

## **Islamic Extremism In Mozambique: A Screen On Cabo Delgado And Mocímboa da Praia**

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**Abstract-** Africa continue to battle with the rise of jihadist group. From Boko-Haram to Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda in the African Maghreb and Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamma'ah (ASWJ) gaming Mozambique. Some of the justifications of jihadist tendencies in Africa is due to the political configuration of some African states, economic situation in local communities, religious and other social vices. Though sometimes referred as Al Shabaab in Mozambique, the group is not related to the radical Islamic movement challenging regional security in the horn of Africa. This paper explores Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamma'ah (ASWJ) activities in Cabo Delgado, a northern province of Mozambique, borders Tanzania, which jihadist tendencies sparked in 2017. The paper equally examines activities of jihadist in Mocímboa da Praia, from a structural theoretical framework. Though the government continue to encounter some challenges in the fight against radical movement, international support is required and new government approach to key social problems in order to curb some of the root causes of the insurgency, such as; rate of illiteracy; poor health facilities; high unemployment, especially among the youth. This is paper expose on the rich natural resources of the country, but also point out the different particularities of the group while providing adequate recommendations for security in the fight against the jihadist group.

### **Introduction**

The emergence of violent extremism in Africa is often due to marginalization, ethno-religious identity, underpinned by weak and corrupt governance. Furthermore, the isolation of certain regions (left poor, despite several base resources, use for the development of other cities is a major menace. In Mozambique the northern provinces; Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa are predominantly Muslim, and lack socio-economic entities for adequate development, which is a risk factor for violent extremism. Jihadists safe corridor in the region and beyond is due to northern poverty, insecure and porous borders, the presence of natural resources, inequality and problems with democratization.

The country was involved in establishing peace following the internal wrangling after the 2014 general election results, before armed attack on state institutions in the Mocímboa

da Praia district capital in Cabo Delgado province on 5 October 2017. This armed attack, by an unknown group crusading for global jihad, was a new phase in the Mozambican political process. Several issues were raised relating to the group's origin and motives, but also to the political and socio-economic implications of the phenomenon for the country.

In Africa, media coverage or information of jihadist tendencies is often limited to foreign press. Journalists and researchers continue to encounter the challenge of primary source or interview victims of areas ravaged by the attacks. In Mozambique, based on a research by DW, (2019), Since October 2017, at least six journalists have been detained, meanwhile in 2018, three foreigners and one Mozambican and two Mozambicans in 2019. However, several cases established with individuals suspected of being linked to the attacks. In which two of these cases, with 221 defendants, were tried by the Cabo Delgado Judicial Court and 57 were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 16 to 40 years. According to Achá (2019) the other cases, involving 50 defendants, had not yet been concluded. Contrary to state discourse of the situation being under control, episodes of attacks continue with some regularity, the region remains tense, particularly the northern part of Cabo Delgado.

### **Landscape of radicalization in Mozambique**

The most recent events in Africa took place in Mozambique, with the violent jihadist group referred to as Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamma'ah (ASWJ) which translates as 'Followers of the prophetic tradition' aspire for new state in the region. ASWJ was created as a religious movement in 2007 and, since then, it has engaged in jihadist tendencies. The attacks on security bases (mainly police and military base) 5 and 6 October 2017 in Macimboa de Praia, in Cabo Delgado, a province in the northern part of Mozambique, registered several casualties and arrest of conservative religious leaders for allegedly inciting civil disobedience.

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) updated of April 2020 revealed that, at least 350 attacks with targets in Cabo Delgado Province have been registered after October 2017 attack. Moreover, jihadist tendencies increased as from mid-May 2018, with approximately 1,000 incidents in all domain of human security, which has caused migration of over 115,000 people.

On 7 April 2020, an attack was coordinated in the village of Xitaxi in Muidumbe district, Cabo Delgado Province, which recorded over 50 fatalities. During their raid, 52 youths were shot dead in the village, as they were attempting to recruit aspirants or youth to join the network and those who resisted were equally murdered. Jihadists attacked simultaneously in several locations; in Cabo Delgado – Mocímboa da Praia and Quissanga. The most appalling was the attack on a Six chapels and a 100-year-old church in Cabo Delgado – the Catholic mission of the Sacred Heart of Jesus situated in Nangololo, appealing to a new wave of war.

