

MOZAMBIQUE

News reports & clippings

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Editor: Joseph Hanlon (j.hanlon@open.ac.uk)

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Total pulls out again and puts onus on government

"The remobilization of the project that was envisaged at the beginning of the week is obviously now suspended," Total said in a statement Saturday (27 Mar) "Total has decided to reduce to a strict minimum level the workforce on the Afungi site." It said nothing about conditions for return, saying only "Total trusts the Government of Mozambique whose public security forces are currently working to take back the control of the area." This is a polite way of saying that government has to sort out better security before Total will consider returning. That means bringing the Mozambican army up to scratch, or hiring a mercenary army.

Insurgents still in control

As of Monday morning, it appeared that insurgents were still in control of much of the largely empty town of Palma, and skirmishes continue. In the past, in their first attack insurgents have not tried to hold district capitals, and after causing death and damage have drifted away. This will probably happen in Palma in coming days.

There is still no mobile telephone communication, so reports remain confused, coming from people with satellite phones and or who have reached Pemba. It is widely estimated

that at least 50 people have been killed.

Fighters came into Palma over several days, some dressed in military and police uniforms, and stayed in supporters' houses. Other groups came from outside on Wednesday (4 Mar) and Thursday. Three attacks started at 4 pm local time on Wednesday, and they met little resistance. This is the same pattern that was followed in the attacks on Mocimboa da Praia.

Government infrastructure in the town was targeted in a systematic manner, with the local police station and military base overrun and destroyed, while at least two banks were raided. (*Guardian*, London, *MediaFax* 29 Mar) Lionel Dyke of the private military company Dyke Advisory Group (DAG) told the BBC (29 Mar) that on the first day insurgents went from house to house killing selected people, and it was initially not indiscriminate killing. But there were attacks on road traffic, including food lorries, which also affected evacuation.

The property company African Century which runs Palma Residences and Business Park evacuated on Saturday 19 staff and 4 customers "under heavy fire". The Amarula hotel came under siege on Thursday but was initially not attacked. On Friday (not Saturday as stated in the last bulletin) a convoy tried to break out and reach the beach, but was attacked and 7 people were killed. Some others in the compound were rescued by DAG helicopters; others fled on foot to the beach or into the forest. There are totally contradictory reports, some saying no one who remained in the Amarula hotel was killed, and others saying there was an eventual attack and deaths.

Initially rescue operations were unorganised and done by local people. On the day of the attack many local boats - including sailing dhows - took people to nearby islands or to Tanzania, which is closer than Pemba.

DAG helicopters rescued 300 people, Dyke said. Police, army, air force and Total became involved later. People were taken to the beach or to the Total installation on the nearby Afungi peninsula, from which commercial flights were going to Pemba.

Dyke says that the insurgents were using weapons captured from raids on army and police in recent months. But with one exception. For the first time they appeared to use mortars, not used by the Mozambique army, and Dyke suggests they probably came from Tanzania.

Warnings but no plans for Palma

Palma has been under siege from several months, with access roads cut and growing food shortages. Mocimboa da Praia had been cut off in the same way before it was attacked. Thus Palma was an obvious target. In the rainy season it is difficult for everyone to move about, including insurgents. The end of the rains - now - is called the fighting season, and the insurgents attacked Palma.

There seems to have been no military plan to repulse the attack. The large military force inside the Total construction zone to protect it remained there to protect workers and not to repel the attack, only moving outside the Total zone on Sunday. There was some fighting from Thursday, but the insurgents appear to have taken control of Palma without major opposition.

SISE is so preoccupied with pursuing and controlling those who disagree with the government that it has had no time to penetrate the insurgents, and thus the security service SISE was again surprised by the attack, commented Adriano Nuvunga, director of CDD (Centre for Democracy and Development).

Total evacuates staff but takes no responsibility for contractors

Total quickly hired a large ferry in Tanzania which overnight Saturday/Sunday took 1200 Total workers to Pemba. The photo shows the arrival.



"Total's absolute priority is to ensure the safety and security of the people who work on the project. Total confirms there are no victims among the staff employed on the site of the project in Afungi," it said Saturday. That makes a key distinction.

Much of the support work is done by contractors, subcontractors, and private businesses like the Amarula Hotel and the man reported missing who was organising a camp to 2000 contract workers. All are in Palma, outside the Afungi fence, and are not Total staff on the site. Some are foreign, but many are Mozambicans from outside Cabo Delgado.

