

COPYCAT PIRACY?

**THE CONTINUED THREAT OF TERROISM AND
PIRACY IN MOZAMBIQUE**



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KEY POINTS

As Al-Shabaab has increased in size and scope it has caused over 3,000 fatalities, displaced 800,000 people and successfully captured district capitals.

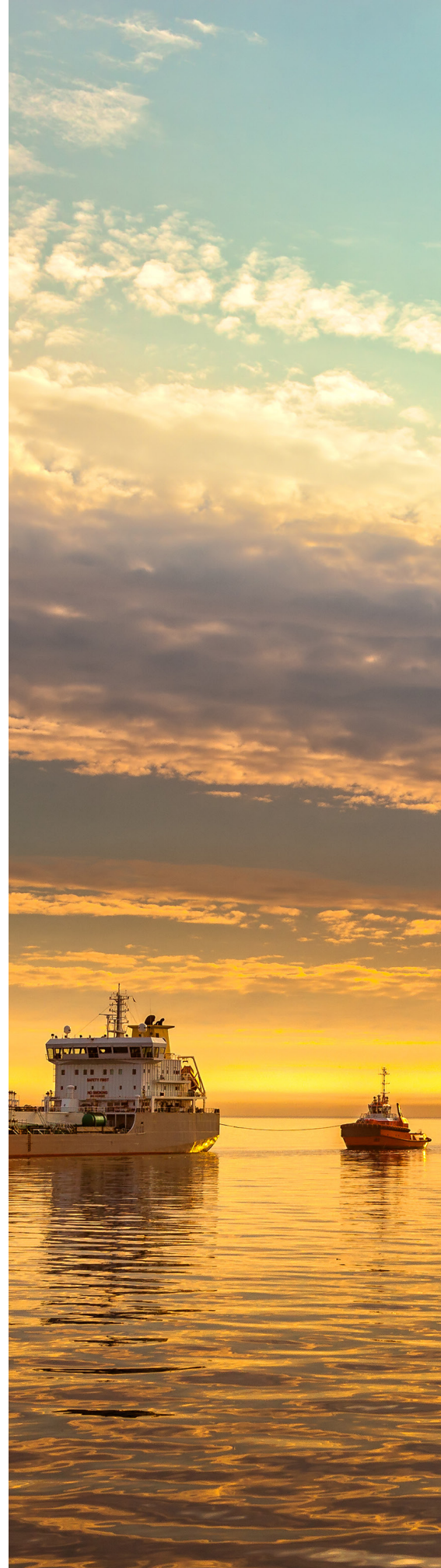
The chaos of the insurgency combined with the underdevelopment of Cabo Delgado and **increasing insecurity of the population cannot be ignored** when looking at the maritime security of the Mozambique Channel.

As the insurgency has continued to grow, efforts to tackle it have failed as mercenaries hired by the Mozambican government have struggled to cope with war in Mozambique's bush.

Deep offshore pirates are the smallest group, but the best funded, organised and equipped

Pirates usually start as small groups operating from marginalised coastal regions, but often can work with militants to form powerful groups able to seriously challenge governments.

Inhabitants of Cabo Delgado continue to feel neglected and marginalised by the state at the expense of foreign companies. Violence is unlikely to end if this does not change.





WAR AND PIRACY

Author: Michael Waddington

In recent years the insurgency in Mozambique's northern most province of Cabo Delgado has largely gone under the radar. Even in 2019, two years since violence began experts from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies were struggling with details as simple as the name of the insurgent group, now most commonly referred to as Al-Shabaab (no relation to the Somali group) or Ansar Al-Sunnah (1). Recently more attention has been brought to the group as it has increased in size and scope, successfully capturing district capitals, having caused well over three thousand fatalities (2), and displacing upwards of 800,000 people in the country (3).