## Theorizing contemporary game in Mozambique

In the past decade, there have been several debates and narrative on the concept of radicalization. Theorizing this concept, will need to focus on three core aspects; ideology or doctrine, cultural dimension or religion and education. Though the concept of radicalization is relatively recent in social sciences, there exist no formal definition in relation to modern security trends (Neumann, 2013). The vast literature on the radicalization phenomenon articulated by scholars reveals not only complexity in human security, but also that the concept is somewhat elusive in relation to the globalization period (Githens-Mazer, 2012; Sageman, 2004; Neumann, 2013; Borum, 2011; Wiktorowicz, 2006; Moghadam, 2005; Mandel, 2009). This paper will draw its theoretical analysis from the framing of some researchers to better understand the dynamic in Mozambique. As such, is necessary to evoke Githens-Mazer (2012) radicalization concept, which explores revolutionary acts contesting a declining political power, to the intensification of existing political orientations and behaviours, usually marked by a shift from peaceful activities to violent extremism (Githens-Mazer, 2012, p. 557). This is alienable with ideology of the extremist group; target Western education, establish a caliphate, and implementation of Sharia through political Islam.

During from the different trajectories of human security in Africa, Mozambique in particular, Githens-Mazer (2012) assertion of research on radicalization is the absence of empirical studies that permit the elaboration of a specific definition of the concept. However, there are three phases of which an individual can be radicalized or forced to join a terrorist organization;

The first is the radicalization process. Radicalization is a situation or a set of stages through which an individual becomes a terrorist or jihadist, a change in beliefs and behaviours that fosters acceptance of the use of violence. This stage is based on ideology or doctrine of the group which the aspirant or flag bearer is recruited. The usual doctrine or ideology is that, Islamic culture is been neglected due to Western civilization, their community denigrated by some state authorities, and the implementation of Sharia and Holy jihad are solution to establish new caliphates will revive Islam.

The second phase explores radicalization phenomenon through causation. This phase is known as the cultural or religious dimension. There by seeking to it understand the possible causes that explain the radicalization of an individual. The causation approach, draws back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which some religious scholars like Usman Dan Fodio succeeded in establishing the Sokoto caliphate in Nigeria through the holy jihad, creation of many mosque, and several scholarships awarded. When some individuals reflect to the 19<sup>th</sup> century successes and present situation which the region or province marked with poverty, bad governance, unemployment, food crisis and violence, the belief in the struggle through radical religious crusades by fundamentalists like Imam Abubakar Shekau.

The third phase defines radicalization in negative terms, that of terrorism or violence due to inadequate education (Githens-Mazer: 2012, p. 558). Most supporters or flag bearers are groomed from areas with no education, those who studied join because of social injustice

(employment, leadership rule and economic development power), and while some join because of successful attacks highly mediatize and wish to support with their educational skills (fanatism) an example is the cyber-attack on the Nigerian Secret Service data base. These causes appeal for the emergence of jihadist tendencies in northern Cabo Delgado, state institutions and the civilian population. This is a structural theoretical framing for counter terrorism units and the state to understand the politico-religious war in Mozambique.

### **Particularities of jihadist tendencies in Mozambique**

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century till date, most religious crusaders(jihadists) have always targeted Muslim communities to expand their ideology, which some tender to be poor, marked with illiteracy and inadequate educational and health facilities. The case study which is Mozambique (particularly northern part and some targeted area in south) is rich in natural resources, known for its culturally diversity, and a nation which more than half of the population living and working in rural areas. Cabo Delgado in the northern part of the country is endowed with energy and natural gas. Some African countries (Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and eSwatini) depend on Mozambique for import and export trade due to their accessibility to the global market through a stretch of over 2,500km of the Indian Ocean coastline. Human Development Report published by United Nations Development Program in 2019, shortlisted Mozambique among the 10 poorest nations having a Human Development Index ranking of 180 out of 189 countries. Geographical, socio-political, and economic factors make Mozambique a strategic area for jihadist tendencies and a possible corridor for international jihadists going to South Africa.

### **Ideology of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamma'ah (ASWJ)**

Most radical movements begin as religious group with crusaders appealing for flag bearers (supporters) to expand the ideology, culture and then engage in jihadist tendencies. ASWJ emerge as a religious group in the northern part of Cabo Delgado Province, and at the end of 2015, her aspirations were unraveled with military engagement in the country. Jihadist groups through the translation of the name tend to lull certain individuals, particularly in poor communities with little or no education, “followers of the prophetic tradition and community”, as is meaning, believe the Islamic communities in Cabo Delgado are not following the principles of the Holy Quran. The name Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamma'ah is in order to distinguish themselves from the local communities, considered to be practicing an inferior version of Islam.

