secular and south-oriented Mozambique state".¹⁴ These people's perception of marginalization, lack of social and economic integration and exclusion from equal education and job opportunities creates problems related to their sense of belonging to the country and fosters a breeding ground for radical organizations. The province of Cabo Delgado, which is called "Cabo Esquecido" i.e. the Forgotten Cape¹⁵ in the local language of the region and has a large Muslim population, draws attention as the poorest region of the country with high poverty and unemploy-

¹² Eugénia Rodrigues, "History of Mozambique," Oxford Research Encyclopedias African History, 23 May 2019.

¹³ Nicolas Cook, "Mozambique: Politics, Economy, and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service (USA), 12 February 2021.

¹⁴ "Islamic State in Mozambique? Control Map & Timeline of the Insurgency," Political Geography Now, 5 February 2021.

¹⁵ "Mozambique: Can Cabo Delgado's Islamist insurgency be stopped?" The Africa Report.

ment rates. It is estimated that sixty percent of the population in Cabo Delgado is illiterate, thirty-five percent of the children in the region have never been to school, and only 0.3% can receive higher education, resulting in a high youth unemployment in the region as high as 88%.¹⁶ These rates are quite remarkable and are a result of low access to education, coupled with the activities of illegal/terrorist organizations.

While the government fails to sufficiently address the problems in the region, its call for investment and authorization of international companies mean less space for local people to produce food. This stands out as a major factor that has increased the sense of injustice among the people in the region in the last

five years,¹⁷ who are increasingly being deprived of their basic livelihoods such as water, agricultural land, wild animals, local medicine, and ruby as source of income, due to the efforts to drive them out of the resource-rich region.¹⁸

The organization called Ansar al-Sunna started its terrorist activities in the country in response to this situation. Claiming to focus on the problems of Muslims in Mozambique, the organization was founded with a militant Salafist-Takfiri approach and thus has a national character rather than an international one. The humanitarian crisis that emerged as a result of terrorism is deteriorating day by day, and approximately 1 million people already suffer from this scourge.

¹⁶ Eric Morier-Genoud, "The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14/3 (2020).

¹⁷ Kavak, "Terör ve Dış Müdahale Tartışmalarının Gölgesinde Mozambik'teki İnsani Kriz."

¹⁸ "Mozambique: Can Cabo Delgado's Islamist insurgency be stopped?" *The Africa Report*.

ANSAR AL-SUNNAH: ORIGINS AND TODAY



A young girl stands in line at a feeding scheme at a tent city, Mozambique, 29 March 2019.

Also known as "Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah", Ansar al-Sunna was founded in 2015 when a group of young people, who were trained in Somalia and had connections with the Salafist groups in Tanzania, took up arms.¹⁹ The group originally emerged when it was joined by the followers of Aboud Rogo Mohammed, the leader of the Kenya-based al-Hijra movement known to be on the UN and US sanctions lists for supporting al-Shabaab in Somalia and who was killed in 2012. Rogo Mohammed was killed in an attack in Kenya in 2012, and his followers blamed the Kenyan authorities for his assassination. The government of Kenya suppressed the uprising that started after this incident and some of the rebels dispersed to Somalia, some to Tanzania, while others fled to Mozambique. According to some assessments, the militants who fled to Mozambique

gave significant impetus to the existing group there.²⁰ At this point, it should be stated that border crossings between Tanzania and Mozambique is a common occurrence where local people, for whom the borders mean little, cross the border in search of jobs²¹. This situation raises further questions about the problems related to basic characteristics of states in the region and border controls. Having fled to Mozambique, the group joined forces with local young people close to militant Salafist views and restructured the organization under the name of Ansar al-Sunna. After it was founded, the organization stated that it did not recognize the state of Mozambique and rejected all state institutions, and started its terrorist activities to seize control in north of the country.²²

¹⁹ Bulama Bukarti and Sandun Munasinghe, "The Mozambique Conflict and Deteriorating Security Situation," Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, June 2020.

²⁰ "How Mozambique's Smuggling Barons Nurtured Jihadists," BBC News, 2 June 2018.

²¹ Emily Estelle and Jessica T. Darden, "Combating the Islamic State's Spread in Africa: Assessment and Recommendations for Mozambique," Critical Threats - American Enterprise Institute, February 2021.

²² Bukarti and Munasinghe, "The Mozambique Conflict and Deteriorating Security Situation".

