

# Private military companies and combating terrorism in Mozambique

*Klaudia Badzyńska*

16.04.2021



### **The article outline:**

- The government of Mozambique uses the services of the Private Military Companies (PMCs) to counteract the spread of the Ansar al-Sunna organization.
- Initially, the cooperation with foreign contractors resulted only in intensified extremist attacks.
- The activity of the private military companies mainly focuses on ad-hoc fights with the threat, without considering the broader context and the reasons for the radicalization in a given area.

### **Introduction**

Mozambique has been facing the attacks from jihadists for many years. In 2018, an Islamist extremist group, Ansar al-Sunna, started a campaign of violence against the governmental and civilian targets in Cabo Delgado, the northern province of Mozambique. Muslims form 54% of its citizens<sup>1</sup>, while the majority of Mozambique inhabitants are Christians. The group started its activity around 2017 as a religious organization, and only later it became militarized. Its first members were supporters of Aboud Rogo Mohammed, a radical Kenyan priest, who was shot in 2012. After this incident, Ansar al-Sunna has been moving into the territory of Mozambique. Although the rebels are also referred to as Al-Shabaab, they have nothing in common with a terrorist organization from Somalia with the same name.

### **The background of the conflict**

The Cabo Delgado province is home to the biggest community of Muslims in Mozambique and its terrain is rich with many profitable natural resources. The dissatisfaction within the province began to be visible in 2010, after the discovery of gas deposits, whose value is estimated at 60 million dollars<sup>2</sup>. Mozambique also has large deposits of coal and titanium, as well as agricultural and hydroelectric potential. However, the development process had its impact on the citizens, who have been forcibly relocated due to the gas pipeline construction

---

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Hanlon, *Religion is shaping Cabo Delgado civil war*; [https://www.open.ac.uk/technology/mozambique/sites/www.open.ac.uk.technology/mozambique/files/files/Mozambique\\_484-30Apr2020\\_Supplement-religion-vote.pdf](https://www.open.ac.uk/technology/mozambique/sites/www.open.ac.uk.technology/mozambique/files/files/Mozambique_484-30Apr2020_Supplement-religion-vote.pdf), accessed 30.03.21.

<sup>2</sup>Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-total-mozambique-idUSKCN24I2FZ>, accessed 30.03.21.

projects. **The initial reluctance of the President of Mozambique Filipe Nyusi towards accepting the international support and an underestimation of threat has created a fertile ground for the radical extremist Islamic groups, and valuable natural resources have become one of the main targets of terrorists.** Despite the rich mineral resources in Cabo Delgado, the marginalization of the Muslim population, which forms a majority in this region, has also played a vital role in inciting the rebels<sup>3</sup>.

The Ansar al-Sunna has gradually extended its presence in the region by conducting its first attack on a police station in Mocimboa da Praia in October 2017. In 2019, it became a part of the so-called Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP)<sup>4</sup>. The dynamic development of this terrorist organization is connected with its methods of operation and acquiring new members. The combatants build relationships with the local community, and then they take advantage of their position to influence the people. The answers of the government of Mozambique have not been adequate enough to face the scale of the problem. There has also been disturbing news about human rights violations by government forces during the interventions, which has only enhanced the local reluctance towards the administration of President Filipe Nyusi<sup>5</sup>. **The Armed Forces of Mozambique, not having proper equipment and training, attempted to suppress the terrorist activities with the help of their private military counterparts.**

### **Private military companies and the mercenaries**

**The activity of the mercenaries is prohibited by the International Convention for the Suppression of the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries introduced in 1989 by UNO. Although the character and scope of the private companies' activities evoke associations with the mercenary activities, no binding definition has been yet agreed that would confirm or disprove this assumption. According to the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, "a mercenary is any person**

---

<sup>3</sup>Foreign Policy, *Mozambique's Insurgency Is a Regional Problem*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/01/mozambique-islamist-insurgency-regional-problem-cabo-delgado/>, accessed 13.04.21.

