



Global Islamism Monitor No. 80

July 28, 2020 Ilan I. Berman, Jacob McCarty, Jessie Kaplan

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FLASHPOINT: MOZAMBIQUE

The insurgency now raging in Mozambique's northwestern Cabo Delgado province is an ongoing conflict between Islamist militants who are attempting to establish an Islamic state and government security forces. Since October 2017, police and military infrastructure has been increasingly targeted in attacks by what experts have termed an evolving Islamist threat. The oil rich province has seen significant violence to date, including the beheadings of dissenters and the displacement of more than 150,000 residents.

Nearly three years on, the conflict plaguing the southeast African nation is expanding in scope and intensity. Local insurgent elements are gathering strength, bolstering their numbers through the recruitment of unemployed youth, army defectors, common criminals and adventure seekers. The Islamist insurgency has also fragmented, evolving into multiple groups and autonomous cells, although most are thought to have ties to *Ansar al-Sunnah* and the Islamic State's emerging African affiliates.

The militants, moreover, are changing their strategy. Rather than focusing on anti-government violence, insurgent actors have taken on social service functions such as handing out looted food to locals and criticizing government failures - and in the process ingratiating themselves with the local population. Nevertheless, these efforts to win the "hearts and minds" of Mozambiquans have been hampered by large-scale refugee flows from the area, as well as the killing of dissenters and those who refuse to be recruited to the Islamist cause. These practices have generated a humanitarian crisis - one that has proven persistent because the area is served by few international aid groups, most of which have already left the area, as well as because the country is currently beset by the coronavirus pandemic. (*The New Humanitarian*, May 28, 2020)

ISIS VERSUS AL-QAEDA IN WEST AFRICA

In the last year-and-a-half, conflict has intensified in West Africa due to the increasing tensions between militant groups in the 3,000 mile land stretch that covers Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Chad. A yearlong truce between Islamic State and al-Qaeda recently ended after violence erupted between regional affiliates of the two groups: the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM). Between March of 2019 and this spring, nearly 1,000 separate attacks were registered in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, and al-Qaeda connected attacks in the area increased by more than 50 percent.

IS and al-Qaeda nominally share the common goal of toppling Western governments and rolling back their influence in the region. As a result, experts say, the recent surge in violence between the two groups reflects local rivalries and competition more than a resumption of institutional competition. But that prospect remains; the local rivalry has drawn the attention of the leadership of both organizations, with ISIS leaders condemning al-Qaeda's regional affiliates as "apostates" who have been responsible for aiding Western "crusaders" because of the Bin Laden network's more compromising stance toward local governments, which ISIS seeks to overthrow. (*Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2020)

HEZBOLLAH'S INSIDE GAME

Israeli authorities are gleaming new information about Hezbollah's recruitment methods following the arrest and interrogation of an Israeli couple from the northern Arab town of Majd el-Kurum in early June. From information acquired during interrogations of the pair, Israel's internal security service, the Shin Bet, has uncovered a Hezbollah cell that had been attempting to recruit Israeli civilians to carry out terrorist activities inside the country. The Lebanese militia reportedly recruited the husband and wife team, both of whom were employed by the Hezbollah-affiliated *Al-Ahkbār* newspaper, over the past decade to enlist sympathetic Israel Arabs to the group's cause. (*Jerusalem Post*, June 30, 2020)