Locally known as al-Shabaab, the group can be confused with the Somalian al-Shabaab due to the similarity of names. Yet the two organizations, which operate independently based on different dynamics, differ from each other in terms of their 'global' and 'local' perspectives. The age profile of the militants is the main reason why they are called al-Shabaab in Mozambique. While the Somalian al-Shabaab operates with a global perspective due to its al-Qaeda links, the Mozambican al-Shabaab follows a local agenda and operates independently even though it declared allegiance to ISIS in April 2018²³. Notwithstanding the Mozambican origin of its followers, the group employs foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) as well. The ISIS statement in 2019 about the establishment of a 'Central African Province' played an important role in rendering the Mozambican organization more visible, which caused the death of more than 1,300 people in a total of 400 attacks carried out in 2020 alone.

Although ISIS claimed responsibility²⁴ for some attacks in Mozambique on the Amaq News Agency via Telegram and Ansar al-Sunna stated its declaration of allegiance to ISIS in 2018, there is limited information on the nature of their relationship²⁵. Besides the attacks for which the ISIS already assumed responsibility, the signs assumed to be ISIS symbols that appeared in the attacks and executions carried out by the group reinforce the belief that the organization has strong ties to ISIS.

However, it is considered that the relationship is not as organic as it seems, but remains superficial as it is mostly based on mutual advantages such as international visibility for one side and increasing reach to Africa for the other. It is also possible to find empirical data to support this claim by looking at the style and language used in assuming the responsibility for the attacks. It is observed that the organization, which is mobilized and is part of the local dynamics, was among the network of ISIS supporters, with the calculations that this could contribute to its own visibility and African expansion thanks to ISIS' increasing acts of terror. After the US designation of the organization as the Mozambican branch of ISIS on 10 March,²⁶ there has been an increase in the media coverage of the group in a way that emphasizes its connection with ISIS. The organization, which the media referred to as "insurgents" instead of using its name before the US designated it as a terrorist organization, is now more commonly known as "ISIS Mozambique" as of 10 March. However, some still argue that open sources do not clearly prove the existence of such bond due to the lack of information and that Ansar al-Sunna mostly acts independently in making and implementing decisions.²⁷

The designation of the group as an ISIS-affiliate is important for paving the way for taking concrete steps to resolve the problem, as there is a clear difference between interfering in a regional issue and intervening in order to fight

²³ "State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique," United States Department of State, 10 March 2021.

²⁴ Tonderayi Mukeredzi, "Mozambique's Violent Insurgency Requires a Regional Military Response," Foreign Policy, 1 July 2020.

²⁵ Emilia Columbo, Judd Devermont and Jacob Kurtzer, "Mozambique: The Problem with Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Designations," CSIS, 12 March 2021.

²⁶ "State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique".

²⁷ Emilia Columbo, Judd Devermont and Jacob Kurtzer, "Mozambique: The Problem with Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Designations".

against the global problem of ISIS. In short, even though naming the group as "ISIS Mozambique" serves the international actors in the region through legitimization, it also gives the impression that ISIS has a wider global network reaching all the way to Africa. In this context, while the US emphasizes that the fight against terrorism in Mozambique should be evaluated within the scope of the global fight against terrorism, Portugal has deployed military experts to the country, and the Republic of South Africa, which has started patrolling activities in the off-shores of Mozambique, wants to send its ground forces.

As is the case in every region in Africa with terrorist activity, Mozambique serves as an example where a struggle between regional and global actors lets imperial powers, who see a window of opportunity to expand their sphere of influence, step in.

On the other hand, it is estimated that Ansar al-Sunna has around 4,500 fighters 2,000 of which is armed. In addition, it is known that the group has members from Somalia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, although their roles are not fully revealed.²⁸ Muslims, who make

up slightly less than one-fifth of the country's population, suffer from a sense of exclusion and socio-economic issues in Mozambique. It should not be forgotten that the colonial past of the region and the country also plays an important role in this situation. As this information shows, the group, which reflected the local problems in its discourse and its calls for violence, reached a serious number of militants. Building its operational capacity through violent acts and field control efforts, the group has a steadily increasing rate of monthly attacks. According to data from the Global Extremism Monitor (GEM) program run by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, the organization carried out at least 20 attacks per month in 2020.²⁹ In addition to its fighting capacity, the organization is mostly financed through its regional smuggling networks and donations. In this context, the group generally generates income from the sales of timber, rubber, ivory, charcoal, ruby, as well as financial flows from its domestic and international networks.³⁰ Ansar al-Sunna, which can generate income through these networks, utilizes its economic resources to recruit personnel and to improve its oper-