While the group is not associated with piracy, Al-Shabaab has been active at sea, seizing islands off Mozambique's coast and using maritime tactical support during attacks on the mainland. There have long been links between insurgency and piracy, both through those not directly involved turning to criminal activities to survive, and insurgents themselves adopting piracy as a tool in their conflict. In Somalia, piracy was linked with the collapse of the state and subsequent inability to protect against illegal fishing leading to the livelihoods of Somali fishermen being ruined. This in turn led many to resort to piracy to take retribution against the illegal trawlers and provide the funds needed to survive (4). In Nigeria Niger Delta militants used piracy as a tool to secure funds and attack multinational companies they blamed for the underdevelopment and environmental destruction of their homes (5). The conflict in Mozambique has been ramping up as government forces and foreign assistance have consistently underestimated the scale of the threat, leading to responses that are too little, too late. The chaos of the insurgency combined with the underdevelopment of Cabo Delgado and increasing insecurity of the population cannot be ignored when looking at the maritime security of the Mozambique Channel.



(1) Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Understanding Extremism in Northern Mozambique, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34aJMFN2XuE&t=107s>

(2) Cabo Ligado, Cabo Ligado Weekly: 28 June-4 July <https://www.cabologado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-28-june-4-july-2021>

(3) defenceWeb, Increased violence in Cabo Delgado pushes a third of the population from their homes, defenceWeb, 5th July 2021 <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/human-security/increased-violence-in-cabo-delgado-pushes-a-third-of-the-population-from-their-homes/>

(4) Edward R. Lucas, "Somalia's 'Pirate Cycle': The Three Phases of Somali Piracy," *Journal of Strategic Security* 6:1 (2013): 58

(5) Temitope Oriola, Kevin D. Haggerty and Andy W. Knight, "Car Bombing 'With Due Respect': The Niger Delta Insurgency and the Idea Called MEND," *African Security*, 6:1 (2013), 78-79



WHY MOZAMBIQUE AND CABO DELGADO?

There are multiple interconnected factors that make Mozambique a potential piracy hotspot. While the Cabo Delgado insurgency is a major factor, it must not be looked at in isolation. Even prior to the start of the insurgency in 2017, researchers had warned that Mozambique faced high risk of piracy for a variety of factors (6). The geography of the country, its size and the chokepoint to shipping provided by the Mozambique Channel all add up to increase vulnerability (7). As well as this the Mozambican state lacks the means to project power effectively over distance; it is no coincidence that the insurgency is taking place in Cabo Delgado, the furthest province from Mozambique's capital, Maputo. Despite this distance and lack of effective control, Cabo Delgado has in recent years seen huge investments in resource extraction with petroleum, natural gas and the world's largest pink sapphire and ruby deposits being found in the province (8). However, this investment has had little positive impact on the lives of the region's inhabitants. For many these new finds have made life worse of as they have had land seized for little to no compensation due to the one sided nature of deals between poor, often illiterate farmers and the rich and well connected in the country (9). While land for farming has been seized, many of the "artisanal" (small scale, usually impoverished local) miners have also been driven from their work by mining company guards hired through a subsidiary of a South African security firm working with government forces. Even more worrying are the local thugs that attack artisanal and unlicensed miners with machetes, allegedly working with the official security forces to prevent local Mozambicans gaining access to the vast mineral wealth of their homes (10). Similarly overfishing by Chinese trawlers and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing has reduced fish stocks to the extent that many Mozambican fishing communities have been unable to continue practicing their trade and seek other ways to try and provide for their families (11). The loss of livelihoods faced by normal people in Cabo Delgado is in stark contrast to the vast profits being made by foreign multinationals and the elite of Mozambique.

