

Security situation in Mozambique

Since 2017, a relatively unknown Islamic group has staged a destabilising insurgency against the Mozambican government forces and the local population in the predominantly Muslim northern province of Cabo Delgado. Off the provincial coast, huge gas extraction projects have been launched in a bid to revitalise the national economy, crippled by external debt. So far, the army has proved relatively ineffective in dealing with the insurgency. The government has asked external partners, including the EU, for support, particularly in the form of training and logistics, but has balked at receiving direct military assistance.

Political background

Mozambique gained independence from Portugal on 25 June 1975, after a long guerrilla war launched in 1964 by the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo). Initially a Marxist-Leninist party, Frelimo ruled the country single-handedly until 1989, when it adopted a multi-party system and started opening up the economy. However, Frelimo still dominates political life and the country has yet to experience a change of power. In the latest elections of 2019, Frelimo won the presidency with 74 % of votes and more than two thirds of parliamentary seats, but the [EU electoral observation mission](#) pointed to numerous irregularities.

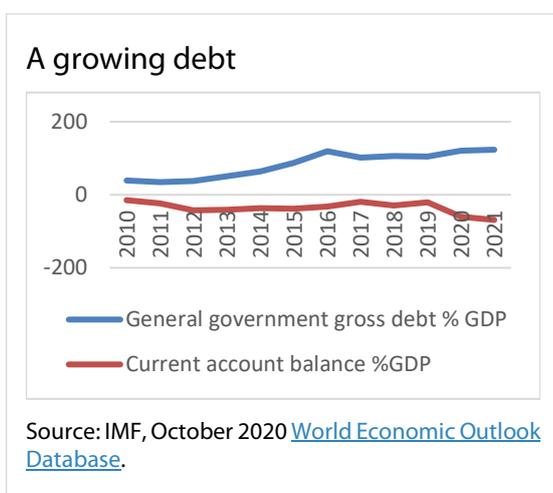
The Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo), which waged a guerrilla war on Frelimo for 14 years before the two reached a [peace agreement](#) in 1992, entered politics as the main opposition party, yet some disenfranchised factions continued their military activities. As per the third and most recent [peace agreement of August 2019](#) between Frelimo and Renamo, some disarmed Renamo [insurgents](#) have been incorporated into the army and the police. The agreement generally [holds](#), giving the government the chance to focus on the northern insurgency, yet some [breakaway factions](#) continue to pose problems.

Northern Mozambique has a Muslim majority, unlike the rest of the country, which is predominantly Christian (and only [18 %](#) Muslim). The Muslim population adheres to the traditionally peaceful and tolerant Sufi tradition. In recent years though, imams from other eastern African countries have spread [radical ideas](#) among disenfranchised youth in the region, exploiting local grievances related to marginalisation, corruption and criminal networks. Local authorities [are considered](#) as lacking the capacity to prevent extremism and radicalisation. Mozambique passed [counter-terrorism legislation](#) in 2018.

Very fragile economic situation

Mozambique's economy suffered a crippling blow with the eruption of a huge [debt scandal](#) in 2016. Between 2013 and 2014, three state companies had taken out loans worth more than US\$2 billion, as external debt backed by government guarantees (equivalent to about [13% of GDP](#)). More than half of this debt was not made public and, in breach of the constitution, remained unknown even to the parliament. Corrupt officials siphoned off significant amounts of money. The scheme is believed to have had broad [ramifications](#) for the government party. When the extent of the fraud was uncovered, the IMF and other donors, including the EU, [froze](#) their direct budget support to the government, which was financing around a third of the budget. Inflation surged and GDP growth, which since

2001 had hovered around [7 %](#) annually, diminished by half over the next years. The coronavirus crisis pushed GDP growth into negative territory, at -0.5 % in 2020. Today, the country faces a huge debt and serious balance-of-payments difficulties. It puts all its hope of economic recovery in the exploitation of recently discovered huge gas fields off the coast of Cabo Delgado. These gas fields have attracted sizeable



foreign direct investment – the [biggest](#) on the African continent – with French Total and Italian Eni leading two of the three major gas extraction projects.