<sup>4</sup>Sky News, *Mozambique conflict: Why will one million people have been forced to flee their homes?* <https://news.sky.com/story/mozambique-conflict-why-have-500-000-people-been-forced-to-flee-their-homes-12209615>, accessed 01.04.21.

<sup>5</sup>Amnesty International, *War crimes in Mozambique's forgotten cape*, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR4135452021ENGLISH.PDF>, accessed 13.04.21.

**who fights in an armed conflict, is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict, is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict and is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party”<sup>6</sup>.**

Private military companies are in turn legal entities, which provide a professional service, in general hiring retired, well-trained soldiers, considered to be experts on the matters connected with the military. **The companies mediate between the government and professional soldiers, thereby particular units are not directly contracted by the government.** The services offered by the companies cover a comprehensive scope of activities, starting with logistic activities, through the security of military objects or civil servants, to escorting convoys with humanitarian funds and training local security forces. They often provide security to private corporations dealing with the mining industry (mainly oil and diamonds), particularly in Africa.

In 2008, the Montreux Document was introduced, signed by the majority of governments using the services of the private military companies. The document assumes that delegating some responsibilities by the state towards PMCs is acceptable. On the other hand, the document orders the countries that hire private military subjects to supervise them and monitor their activity. At the same time, the state’s responsibility has been clearly separated from the PCMs responsibility arising from the violations of international humanitarian and human rights<sup>7</sup>. Despite an entry in the Montreux Document, which prohibits the use of private companies for direct participation in an armed conflict<sup>8</sup>, it has not been possible to develop comprehensive regulations, which would be able to fully define the international PMCs status<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup>Additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions of August 12th, 1949 <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/6a78d9/pdf/>, accessed 03.04.21.

<sup>7</sup>A. Foong, *The Privatization of War: From Privateers and Mercenaries to Private Military and Security Companies*, “Asia Pacific Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law” 2008–2011, pp. 231–232.

<sup>8</sup>International Committee of the Red Cross, *The Montreux Document*, [https://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/135841/montreux\\_document\\_en.pdf/](https://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/135841/montreux_document_en.pdf/), accessed 03.04.21.

<sup>9</sup>Kacper Mirosław Milkowski, 2017, *Status prawny prywatnych firm wojskowych a zaangażowanie we współczesne konflikty zbrojne – komercjalizacja wojny?* [http://www.pedkat.pl/images/ksiazki/Wsp%C3%B3%B3%C5%82czesne\\_zagro%C5%BCenia\\_-\\_naturalne\\_i\\_cywilizacyjne.pdf#page=562](http://www.pedkat.pl/images/ksiazki/Wsp%C3%B3%B3%C5%82czesne_zagro%C5%BCenia_-_naturalne_i_cywilizacyjne.pdf#page=562), accessed 13.04.21.

In 1993, a private military company Executive Outcome (EO) was hired by the government of Angola to recapture the deposits areas of petroleum from the guerrilla UNITA<sup>10</sup>. The operation was successful, which resulted in a long-term Angolan government contract, covering the army training and direct military operations. However, the Executive Outcome has never managed to liberate itself from its mercenary identity. Its actions, no matter how short-term, effective and professional, have never become an antidote to the complex problems of the countries consumed by the conflict. This is confirmed by the fact that shortly after the withdrawal of EO divisions from Sierra Leone, the country has again stumbled into the civil war. **What is more, the services of the military companies are mainly provided during the crises of the state and law, and such a state undoubtedly contributes to gainprofits from these subjects, disproportionate to the degree of involvement and cost incurred.**

### **The Wagner's group**

In September 2019, forces of the Wagner's group were deployed in Mozambique to counteract the rebels from Ansar al-Sunna. This company has been started by Yevgeny Prigozhin - a long-time ally of the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin. **Wagner's group can be perceived as an instrument of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. The operating distance of the group extends over, among others, Sudan, Libia, Central African Republic, and Syria.** The Prigozhin's corporations had been already sanctioned earlier by the United States Department of the Treasury for their actions in Syria, and the Internet Research Agency, financed by him, was responsible for the attempts to interfere in the election in the USA in 2016<sup>11</sup>. The deployment of the Russian counterparts in 2019 took place after the visit of the President of Mozambique Filipe Nyusi in Moscow, during which the agreements allowing Russian companies to extract liquified natural gas have been signed<sup>12</sup>.