These grievances are helping to fuel Mozambique's insurgency which has been steadily growing since 2017. Mozambique's government has attempted to use force against the insurgents and has brought mercenaries to help aid their own state forces. The South African Dyk Advisory Group (DAG) as well as the Russian Wagner Group are both private military contractors that have been involved in aiding the government (12). However, these efforts do not seem to have produced useful results as the insurgency has continued to grow and the mercenaries have been struggling to cope with the hostility of war in Mozambique's bush. DAG, which has helped provide air power for government forces, has reportedly lost both a Gazelle (ZU-ROJ) helicopter and Bat Hawk ultralight (13). Likewise, Wagner has allegedly suffered multiple fatalities to insurgent ambushes (14). It has believed this has led to the withdrawal of the group (15). The Mozambican government's decision to try and rely on foreign mercenaries suggests they lack confidence in their own forces' ability to successfully prosecute the conflict against Al-Shabaab alone. This lack of confidence seems well placed; Amnesty International has reported on Mozambican soldiers fleeing from towns they were placed to protect, dropping weapons and removing uniforms to blend in with civilians (16). However, the failures of the Mozambican military are often displayed even when there are no insurgents to fight. Amnesty has accused the military of extortion, theft, violence, torture and even extrajudicial killings of civilians (17). This is in turn driving more people to lose faith in their government and possibly even to seek protection from the government among the insurgents, who often look out for Muslim civilians and bring their own type of law and order (18).

This paints a picture of Cabo Delgado as an area with a population that feels exploited by their government and multinational corporations while being abused by a military seemingly more interested in making money from civilians than protecting them. This has left the province incredibly vulnerable to a rise in piracy. The lawlessness of the region and inability of the military to stop violence suggests there is little deterrent to taking part in criminal activity. As land is lost, fish stocks are depleted and the huge numbers are displaced by the insurgency many people are likely to be driven to crime and banditry to survive.

(6) Ursula Daxecker and Brandon C. Prins, "Enforcing order: Territorial reach and maritime piracy," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 34:4 (2017), 373.

(7) Daxecker and Prins, *Enforcing order*, 373.

(8) Gregory Pirio, Robert Pittelli and Yussuf Adam, "The emergence of violent extremism in Northern Mozambique," *Africa Centre for Strategic Studies*, March 25th, 2018, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-emergence-of-violent-extremism-in-northern-mozambique/>

(9) Pirio, Pittelli and Adam, *Violent extremism in Northern Mozambique*.

(10) Estacio Valoi, "The Blood Rubies of Montepuez: Troubling Pattern of Violence and Death for Responsibly Sourced Gems," *100reporters*, 3rd May, 2016, <https://100r.org/2016/05/the-blood-rubies-of-montepuez/>

(11) Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea, "Mozambique's fishermen point to China as fish stocks dwindle," *Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea*, 20th January, 2020 <https://fcwc-fish.org/other-news/mozambiques-fishermen-point-to-china-as-fish-stocks-dwindle>

(12) For DAG: Amnesty International, "WHAT I SAW IS DEATH" WAR CRIMES IN MOZAMBIQUE'S FORGOTTEN CAPE," (2021), 10. For Wagner Group: Piotr Sauer, "In Push for Africa, Russia's Wagner Mercenaries Are 'Out of Their Depth' in Mozambique," *The Moscow Times*, 19th November, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/19/in-push-for-africa-russias-wagner-mercenaries-are-out-of-their-depth-in-mozambique-a68220>



POOR ENFORCEMENT AND POVERTY FOSTER PIRACY

This environment is perfect for piracy to emerge. Pirate expert and historian Philip Gosse came up with the theory that piracy develops in cycles. This is the idea that piracy progresses in stages, initially in small scale “subsistence piracy” which starts in marginalised coastal regions where a population resorts to piracy for survival, attacking only the weakest shipping traveling close to the coast. Regional piracy may evolve beyond this stage if enough profits are made and groups are able to expand and become more organised. The rise of these larger groups leads to smaller subsistence pirate groups being outcompeted or incorporated into the larger outfits capable of attacking even the largest of vessels. In Gosse’s final stage, pirates become powerful enough that they are able to bargain with states and form alliances as close to equal partners (19).

