



**SECURITY ASSESSMENT OF**

**RENAMO ACTIVITY**

**IN**

**CENTRAL MOZAMBIQUE**

30 June 2016

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## **Executive Summary**

Tension between the ruling Mozambican government and the armed militia wing of the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) opposition party increased over the first half of 2016, continuing to manifest itself through guerilla violence. The most tangible effect of this increased tension has been armed attacks by RENAMO personnel targeting police, military, and civilian vehicles traveling on roadways in the central provinces of Sofala, Manica, Tete, and Zambezia. As a result of attacks by suspected RENAMO militiamen on vehicles, the Mozambican government has implemented heightened security measures in the affected areas, including instituting mandatory armed security escorts for convoys of vehicles traveling on particularly dangerous stretches of highways in central Mozambique, including along the EN1 and EN7 highways.

## **Background**

In early December 2015, a constitutional amendment proposed by RENAMO that aimed to give the opposition party more power in localities where it is most popular was struck down by Parliament. Next, tensions further escalated following an apparent assassination attempt against RENAMO General Secretary Manuel Bissopo on 20 January 2016 in the city of Beira, Sofala Province. RENAMO leaders immediately accused the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) party of directing the assassination attempt, which wounded Bissopo and left his driver dead. RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama further stoked tensions when he announced that his armed supporters would “democratically” seize control of six northern and central provinces—Sofala, Manica, Zambezia, Tete, Nampula, and Niassa—beginning on 1 April 2016.

The tensions between RENAMO and the Mozambican government escalated to more outright violence beginning in February 2016. On 8 February, RENAMO militia leaders announced they would establish roadblocks and checkpoints along the main EN1, EN6, and EN7 highways in Sofala Province and other areas of central Mozambique in an effort to disrupt overland travel. Shortly after establishing roadblocks, RENAMO gunmen began opening fire on vehicles suspected of transporting government troops. The first attack along the Save–Muxungue stretch of EN1 highway occurred three days later, on 11 February. Several subsequent attacks occurred along EN1 in Sofala Province in the following weeks and months, the majority of which targeted passenger buses, commercial trucks, and/or police vehicles.

## Government Response

In response to the attacks and ambushes along highways in central Mozambique, police and military authorities have implemented mandatory, scheduled escorts for convoys of vehicles traveling on two particularly vulnerable stretches of **EN1** highway and, more recently, a stretch of **EN7** (red on attached map). On EN1, the convoy system has been instituted on a 95 kilometer (60 mile) long stretch of road between the **Save River** and the village of **Muxungue**, and on a 110 kilometer (70 mile) long section between **Nhamapadza** and **Caia** further to the north. Along these sections of EN1, two scheduled convoys of vehicles typically operate in each direction every day. The convoys only operate during the day and travel at night is highly discouraged. According to local accounts, on the busier Save–Muxungue route, the first escorted convoy typically departs Save at 07:00 local time and reaches Muxungue at about 08:45. The return convoy leaves Muxungue at 09:00. In the afternoon, the convoy leaves Save at around 14:00 and the return convoy leaves Muxungue at 17:00. The convoys can often include up to 100 commercial and passenger vehicles plus armed police and military vehicles. The armed escort system was similarly introduced in the summer of 2014 along the same stretch of road due to low-level insurgency by RENAMO militiamen.

On 12 June 2016, Mozambican authorities initiated another mandatory armed escort policy for a section of EN7 highway to the west, closer to the Zimbabwean border. Under the new policy, armed escorts are required on the roughly 270-kilometer (168-mile) stretch of **EN7** between the town of **Vanduzi** and the **Luenha River**, which serves as the border between Manica province and Tete province to the north.

In addition to implementing armed highway escort measures along sensitive roads, Mozambican security forces have begun offensive operations against RENAMO elements. In April 2016, Mozambican military forces initiated an offensive in the Gorongosa area against a RENAMO base where RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama is believed to be residing at a hidden headquarters. Similar offensive raids on RENAMO bases and strongholds are likely in Sofala province and the surrounding areas.