However, through its campaign of violence from 2017 onwards, the group have succeeded to endorse hundreds of flag bearers. Critically, the name of the group is not usually flag during media communication, some prefer to use the Arabic term for ‘youth’, al-Shabaab, while others referred to as Ahlu al-Sunna, Ansar al-Sunna or Swahili Sunna. The group subscribe to the narrative of other jihadists groups in Africa, which envisages the prevention of Western values and they want women to dress in more modest clothing.

ASWJ ideology is based on teaching of radical Islamic from the East African nations of Kenya and Tanzania, the latter being a country directly bordering the province of Cabo

Delgado where most jihadist group believe to be a safe haven. The group's ideology emerged based on Kenyan radical Islamic cleric and al-Shabaab sympathizer, Aboud Rogo Mohammed, the brain of the 1998 US Embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam. Aboud Rogo Mohammed was known to denigrate non-Muslims, criticize moderate Muslims and restrain alienation to politics, and inter-religious dialogue. His ideology is the fundamental concept for the creation of ASWJ. Based on Cabo Delgado, with a majority of the population being Muslim, high levels of youth unemployment and marginal economic development, provided a suitable environment for jihadist group to grow its membership.

One of the humiliating aspect of human security is when an organization succeed to hit a hard target and claims responsibility, which expose the challenges of the state to secure its citizens. In 2020, a video (video was produced by Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP)) was released of two attacks on towns in northern Mozambique claimed by ASWJ, after two years of operation in the gas-rich area, shows their aspirations are long-term. In the video a tall, unmasked man in khaki uniform surrounded by other fighters is seen making such statements as: "We are not fighting for wealth, we only want Islamic law" and "We occupy [the towns] to show that the government of the day is unfair. It humiliates the poor and gives the profit to the bosses." The man spoke frequently about Islam, and his desire for an "Islamic government, not a government of unbelievers", he also cited alleged abuses by Mozambique's government troops and repeatedly complained that the government was "unfair". The ASWJ is still evolving, its leadership structure and affiliations need to be destroyed before it reaches its peak.

### **Education (Madrassas)**

Education is a fundamental human right for all and enshrined in nearly all constitutions in the world. However, inadequate education is one of the major factors for the rise of jihadist tendencies in Africa, particularly with areas with no educational system and where public services in general are weak, like Cabo Delgado and Mocímboa da Praia, families turn to madrassas or Quranic schools, that feed and shelter their children.

Drawing from the patterns of other radical Islamic groups, aspirants were drilled using the holy Quran to become "hafiz" - someone who has memorized the entire holy book. It's worth noting that all Quranic schools in throughout Mocímboa da Praia district, including the district capital, were in very poor areas, where the subsidized life of the madrassas, a strategic factor to draw vulnerable youths. During the passage of youths in these Quranic schools they were watched and discussed videos of sheik Aboud Rogo. To better equip them, they were given flash drives with jihadist chants and propaganda videos showing the group's alleged military operations, as well as images showing how Muslims are persecuted around the world. Through these images, was sought a crusade for youths to join the jihad cause. This explains why members of the ASWJ are typically between 20 and 35 years old, unemployed due to inadequate educational system.

The motivation for individuals to join the group has been influenced by the poor economic situation in Cabo Delgado as discussed above. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) research revealed that 70% of individuals who join terrorist groups in Africa do so



because of violent and repressive actions taken by the government. However, other factors that radicalize youths can include but not limited to; geographic proximity to jihadist group, sociopolitical marginalization, and exposure to extremist propaganda.

### **Technological innovation**

The localization period has changed the dynamics of communication and media leverage, with different sorts of connectivity (internet access), associated with the spread of cell phones, and digitalization in political participation. Social networks are vital in conveying a message to an audience. Networking sites like Tweets and Facebook convey emotions to the reader. However, some violent extremist groups, like Mocímboa da Praia's Al-Shabaab exploit Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and videos to recruit combatants. The dissemination of videos is to inspire, give a different narrative of the struggle to future flag bearers (new recruits or jihadists). The jihadist videos contain messages in Kiswahili and Arabic, which most localities are vest with such language for quick recruitment.

Jihadist tendencies is based on “plot theory”, which religious clerics use to convince youths and other vulnerable persons to join their movement. For example, in Northern Nigeria and Cameroon, imam Abubakar shekau is gaming the system, while in Mozambique, the group is inspired by Aboud Rogo videos and speeches. Violent extremists usually exploit young people are at a time in their lives when they question their lives and identity, in order to convince them that they are “superior beings” and make them believe in a “holy duty” to help create world order. Through such speeches, young people from Mocímboa da Praia and northern Mozambique endorsed the crusade of radical jihadism and join the group. Consequently, the group enjoyed relative growth in Mocímboa da Praia, thou its ability to attack the state and sow panic among local communities, continue to force the central government to send troops to fight it.