These cycles were based on the pirates of centuries past, but can be seen in modern cases. In Nigeria pirates started small, but expanded to form large militant groups, and eventually were able to negotiate with the government to receive lucrative security contracts for the state all while continuing to attack vessels in the Gulf of Guinea, likely with support of certain elites (20). It is important to understand that this

was a slow process beginning in the 90s and only reaching the final stage in the 2010s, likewise in Somalia subsistence piracy took place from 1990, prior to the major surges that drew global attention and indicated the movement to later stages in the piracy cycle (21).

“ In Nigeria pirates started small, but expanded to form large militant groups, and eventually were able to negotiate with the government to receive lucrative security contracts ”

Subsistence piracy is incredibly hard to monitor as robbery of local vessels will rarely reach beyond local news, and other likely targets are illegal fishermen who will not be able to report attacks without incriminating themselves. As was the case in Somalia, it is likely that piracy will only start being reported on once the first stage has passed and advanced pirate groups are targeting international shipping for robbery and kidnap for ransom. It is hard to know if Mozambique has already reached the first stage in the

cycle and we are unaware due to underreporting. IMB reports have shown a rise in piracy in Mozambique since 2017, however the numbers remain small, with 4 reported attempted or actual attacks in 2020 (22). Whether this is the full picture or not is difficult to tell due to general underreporting of piracy, especially in an area going through as much chaos as Cabo Delgado. If there is already subsistence piracy going on in the region there is a major risk that it could escalate to organised piracy.



(13) Guy Martin, “Another private military contractor aircraft down in Mozambique,” defenceWeb, 19th June, 2020, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/aerospace/aerospace-aerospace/another-private-military-contractor-aircraft-down-in-mozambique/>

(14) Pjotr Sauer, “7 Kremlin-Linked Mercenaries Killed in Mozambique in October — Military Sources,” The Moscow Times, 31st October, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/31/7-kremlin-linked-mercenaries-killed-in-mozambique-in-october-sources-a67996>

(15) defenceWeb, “Gazelle crash in Mozambique confirmed,” defenceWeb, 22nd April, 2020, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/aerospace/military-helicopters/gazelle-crash-in-mozambique-confirmed/>

(16) Amnesty International, “WHAT I SAW IS DEATH,” 16

(17) Amnesty International, “WHAT I SAW IS DEATH,” 13-16

(18) Eric Morier-Genoud, “The jihadi insurgency in Mozambique: origins, nature and beginning,” Journal of Eastern African Studies, 14:3, (2020), 398-399

(19) Lucas, “Somalia’s “Pirate Cycle,” 57

(20) Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, “Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between brown and blue waters,” UNODC, 2021, 86-87.