## Analysis

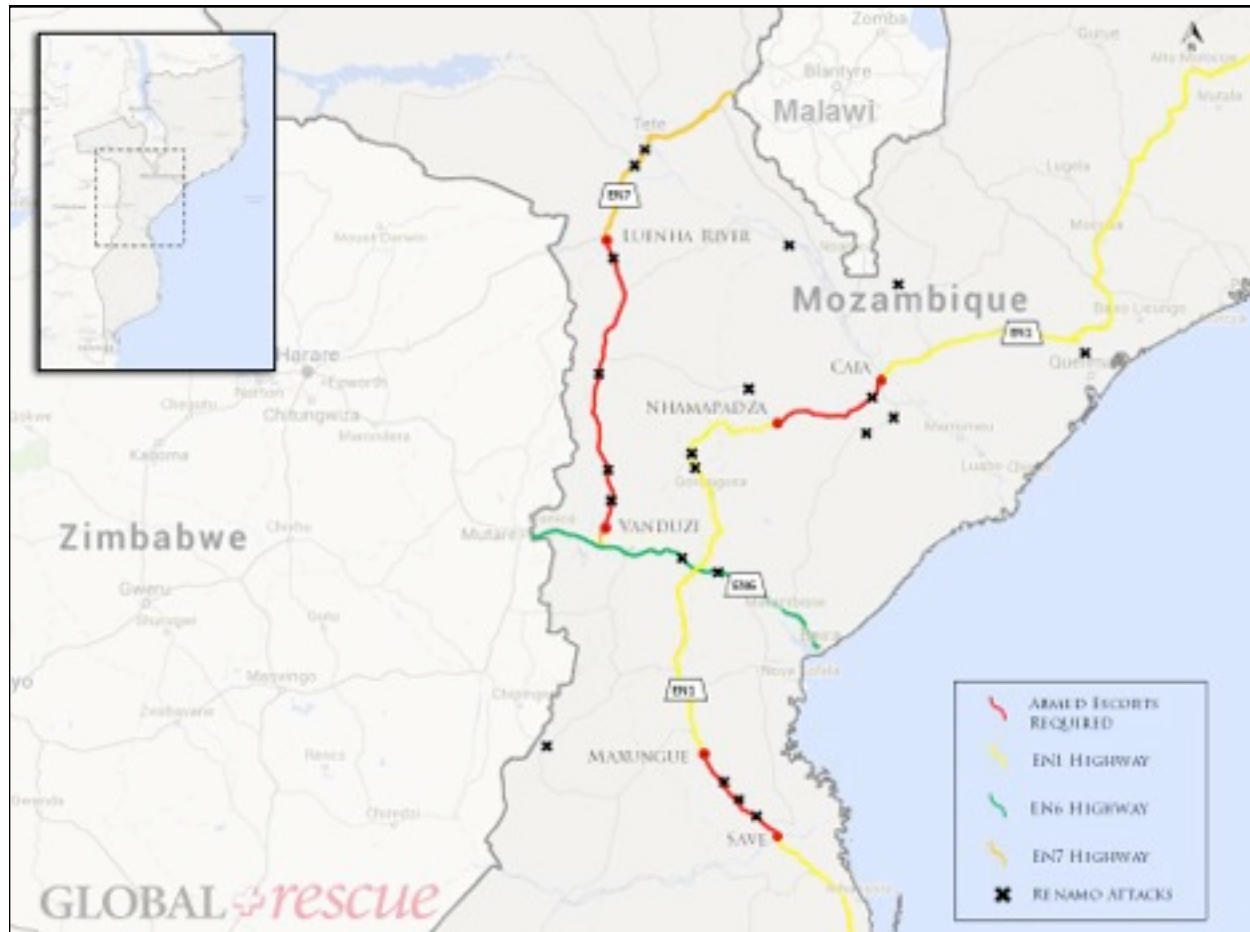
While the police convoy system has reduced the number of RENAMO ambushes and attacks along the two vulnerable stretches of EN1, attacks have nonetheless continued to occur, albeit at a reduced rate. Convoys have been fatally attacked on the Save–Muxungue road despite the presence of police and military escorts. RENAMO members have also increased their use of sabotage along EN1 highway, leading to an increase in travel disruptions due to infrastructure damage. Ambushes and attacks by RENAMO militiamen have also occurred on highways outside of the aforementioned stretches of

EN1 in recent weeks. The most notable area of attacks outside of EN1 has been the Honde area of Báruè district, in the western Manica Province, along the EN7 highway.