At the end of 2019, Ansar al-Sunna, in two separate acts, killed seven workers of the Russian group and 20 soldiers of the local army. **The ineffectiveness of Wagner's forces in**

---

<sup>10</sup>The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

<sup>11</sup>CNN, *Russian mercenaries fight shadowy battle in gas-rich Mozambique*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/29/africa/russian-mercenaries-mozambique-intl/index.html>, accessed 02.04.21.

<sup>12</sup>Geopolitical Monitor, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/russian-mercenaries-a-string-of-failures-in-africa/>, accessed 02.04.21.

**combating jihadist rebellion has led to the decision of the Mozambique government to withdraw the group from the region. Their failure has mainly resulted from the lack of knowledge about the local culture and from the reluctance to cooperate with the Mozambique army<sup>13</sup>.**

### **Dyck Advisory Group (DAG)**

To substitute the Wagner's Group, Mozambique has hired the Dyck Advisory Group company, whose main aim was to conduct raids on Ansar al-Sunna positions in Cabo Delgado. Despite certain failures, the air support provided by the DAG has effectively prevented the rebels from taking strategic positions along the country's coast. In July 2020, the government of Mozambique prolonged the contract with DAG for another 8 months, during which the company provided not only operational support in the field but also training support for the Mozambique forces<sup>14</sup>.

DAG already had experience in operating in the field, however, like in the case of the Russian group, the beginning of its activity in Mozambique has not been the easiest. During the first few weeks, as a result of firing, the group lost a helicopter and a reconnaissance aircraft. However, DAG cooperated with the governmental sources, and the support given by the company was helpful to prevent further movements of Ansar al-Sunna to the key cities.

**Dyck Advisory Group has met criticism from, among others, Amnesty International. In its report, the organization accused both the government of Mozambique and the rebels of war crimes against humanity, including murdering, tortures, and abductions<sup>15</sup>.** Mozambique has denied these allegations, as though the soldiers have committed such cruelties, claiming that the crimes were committed by the Islamist insurgents pretending to be soldiers. The non-governmental organization also accuses DAG workers of firing at civilians while prosecuting suspected combatants. It is suspected that the contract with the private

---

<sup>13</sup>The Moscow Times, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/31/7-kremlin-linked-mercenaries-killed-in-mozambique-in-october-sources-a67996>, accessed 04.04.21.

<sup>14</sup>Global Risk Insights, *Mozambique and the Fight Against Insurgency*, <https://globalriskinsights.com/2021/02/too-many-mercenaries-in-mozambique/>, accessed 04.04.21.

<sup>15</sup>Amnesty International, *Mozambique: Civilians killed as war crimes committed by armed group, government forces, and private military contractors – new report*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/mozambique-civilians-killed-as-war-crimes-committed-by-armed-group-government-forces-and-private-military-contractors-new-report/>, accessed 04.04.21.

military company from CAR has been suspended, but the government of Mozambique has not officially confirmed this report<sup>16</sup>.

### **The Paramount Group**

**Mozambique has also cooperated with the Paramount Group, a global company of the aviation and technology industry, with its headquarters in the ARC. The company does not provide personnel, it only ensures the equipment and training. Although the additional support provided by the Paramount Group is necessary for combating terrorism, it raises further questions concerning the supplying process and organization of the defense forces in Mozambique. The company has been assigned to cooperate with the Defence Department of Mozambique, while the Dyck Advisory Group cooperated with the state police<sup>17</sup>. Then the two pillars of security in Mozambique currently use the services of competitive companies, to obtain the same resources in the form of training and equipment for the needs of the same conflict<sup>18</sup>.**

### **Profit and loss statement**

**The decision of the Mozambique government on combating extremism with the use of private companies has only brought the opposite effect to the one intended, and even minimal success in restraining the spread of uprising in some key cities has been noted, the military operations have not influenced the root causes, which had resulted in Ansar al-Sunna appearing.** Quite the contrary, the deployment of military units caused the mobilization of terrorist groups and a change in the fight tactics, which has translated into more brutal attacks. The lack of transparency characterizing private military companies has also posed a difficulty for the effective information sharing process for the state and regional institutions. Moreover, the defense forces of Mozambique have turned out to be poorly equipped and not trained to fight with the extremists.