As of today, Ansar al-Sunna appears to be an organization that acts independently based on local dynamics despite its allegiance to ISIS, in command of approximately 4,500 militants, 2,000 of which is armed. In addition, it has caused economic and security problems as well as a humanitarian crisis where more than 2,500 people have died, more than 700 thousand have been displaced, and about 1 million have become unable to meet their basic needs.

²⁸ Chrispin Mwakideu, "Mozambique's Extremist Violence Poses Threat for Neighbors," DW, 29 March 2021.

²⁹ Audu Bulama Bukarti and Sandun Munasinghe, "The Mozambique Conflict and Deteriorating Security Situation," Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 19 Temmuz 2020.

³⁰ Bukarti and Munasinghe, "The Mozambique Conflict and Deteriorating Security Situation."

ational capacity. In addition to the problems faced by the youth and their families in terms of high rates of unemployment and weakened ties with the state, economic reasons are also a driving force that pushes people to join the organization.³¹

As of today, Ansar al-Sunna appears to be an organization that acts independently based on local dynamics despite its allegiance to ISIS, in command of approximately 4,500 militants, 2,000 of which is armed. In addition, it has caused economic and security problems as well as a humanitarian crisis where more than 2,500 people have died, more than 700 thousand have been displaced, and about 1 million have become unable to meet their basic needs. At this point, the inadequacy of state mechanisms in Mozambique is also an

aggravating factor in the crisis. In this regard, it is noteworthy that an evacuation and resettlement mechanism has not yet been established for people who had to leave their homes in the Cabo Delgado province. While the inadequacy of state mechanisms leaves civilians unsafe and vulnerable, it also paves the way for the terrorist group to oppress civilians psychologically, and ultimately creates a suitable environment for foreign intervention in the country. As the economic hardships, the lack of expertise in public services, and the marginalization through ethnic and religious polarization create inequality of income and opportunity within the country, the Muslim population, which is the biggest victim of this situation, was pushed into terrorism in the name of religion.

³¹ Audu Bulama Bukarti and Sandun Munasinghe, "The Mozambique Conflict and Deteriorating Security Situation."

THE APPROACHES OF NON-MOZAMBICAN ACTORS TO THE PROBLEM



A stamp with colonial Portugal's head of state, printed in Mozambique.

In Mozambique, which has a total population of 30 million, forced migration due to terrorism can deeply shake the already weak state mechanisms with its security dimension and social and economic repercussions. Considering that the number of people who had to leave their homes since 2017 is around 700 thousand, it can be estimated that the management of areas such as education, economy and sociology, and especially health and security will be quite difficult, and humanitarian crises will ensue when almost one million people will be displaced in a short time.³² On the other hand, since migration can take place both toward neighboring countries and toward different cities within the same country, this situation stands out as a security crisis with regional and global implications that is escalating rapidly, and its full effects have yet to be seen. Neighboring countries and global actors approach the issue in the region as hu-

manitarian crisis, whose security dimensions go well beyond the borders of the country.

In this context, some of the main actors involved in the issue are the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Russia, the Republic of South Africa, Portugal, the US, the EU and the UN. The first actors engaged in the problem in its initial phase were the neighbors of Mozambique, who were worried that the problem would spread to their own territories and thus made efforts to ensure the involvement of SADC, which was founded as a security and peacekeeping organization for the resolution of regional problems, and for forging a common response against terror. Yet these efforts did not yield any results. Today, some still pin hope on SADC mechanisms³³. However, there are difficulties related to operating interstate mechanisms such as SADC, especially in the face of direct security issues, and in the presence of deterrent and

³² Armando Domingos, "Mozambique Terror Leaves Kids Parent-Less", All Africa, 20 May 2021.