(21) Lucas, “Somalia’s “Pirate Cycle,” 56-57

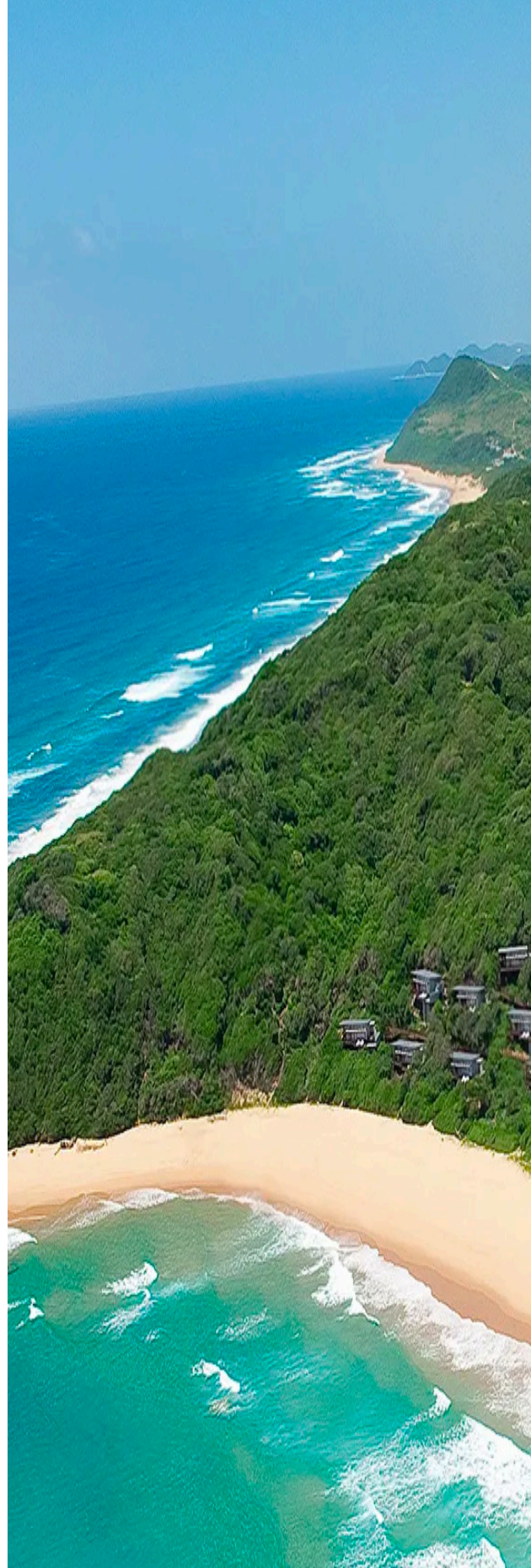
(22) IMB annual report



INSURGENTS AND PIRATES

If IMB reports are accurate and piracy is currently only very small in scale, the region is still at risk of piracy expanding as communities in Cabo Delgado continue to feel exploited by government and security forces. However, an even bigger risk is the potential of the insurgents themselves to start adopting piracy. The group has already dipped its toes in, seizing at least seven sailboats and taking 2 prisoners on November 23rd 2020 (23). Al-Shabaab have also been able to use vessels to seize islands off the coast of Mozambique suggesting a degree of familiarity with naval actions (24). More worryingly was the group's ability to coordinate their attack on Mocímboa da Praia in March 2020 using forces from land and sea to surround the area (25). Within the town there are boat-makers capable of constructing vessels with goods capacity of 15-20 tonnes, able to travel as far as Tanzania or the high seas (26). Al-Shabaab has the potential to utilise these resources should they decide to adopt piracy. The risk now is that the group's expansion and greater need for funds will lead to the adoption of piracy and other criminal activities. Al-Shabaab have already begun moving in this direction. When they attacked the city of Palma foreigners were abducted and ransoms were demanded by the group. According to Tribune India a demand of one million USD was demanded for an Indian branch manager of a private company (27). The region of Cabo Delgado is also home to significant illicit markets and there are already reports that the group is engaged in the smuggling of timber, rubies and ivory (28).

The simultaneous growth of maritime capacity and need to fund their insurgency combined with experience in illicit smuggling and kidnap for ransom leave Al-Shabaab very well positioned to adopt piracy. This will allow them to both gain income from robbery and kidnap, while also drawing greater attention to their movement by hitting international targets. If the group is able to secure ships capable of reaching high seas they may be able to target the growing offshore LNG extraction industry as well as the vast amounts of shipping passing through the Mozambique Channel. These factors all place Mozambique at serious risk of developing a major piracy problem. Mozambique seems completely unprepared to tackle maritime issues alone. With the fourth longest coastline in Africa and an EEZ extending 200nm from the coast, Mozambique is incredibly unequipped to police its own vast waters. In 2020 it was estimated Mozambique had as few as 200 naval officers in the 11,200 strong Mozambique Armed Defence Forces (FADM) (29). The Mozambican navy seems to be lacking in numbers, equipment and even fuel for training (30).