Mozambique is also exposed to natural disasters, which have recently ravaged agricultural production, a vital part of the economy, particularly in the more remote areas. Cabo Delgado was among the provinces hit hardest by both the April 2019 [Kenneth tropical cyclone](#) and the [December 2019 – January 2020 floods](#). These destroyed [crops](#) and infrastructure, displaced thousands of people and caused a cholera outbreak in the province. [Food insecurity](#) in the province was serious in 2020 also due to the impact of the pandemic.

The Cabo Delgado insurgency

Since 2017, an Islamist insurgency has destabilised Cabo Delgado, causing a [spiral of violence](#) fuelled by poverty and deprivation, similar to that witnessed in the [Sahel](#). It is driven by [Ansar al-Sunna](#), locally known as al-Shabaab – a jihadi group that declares its affiliation to the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). Insurgents have attacked both security forces and civilians, burning villages and committing atrocities. They have also [occupied](#) the port town Mocimboa da Praia, leading to the displacement of over [500 000 people](#). The conflict has assumed an inter-religious dimension, with certain [sources](#) claiming that Christians and their churches are the specific targets of some attacks. In October 2020, the Islamist insurgency spilled over into Tanzania, with [an attack](#) in the border region followed by several other attacks, prompting the two countries to reinforce their border cooperation.

The Mozambican [army](#) has been ineffective in stopping the insurgency. Its chief of staff was [changed](#) at the start of 2021. Understaffed and composed mainly of former Frelimo fighters, it has limited operational capability and ageing equipment. To make up for this critical lack of capacity, the government has involved foreign mercenaries. The Russian Wagner Group [sent mercenaries](#) in 2019, but soon downscaled operations after suffering heavy losses. [Dyck Advisory Group](#), a South African private company, has provided aerial support and training to the army since early 2020. Human rights [organisations](#) criticise the exclusively militaristic approach that has alienated the local population through numerous abuses. [Experts](#) warn that it is bound to fail. Politically, Cabo Delgado, the [place](#) where the 1960s independence war started, has been a government [stronghold](#); however, years of economic marginalisation and unemployment, coupled with little hope that the gas projects would benefit the local population, have cast general disillusionment. The insurgency poses a direct threat to the gas projects, with one [attack](#) on 30 December just 10 km from Total-led infrastructure. Gas companies have [turned](#) to private security companies to protect staff.

International cooperation to tackle the crisis

The African Union is still to take an [official stance](#) on the crisis. An AU military deployment would only be possible with the backing of the UN Security Council. The Southern African Development Community, of which Mozambique is a member, has become more aware of the threat, but a January summit to discuss the crisis was [postponed](#). Mozambique has rejected the idea of foreign military deployment.

According to [press reports](#), Mozambique asked the EU for humanitarian and logistical support and help in training its armed forces, in September 2020. The EU ambassador to Mozambique [responded](#) favourably, promising EU support with regard to humanitarian assistance, security and development, but demanding 'verifiable commitments' from the Mozambican security forces to respect human rights in their operations. The EU Commissioner for International Partnerships adopted a [similar stance](#). Portugal's foreign minister, whose government currently holds the rotating EU Council presidency, has [come out](#) in favour of the EU stepping up its military and security assistance to Mozambique.

European Union cooperation with Mozambique

Promoting peace and security, the rule of law and human rights, but also foreign investment, are among the priorities of the EU's [cooperation](#) with Mozambique, according to the [National Indicative Programme with Mozambique 2014-2020](#) agreed under the 11th EDF. Mozambique ratified the [EU-SADC economic partnership agreement](#) in 2017, enjoying more [protection](#) than the other SADC members, given its status as a least developed country. In November 2020, the EU [committed](#) to provide budget support worth €100 million to help the country respond to the socio-economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis. This marks the resumption of this type of aid after a four-year break caused by the debt scandal. In a [September 2020 resolution](#) on the humanitarian situation in Mozambique, the European Parliament called on the EU and its Member States to scale up their support for national and regional authorities and invited Mozambique's government to be more responsive to dialogue and cooperation with the EU and the SADC.

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