³³ Gavin, "Crisis in Mozambique is Grabbing the World's Attention."

preventive elements on the field. Therefore, it is clearly difficult to activate such mechanisms in Africa where lots of ethnic, religious and sectarian polarizations, weak state mechanisms and a long, damaging colonial past exist. In addition, Tanzania, Mozambique's northern neighbor and another regional actor, agreed to cooperate with Mozambique in the fight against terrorism, and a counter-terrorism agreement was signed between the two countries last November as the terrorist activity in Mozambique started approaching the Tanzanian border and causing occasional border violations.³⁴ Questions remain as to how this agreement will bring concrete results on the ground and how much potential it has for the future.

The efforts of the Mozambican government lacking sufficient security forces and economic capacity, resulted in the active involvement of Russia and the Republic of South Africa in the region with their private military companies. After the Mozambican government signed an agreement with the Russian private military company Wagner Group³⁵ in 2019 for the deployment of 200 military advisors, the company started to operate in Cabo Delgado. In accordance with its grand Africa policy, Russia provides aid to the Mozambican government with its private military companies instead of direct involvement through its official military presence on the ground.³⁶ Accordingly, Wagner is known to have 160 to 300 armed personnel, unmanned aerial vehi-

cles and high-tech military intelligence analysis equipment in Mozambique.³⁷ It is reported that some Wagner mercenaries in the region were ambushed and executed by Ansar al-Sunna at different times.³⁸ In addition to this loss of personnel, the climate led Wagner to consider this region as one of the most difficult areas of operation in Africa. On the other hand, the Mozambican government, failing to fight terrorism with its own security capacity, continued its efforts to find a military contractor to solve its problem and thus contacted the South African Dyck Advisory Group (DAG), following the failure of its initial agreement with the Russian Wagner Group that was unable to deliver the desired results in the region.³⁹ The DAG, on the other hand, was accused in a report prepared by Amnesty International of using excessive force in the region and of employing methods in violation of human rights, such as opening fire against crowds and attacking hospitals. Such actions are considered as war crimes and similar examples can be seen in the lawsuits and accusations against many private military companies.⁴⁰ The increasing activity of private military companies on the ground often raised questions in the international community regarding their illegal activities, their salaries paid with natural resources that raised doubts about the sovereignty of poor yet resource-rich countries, and their relations with illegal groups at the local level, and worsened the already-grave conditions created by factors such as terrorism and forced displacement.

³⁴ "Mozambique, Tanzania Sign Accord to Fight Insurgency," Barrons, 24 November 2020.

³⁵ "The Military-First Approach in Northern Mozambique Is Bound to Fail," Council on Foreign Relations, 23 November 2020.

³⁶ Tucker, "Mozambique Is Emerging As The Next Islamic Extremist Hotspot."

³⁷ Mustapha Dalaa and Halime Afra Aksoy, "Russia's Wagner Group Reportedly Deployed in Africa," 5 March 2021.

³⁸ Pjotr Sauer, "In Push for Africa, Russia's Wagner Mercenaries Are 'Out of Their Depth' in Mozambique," 19 Kasim 2019.

³⁹ "Mozambique Conflict: What's Behind the Unrest?," BBC News, 29 March 2021.

⁴⁰ Joseph Cotterill, "Mozambique looks to private sector in war against Islamists," 15 March 2021.

Other countries that are closely engaged with the issue are France, due to the investments of the French Total company; Britain, which supports the same project; and Germany, which is involved through the European Union. The parties (EU-Mozambique) previously agreed on cooperation in the context of counter-terrorism upon the request of the Mozambican government; therefore, deployment of troops in the region by the EU remains as an option on the table.⁴¹ Expanding the mandate of EUNAVFOR—the EU force in the Horn of Africa—to include Mozambique is also being discussed within the EU circles. Particularly some German and British officials criticize France of using the EU force in Africa for its colonial interests. It is estimated that such an engagement would meet with similar criticisms especially in the post-Brexit period. Portugal is also engaged in the problem through the EU and has colonial interests in Mozambique as well. It has 120 military experts affiliated with the special forces for training purposes, and frequently expresses its desire to send new experts. In line with the latest agreement signed on 10 March, the two countries agreed to cooperate in the areas such as intelligence sharing and drone know-how that will last until 2026.⁴² Similar to other former colonial powers, Portugal's presence in Mozambique is also considered as part of a post-colonial effort, even though Mozambique gained its independence in 1975. This perspective is reinforced by the fact that the two countries have frequently engaged in military cooperation since 1988.