### **Ethnicity-Based Identity Issues**

Ethnicity is a strategic aspect in most internal wrangling in Africa, an example in Rwanda genocide of 1994 and even the present situation in some part of Nigeria, such as the Niger Delta. The independence of Mozambique in 1975, did not restrain FRELIMO's ideological discourse on national unity, social cleavage in some communities and regions of the country base on ethnic grounds, major obstacle in the process of nation building. As in most Sub Saharan African countries, political elites in Mozambique are tainted by fierce competition for access to and control of resources, which is a major aspect of corruption and embezzlement of state funds personal enrichment (Bayart, 1989). This routine usually leads to manipulation of ethnic identities, neglecting ethnic community in favor to the ethnic patenance of leaders of the nation for protection. An example is Mocímboa da Praia, where administrators manifest loyalty to the state for the distribution of public office and resources, some ethnic groups like the Mwani feels excluded from political representation and economic benefits.

## **Impact of jihadist tendencies in Mozambique**

Human security in Africa remains a phenomenal challenge to states, because of corruption, bad governance, inadequate education, and famine which leads to prostitution, child soldiers and the massive recruitment of young people in jihadist groups. The activities of ASWJ has increased in frequency, with over 80 attacks taking place in the first four months of 2020. Statistically, there have been over 350 coordinated attacks by the group since the initial attack in October 2017. The attacks targeting civilians as well as state actors across the north of Mozambique. Over 100,000 Mozambicans have migrated after homes and villages have been burned to the ground, and over 1,000 civilians (including children) have been injured and others murdered. The insurgents have also captured some areas and thus, creating a new humanitarian crisis. Some of the direct effects on citizens range from loss of life to displacement from homes, farms and businesses.

A major impact has been that the instability and levels of fear in local communities due to food crisis. Also, most basic rights guaranteed by the Mozambican Constitution and international treaties that Mozambique has ratified. Many residents of Cabo Delgado are scared to return to their villages to plant or harvest crops. Their routine activities have been abandoned such as; entering the forests to gather wild fruit, medicinal plants and firewood due to inadequate security. As a result, food crisis intensifies, following the cyclones Idai and Kenneth which hit Cabo Delgado in 2019, leaving villagers powerless to replenish their reserves. The COVID-19 pandemic worsens the crisis, as it is hindering farmers from going to plant their crops and limits movement of goods from one country to another.

The economic situation in Mozambique is deteriorating with hunger, internal violence and destruction by the cyclones which necessitates recovery methods for the country. UN World Food Program revealed that, over 2 million people were in need of food assistance in 2019, while Global Hunger Index, which measures food supply, mortality rate and nutrition levels in a country, ranked Mozambique 96th out of 117 qualifying countries the same year. Education has also been affected by the insurgency violence, as most were fleeing for their lives, parents are unlikely to send children to school, thereby further exacerbating the social effects of the violence. Many schools were had to close after attacks began and teachers abandoned their posts out of fear.

## **Conclusion**

This research report is a first attempt to address the phenomenon in order to understand the complexity of the dynamics of the origin of jihadist tendencies in Mozambique but also in the structure of the conflict and violence in Cabo Delgado. The attack on Mocímboa da Praia on 5 October 2017, is considered as a conspiracy by external powers to destabilize Mozambique government, through land conflict against the backdrop of the area's natural resources thesis, to the sect (Morier-Genoud, 2019) and jihadism theses, in the context of the growing dynamics of violent extremism in the countries of the region.

Despite the fact that Cabo Delgado Province is linked to Mozambique's capital city, Maputo, it has always been neglected by the central government. Which have paved the way for jihadist recruitment and attacks following the high poverty rates, poor infrastructure and

a lack of access to social services in comparison to the southern provinces of Mozambique. The security approach adopted by the Mozambican military machine in order to curb this radical group seem to push certain individuals to the extreme edge of the struggle. The illicit economy flourishing in the north due to the wave of violence which the government needs to address for peace in Cabo Delgado.

Overcoming the crisis successfully will require the government to cultivate trust within the community (civil-military relationship, community policing) in order to curb the insecurity posed by jihadists in the country. The government will need to respond to the legitimate grievances concerning Cabo Delgado's level of development, based on the resources in the province and as well the expansion of the natural gas industry in the region. The government must address the socio-economic, religious and political narratives behind the insurgency, otherwise the attacks are very likely to continue.

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