(23) Cabo Ligado Weekly: 23-29 November 1

(24) Djordje Djukic and Evan Centanni, "Mozambique Insurgency: Close-up Map of Control in April 2021," Political Geography Now, 22nd April, 2021, <https://www.polgeonow.com/2021/04/cabo-delgado-conflict-map-2021.html>

(25) Meghan Curran, Christopher Faulkner, Curtis Bell, Tyler Lycan, Michael Van Ginkel and Jay Benson, "Violence at Sea: How terrorists, insurgents, and other extremists exploit the maritime domain," Stable Seas, August 2020, 102.

(26) Curran et al, "Violence at Sea," 104.

(27) Tribune News Service, "Kin of Panipat man held by Mozambique terrorists in despair," Tribune India, 17th July, 2021, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/kin-of-panipat-man-held-by-mozambique-terrorists-in-despair-269693>

(28) Curran et al, "Violence at Sea," 103.



SUMMARY

This has left Mozambique's maritime enforcement capabilities woefully inadequate. To try and increase maritime enforcement capacity efforts have been made to acquire new vessels, including three HSI 32 Interceptor naval patrol vessels from France (31). Whether there will be enough fuel and crew available to make effective use of these vessels remains to be seen.

In order to try and increase its ability to combat Al-Shabaab and increase maritime security Mozambique has made efforts to attract foreign support. With the lack of success brought by mercenary groups it seems there is a shift towards seeking the support of foreign states more directly. The US has sent some of its elite Green Berets to help provide training for Mozambican security forces (32), Portugal has also been providing training to its former colony's soldiers and marines (33). More locally, Rwanda has claimed to be preparing to send its own ground forces to assist the FADM as has the Southern African Development Community (34). The potential impact of the training and additional forces is hard to judge as concrete numbers and scale of operations are currently lacking. Even if this assistance does materialise there is a risk it will again be too little too late as was seen with the introduction of DAG and Wagner in the conflict. The insurgency has been allowed to reach a point whereby it has repeatedly been able to attack and seize major towns in Cabo Delgado. If the international community underestimates the momentum and mass of the insurgency these additional forces could cause more harm than good if they fail to effectively protect civilians and defeat Al-Shabaab. Even if these forces do see military victories they fail to approach the underlying causes of the insurgency. If the inhabitants of Cabo Delgado continue to feel neglected and marginalised by the state at the expense of foreign companies it is unlikely the violence will come to an end, especially if the FADM continues abusing the population it is meant to protect. Greater efforts will be needed to provide both physical and human security for the region if the risk of piracy is to be eradicated.



(29) Kelly Moss, "Crippled Capacity: How weak maritime enforcement emboldened Ansar-Al-Sunna," Centre for International Maritime Security, 2nd October 2020, <https://cimsec.org/crippled-capacity-how-weak-maritime-enforcement-emboldened-ansar-al-sunna/>

(28) Curran et al, "Violence at Sea," 103.

(29) Kelly Moss, "Crippled Capacity: How weak maritime enforcement emboldened Ansar-Al-Sunna," Centre for International Maritime Security, 2nd October 2020, <https://cimsec.org/crippled-capacity-how-weak-maritime-enforcement-emboldened-ansar-al-sunna/>

(30) Moss, "Crippled Capacity,"

(31) Moss, "Crippled Capacity,"

(32) Naina Bhardwaj, "US deploys Green Berets to defeat ISIS-linked insurgents accused of beheading children on a new front in southern Africa," Business Insider, 20th March, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/green-berets-to-battle-isis-insurgents-accused-of-beheading-children-2021-3?r=US&IR=T>

(33) Reuters Staff, "Portugal to help Mozambique train forces against militants," Reuters, 11th December 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/mozambique-insurgency-portugal-idUSKBN28L29A>

(34) Saul Butera, Matthew Hill and Borges Nhamirre, "Rwanda Plans Mozambique Deployment to Help Fight Rebels," Bloomberg, 24th June, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-24/rwanda-plans-mozambique-deployment-to-help-fight-rebels>