In the context of global fight against international terrorism, the United States defined the terrorist organization in Mozambique as the Mozambican branch of ISIS and included it on the list of foreign terrorist organizations on 10 March 2021⁴³. Then, on 15 March, the US Embassy in Mozambique announced that the US special forces would support the Mozambican army against violent extremism and terrorism.⁴⁴ In this context, the US sent a number of soldiers to Mozambique for the purpose of training. After the Palma Attacks carried out by Ansar al-Sunna, which made a worldwide impact, the US increased its presence in Mozambique and deployed another group of green berets to the region.⁴⁵ The terrorist group took over Palma for a short time with a force of 150 militants and carried out attacks on civilians, including foreign company employees, thereby taking its international visibility to a new level. It should be remembered at this point that Palma is vital for the LNG capacity of Mozambique and that the French company Total carries out its energy operations in Palma as its headquarters. In the last ten years, Palma has become a region where new hotels and banks have been opened, and over a thousand foreigners live, especially as a result of natural gas activity. That is why, Palma is an important target for the organization, and attacking the city gives the organization both visibility and international profile, potentially depriving the Mozambican government of important economic resources and undermining its credibility with international companies. However, it is also possible to bring competition to the field through the group in the

⁴¹ Gavin, "Crisis in Mozambique is Grabbing the World's Attention."

⁴² "Mozambique: Portugal to Send More Soldiers to Mozambique to Fight Terrorism," All Africa, 12 May 2021.

⁴³ "US Blacklists Deadly Militias in DR Congo, Mozambique Linked to IS Group," France 24, 12 March 2021.

⁴⁴ "Mozambique Conflict: What's Behind the Unrest?" BBC News.

⁴⁵ "US Green Berets Are Training the Mozambique Army to Take on a Growing Insurgency Linked to ISIS," Business Insider, 17 May 2021.

energy equation in Africa and in Mozambique in particular. Such periodic cooperation possibilities bring terrorist groups important financial and military gains. Although the organization did not seriously damage Total's facilities in Palma, satellite images showed that the Mozambican army pillaged the facilities while recapturing the city, which caused tension between the Mozambican government and France. In April 2021, Total decided to freeze all its investment in the country amounting approximately 60 billion dollars in total, which is concentrated in Cabo Delgado—the region thought to contain half of the known natural gas and oil reserves of the country. This is one of the clearest examples of how the dynamics of terrorism and natural resources in Africa interact with one another.

The United Nations approaches the issue with humanitarian concerns and tries to find solutions to regional problems in accordance with its latest program aimed at helping the victims of the crisis.⁴⁶ Calls for the UN to send forces to the region to establish and maintain peace and to engage more directly in the problem have not yet been answered. In such a scenario, one could assess that the reconciliation process of the international actors, who are active in the UN and in an already-deepening competition in the region, will be important. A delay or failure to reach a consensus may cause the actors to bring their own solutions to the table and thus deepen the competition. At the same time, it may cause the efforts in the fight against terrorism and against security problems in Mozambique to continue without a control mechanism.

Even though it is not directly involved in the issue, Turkey stated that it stands by the Mozambican government against terrorism. In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey openly condemned the attacks carried out by Ansar al-Sunna since 24 March in a written statement, in which it was expressed that Turkey stands by the people and government of Mozambique, and hopes that the region will find peace and serenity as soon as possible. Although it was stated in the statement that the necessary support could be given to Mozambique's fight against terrorism, the nature of this support was not described in detail. In this case, it is possible to assume that the support to be given will be shaped according to the demand.⁴⁷

As there is a general trend to focus on the fight against terrorism from a military perspective, the most important problem stands out as the organization's urban warfare capabilities,⁴⁸ as it is impossible to deploy heavy weapons against rebels in residential areas; rather, light weapons and one-on-one combat are required. This situation further delays the resolution of the problem, since it requires the Mozambican army to have a sufficient level of training and advanced equipment. Building such a capacity requires costly large-scale investments while success is not guaranteed. In addition, the fight against terrorism requires comprehensive, holistic and permanent efforts. This includes the motivating factors of terrorism such as economic and social marginalization, youth unemployment, ethnic and religious discrimination, lack of identity and excessive use of force.

⁴⁶ "UN Appeals for \$254m to Help Mozambique Conflict Victims," Al Jazeera, 18 December 2020.

⁴⁷ Ali Murat Alhas, "Turkey Strongly Condemns Terror Attacks in Mozambique", Anadolu Agency, 1 April 2021."