The raid on Palma made clear that there were no plans or systems to evacuate contract staff in the event of an attack, and Total only took responsibility only for their own staff. There were social media reports (unconfirmed) about Total initially not allowing some contract staff into the Afungi secure zone. DAG helicopter rescues were curtailed because Total has a policy against supplying fuel to private military companies.

So contract workers and companies were left on their own - and are angry. They feel Total had some responsibility to them.

ISIS claimed credit for the attack, in a very general 28 March statement. In a statement issued on official media channels, ISIS claimed insurgents killed more than 55 members of local security forces and Christians, including those from "Crusader nations",

and destroyed official buildings and banks. The statement is very general and seems based on media reports.

OCHA Access Snapshot is the best summary of the war situation. Published 23 March but only covering the pre-Palma situation. Internally displaced has risen to 607,000 in Cabo Delgado. Shows most roads are closed in the war zone. Excellent. <http://bit.ly/Moz-OCHA-Mar> The poster notes the continued problem with lack of humanitarian visas. In February 2021, agencies faced a 65% increase in the payment of taxes after it was confirmed that the humanitarian aircraft used to deliver critical cargo, primarily to Palma, would not be exempt from taxes. OCHA also says that at the end of December, there were 670,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Niassa and Zambezia as a result of violence in Cabo Delgado

Comment

Frelimo lost its gas gamble

Frelimo bet the country on gas - and has just lost the bet.

The Frelimo leadership was dazzled by the gas, and believed Mozambique would be like Abu Dhabi, Qatar, or Kuwait. Gas would make the elite fabulously wealthy and also trickle down to ordinary people. Poverty and inequality are increasing, but there was no reason to spend money on rural development because the gas bonanza would end poverty. Of course, the elites could take their share early, as with the \$2 bn secret debt in 2012. The gas bonanza would benefit everyone by 2020, delayed to 2025, and then to 2030. The people would believe the dreams.

But in Cabo Delgado they did not, and an insurgency began in 2017 - over growing poverty and inequality, as well as political and economic exclusion. There is very broad agreement that initially al Shabaab was local people with local leadership. There is a huge debate as to whether Islamic State now controls al Shabaab, but even advocates of that view accept that IS took over an existing local insurgency. Local people saw the development of ruby mines and the initial gas development, and realised there were no jobs for them; the gas and ruby money was not trickling down to them.

Three multinational giants control the gas - ENI (Italy) the far offshore section, ExxonMobil (US) the middle section, and Total (France, taking over from Anadarko) the section closest to the coast. ENI was first to start, with a small floating gas liquification platform ordered in 2017 but not yet in operation. Total began serious work on part of its gas production and liquification plant last year.

So work has begun on only a small part of the dreamed of gas bonanza. But in the last two years, the global market picture has changed. Gas is a fossil fuel coming under environmental pressure so predictions of demand 20 years from now are falling, while Russia and Saudi Arabia have upped production to try to capture what is left of the market. Many gas projects across the world have been abandoned. Collapsing markets have already combined with security questions about Cabo Delgado. ExxonMobil has made clear it is unlikely to go ahead; ENI has said nothing about anything more than the initial floating platform.

Insurgents reached the gates of Total on New Year's eve, and Total pulled out its staff. It said it would not employ a private army for protection. The Total CEO told President Filipe

Nyusi personally that Total would only return if Mozambique would guarantee security in a 25 km cordon around the gas project on the Afungi Peninsula.

Last week Nyusi staked his personal prestige and that of the nation on a promise of security. Total agreed to go back to work. Two days later insurgents occupied Palma, within the security cordon, killing contract staff working on the project. Total says work "is obviously now suspended" and will only resume when government really can provide security.

It was Nyusi's last roll of the dice. The whole gas gamble was bet on a promise of security, and Nyusi - and Mozambique - lost the bet.

Will Total return? Not in the short term. It will take perhaps two years for US, Portuguese and other trainers to create a functioning army. Total has other interests in Africa; it has only spent a small part of the \$20 bn project cost, and can still walk away. Even if it returns it will demand a much more favourable deal with Mozambique. ExxonMobil has already written off \$20 bn of gas assets elsewhere in the world and will not go ahead in Cabo Delgado. It looks increasingly like ENI's floating platform will be the only gas production in Mozambique.

Mozambique is waking up to the realisation that billions of dollars flowing into the state budget and local pockets was only a dream. Frelimo bet the country on that dream. And last week it lost. *jh*

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