According to Mozambican government statistics, between October 2015 and the end of June 2016 there have been 107 separate RENAMO-related attacks nationwide that have killed 40 people and injured 79 others. Of the 107 attacks, 56 were recorded in Sofala province, followed by 21 in Manica, 11 in Tete, and 8 in Zambezia. A selection of recent incidents includes:

- **22 June:** Suspected RENAMO members killed a local FRELIMO secretary in Mossurize, Manica.
- **21 June:** RENAMO gunmen ambushed and robbed a group of civilian vehicles in the Cheringoma area of Sofala.
- **20 June:** Suspected RENAMO gunmen opened fire on Malawian-registered fuel trucks traveling on EN7 between Nhassacala and Macossa crossing, approximately halfway through the armed convoy route.
- **8 June:** At least one person was killed and several others were injured as RENAMO gunmen attacked five commercial trucks in Báruè district, Manica province, stealing the goods and setting the five vehicles on fire.
- **4 June:** At least two people were injured as RENAMO gunmen attacked two commercial trucks in Báruè district, Manica province, that were travelling from Tete to Chimoio, setting one of the trucks on fire.
- **27 May:** RENAMO gunmen attacked and injured two members of the riot police when they ambushed a bus near Quelimane in Zambezia province.
- **10 May:** At least 10 RENAMO gunmen ambushed a vehicle belonging to the public electricity company EDM in Inhamitanga, located in the Cheringoma district of Sofala province, stealing property. In a similar incident, RENAMO gunmen attacked a group of fishermen in Inhamitanga, also in Cheringoma district, stealing some of their possessions.
- **5 May:** RENAMO gunmen opened fire on a military vehicle travelling through Tsangano district in Tete province, killing at least three soldiers. The ambush allegedly occurred when security force personnel assigned to provide food and medicine to the local population was returning from their base in Chibaene village
- **31 March:** At least one person was injured when RENAMO forces fired on a bus traveling on EN7 near the town of Nhamatema.

There are some discernible trends in what kind of vehicles RENAMO tends to target in attacks. Mozambican military and police continue to be RENAMO's primary target. However, inter-city buses operated by "Nagi Investimentos" have been disproportionately targeted by RENAMO highway ambushes in recent months. According to RENAMO members, the Mozambican government occasionally contracts Nagi passenger buses to transport police and soldiers, therefore making them legitimate military targets. RENAMO members have also attacked police stations and posts in Sofala, Tete, Manica, Inhambane, Niassa, Nampula, and Zambezia. As such, travelers in the area are advised to avoid using Nagi buses. In addition, commercial trucks registered in Malawi that have Malawian license plates have also been disproportionately targeted, particularly along the western EN7 highway. Landlocked Malawi largely relies on overland trucks to move commercial goods to the port in Beira, Mozambique.



## Outlook

Given RENAMO's declining popularity and shrinking base of support, a return to levels of violence comparable to the 1977–1992 civil war between RENAMO and FRELIMO is highly unlikely. A return to levels of violence that the country witnessed at the peak of RENAMO attacks in 2014 is possible and cannot be ruled out. Despite claims to the contrary, RENAMO does not have the capacity to “seize power” in any Mozambican provinces like it has threatened to do. In an encouraging sign, in recent months FRELIMO and RENAMO leadership have engaged in talks aimed at establishing preconditions for future peace negotiations. Whether future negotiations will be productive remains to be seen.

Irrespective of the outcome of negotiations, beaches and tourist destinations located along the coast of Mozambique and in main cities are likely to remain unaffected by the low-level violence being carried out by RENAMO elements in central Mozambique. In the interior of the country, hunters and other individuals traveling overland in the central provinces—particularly in the inland parts of Sofala and Manica provinces—should continue to remain vigilant and exercise heightened security practices while minimizing non-essential travel along rural parts of EN1, EN6, and EN7 highways.

## Advice

- Minimize non-essential overland travel along rural parts of EN1, EN6, and EN7 highways in central Mozambique.
- While traveling in convoys, particularly on EN1 between Muxungwe and Save, avoid driving immediately in front of or behind buses as they are often the targets of attacks. Similarly, avoid allowing government soldiers or police to ride in your vehicle between checkpoints as they are often the targets of roadside attacks and ambushes.
- Travelers should carry their own redundant communications (Cell phone, Sat phone, FM radio) and follow itineraries that are shared with others such as family, lodge operators, safari operators.
- Providing itineraries and other travel information to the US Embassy American Citizens Services unit and registration with the State Department STEP program are also prudent precautions.