⁴⁸ "Mozambique: Why IS Is so Hard to Defeat in Mozambique," BBC News, 1 April 2021.



CONCLUSION

According to the Global Terrorism Index, 7 of the 10 countries where terrorism has increased the fastest in the 2019-2020 period are in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is indeed the case for Mozambique as it experienced large-scale attacks by Ansar al-Sunna in 2020. Africa is the only continent where political violence is on the rise according to 2020 data of ACLED, and Mozambique is among the African countries where violence is prevalent the most. Terrorism shows a rising trend across the continent and it has become the most important security problem for Mozambique. This is a result of Mozambican government's inability to produce a solution to the problem, which led to the involvement of regional and global actors.

The province of Cabo Delgado, which gave significant impetus to Mozambique in its process of independence from Portugal, draws attention as an energy-rich region in north of the country. Yet, the region has been faced with significant socio-economic difficulties since 2017. On the other hand, investments for

liquefied natural gas in the resource-rich region did not yield the anticipated results due to terrorist activities that caused the death of more than 2,500 people. This situation further weakened the Mozambican economy, which is already one of the weakest economies of Africa, while also reducing the resilience of the local population against the terrorist organization. Humanitarian crisis due to terrorism is another dimension of the problem at local, regional and global levels and it resulted in the forced mass migration of 1 million people.

On the other hand, in 2018, Ansar al-Sunna declared its allegiance to ISIS, which could not regain its former power after losing its territorial dominance in the Middle East and which seeks to increase its influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. This situation has the potential to significantly deepen the conflict in Mozambique, where terrorism is currently a problem involving international actors, causing not only regional insecurity, but also humanitarian crises due to large waves of immigrants. It seems impossible to expect promising developments

It seems impossible to have high hopes for the near future for a possible resolution of the conflict in this environment, where the local dimensions such as identity and economy as well as the military dimension in terms of effective fight against terrorism remain neglected.

in the foreseeable future toward a solution to the problem in an environment where the Mozambican government is unable to provide adequate support to people who had to leave their homes, either by evacuation or in search of basic needs. The state failed to take the problem seriously and devise an effective strategy for taking early military measures or improving the economic and social conditions. This situation, which is yet to be addressed by the government, turned into a propaganda tool for the terrorist organization and a motivation to pursue concrete gains.

Apart from the fight against international terrorism, Mozambique occupies an important place for international actors in the context of the global power struggle, since the natural gas discoveries in 2011 have become a part of the grand strategies of foreign actors. All actors involved in the problem are trying to pursue their own interests in Mozambique and to have a say in the new system that will be established once the problem is finally resolved. This situation will prevent the already fragile state of Mozambique from benefiting from its great energy reserves in accordance with its national interests.

In addition to the issues of terrorism and energy, the fact that Mozambique is an international water transit route also increas-

es the importance of the country in the eyes of global powers. The Mozambique Channel is a transit route for international trade. In this respect, the increasing insecurity in the region and its possible transformation into a favorable area for piracy will negatively affect international trade.

While terrorist activities in Mozambique are an extension of the global militant Salafist views that are on the rise in Africa, they are on the other hand an illegal response to the material and moral problems faced by the people in the region, especially in terms of economy, education, health, housing, equality, and justice. In addition, the natural resources in north of the country and the existence of the Mozambique Canal, which is an important transit point for the world trade, explains the interest of the powers to take part in the global power struggle in the region. In this respect, the conflict that Mozambique is facing also has energy security and economic security dimensions, which deepens the struggle in the region.

A general outlook suggests that the problem continues to grow with its different aspects such as the humanitarian crisis triggered by forced migrations, international terrorism due to the connection with ISIS, energy security due to the natural gas reserves, and the aspects of transit

routes and supply security in terms of international trade. Moreover, it continues to provide suitable opportunities for the involvement of the great powers. While increasing external intervention has the potential to boost the Mozambican government's military capacity in the fight against terrorism, it also makes the government dependent on these powers. The global actors prefer supporting the Mozambican government through military supplies

and a low number of military personnel with limited training purposes, in addition to designating Ansar al-Sunna as a terrorist organization. It seems impossible to have high hopes for the near future for a possible resolution of the conflict in this environment, where the local dimensions such as identity and economy as well as the military dimension in terms of effective fight against terrorism remain neglected.



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