

ISIS-Linked Militants in Mozambique Recruiting Youth with Fraudulent Business Loans



Mocimboa da Praia, VOA Português.

Source: Venâncio Miguel, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mocimboa_da_Praia,_VOA_Portugu%C3%AAs.jpg, CC x 2.0

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 5 April the Portuguese-language publication *jornaltornado.pt*, which attempts to be ideologically neutral, published the excerpted article by former Portuguese Socialist Party politician Paolu Casaca. In the article, Casaca discussed the ongoing violence by fighters in northern Mozambique loyal to ISIS operating under the moniker of al-Shabaab, not to be confused with the better known Somalia-based terrorist group of the same name. In the article, Casaca assessed the reasons why the Mozambican jihadists had succeeded in financing and recruiting so rapidly.

The article suggested that the ISIS-loyal fighters began obtaining funding from illegal networks that smuggle ivory and diamonds from within the East Africa region and timber from China that arrived at Mozambican ports. In turn, the group's leaders used that money to recruit youth at mosques and Islamic schools by offering loans for purchasing fishing boats, small shops, or building tools that recruits could use to start their own businesses. This enabled the Mozambican al-Shabaab leadership to build an increasingly widespread movement. The article claimed, however, that before major attacks, those who received a loan were required to sell their businesses and equipment and provide their profits to the leadership to fund future attacks. Anyone who disobeyed these orders would be killed. Such claims are consistent with another 6 April article in Portuguese-language *omrmz.org*, which is a nonprofit publication in Mozambique that covers rural affairs. It found from interviews with al-Shabaab members that the group's leaders recruited youth living in a state deprivation and therefore willing to take any support the leaders could provide.

The *jornaltornado.pt* article concludes that the dual factors of ideological indoctrination and financing in northern Mozambique are part of a broader phenomenon that must be tackled in order to defeat the ISIS-loyal fighters in the country. In a country like Mozambique that is already fragile, Casaca argues that ignoring these factors is a recipe for failure.

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Source: “Jihad avança em Moçambique (Jihad advances in Mozambique),” *jornaltornado.pt* (local Portuguese language publication considered neutral), 5 April 2021. <https://www.jornaltornado.pt/jihad-avanca-em-mocambique/>

A report by an international organization specializing in the study of the relationship between crime and terrorism (The Global Initiative to Combat Transnational Organized Crime, which uses the English-language acronym GIATOC) in October 2018 already predicted an evolution of jihad in Mozambique very similar to the one that has been validated. The plundering of natural resources, especially wood smuggled to China, but also ivory from illegally slaughtered elephants and diamonds, and the drug and refugee trafficking that flourished even before the start of jihad, was a good breeding ground for financing the jihadist network. Ideological indoctrination began with the arrival of Somali jihad refugees in 2006, when the jihadists no longer directly controlled Mogadishu. The jihadists known as ‘al-Shabaab’ were also known by the same name in Mozambique.

The recruitment method followed was already based on microcredit: the first leaders of al-Shabaab began to recruit young people at their mosques and madrassas by offering investment loans. These loans could be invested in any sector of interest and all new sect adherents moved into business. Some bought new boats for fishing, some started small shops selling food and consumer goods, and others settled into auto repair or the sale of building materials or power tools. When the time came, recruits were required to sell the acquired assets, presumably to finance the attacks. Those who disobeyed were punished.

Jihadist indoctrination is the essential element to take into account before the phenomenon increases. Jihad in Mozambique is also the result of a state of extreme fragility of Mozambique.

“Caracterização e organização social dos Machababos (Characterization and social organization of Machababos),” omrmz.org (non-profit publication in Mozambique that covers rural affairs), 6 April 2021. <https://omrmz.org/omrweb/publicacoes/or-109/>.

The messianic promise of social order combined with the distribution of concrete benefits – food, clothing, and protection – had a seductive effect on vulnerable populations, especially in a scenario of violence, great social precariousness, and food insecurity.