---

<sup>16</sup>BBC, *Mozambique town Palma ,retaken' from militant Islamists*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56637573>, accessed 04.04.21.

<sup>17</sup>Global Risk Insights, , *Mozambique and the Fight Against Insurgency*, <https://globalriskinsights.com/2021/02/too-many-mercenaries-in-mozambique/>, accessed 04.04.21.

<sup>18</sup>Ibidem.

During the first nine months of 2020, the Ansar al-Sunna attacks doubled compared to those from 2019<sup>19</sup>. **Although Ansar al-Sunna has been primarily treated like a new group composed of the marginalized young people, a potential threat it poses for the expansion of extremism in southern-central Africa cannot be ignored, especially taking into consideration its vast evolution and strong connotations with the external terrorist network.**

**As the prolonged anti-terrorist operations in Sahel and Horn of Africa have proven, a purely militarized approach is shortsighted if it does not have a strategy, which also deals with political, religious, and ethnic causes of violence.** In the case of Mozambique, the government should then implement development and educational programs in Cabo Delgado, to solve socio-economical factors propelling extremism. There is also an urgency to face the humanitarian crisis, which resulted in 530 thousand people being internally displaced<sup>20</sup>.

## Summary

In countries, in which the private military companies work, security to an increasing extent becomes a private welfare, not a public one. **In situations of armed conflict, a return to the public order can be only achieved when the country's legitimacy will be restored, and its ability to maintain the order and the security of the population will be well-established.** It seems implausible when ensuring safety remains in the hands of the private subjects. The main arguments in favor of using the private military companies are, among others, lower costs of operations in comparison to a regular army, greater availability, self-sufficiency, and mobility<sup>21</sup>.

Using private military forces in peace-keeping operations and armed interventions weakens the position of the state as a subject entitled to ensure security and to be its guarantee. **Between every commissioning party using the services of the private military forces and themselves, there occurs a significant discrepancy of interests. On the operational level,**

---

<sup>19</sup>Vigil InSight, <http://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Mozambique-Vigil-InSight-Situation-Report.pdf>, accessed 01.03.21.

<sup>20</sup>UNHCR, Legal aid project on the right to documentation for internally displaced persons in Mozambique, <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2021/2/602ba5af4/legal-aid-project-on-the-right-to-documentation-for-internally-displaced.html>, accessed 04.04.21.

<sup>21</sup> R. Uessler, Warsaw 2008, *Wojna jako usługa*, op. cit., pp.17-19.

**they consistently strive to the realization of a stated objective, however, their long-term strategies and the operating principles are essentially contrary.** The private military companies concentrate on maximalizing incomes and expanding the scope of their operations. Whereas the governments and international organizations usually focus on the activities aimed at keeping long-term peace and countries' stabilization.

## Conclusions

The use of services provided by PMCs has primarily prevented degradation of, already serious, situations in Mozambique, but only temporarily. **The failure of the private military companies such as the Wagner's group, DAG, Paramount Group, and the government of Mozambique in the fight with the crisis of security sets in a new light the trend that has appeared among the rules in Sub-Saharan Africa since the '90s<sup>22</sup>. Countries often deprived of crucial military potential, to an increasing extent have relied on using private military companies to combat rebellion, civil wars, and what is most important, the security of their natural resources.** Angola, Sierra Leone, Kongo, Central Republic of Africa, Nigeria, and Uganda are examples of countries, which have used services preferred by PMCs to maintain peace. In the past, private military services as STEEP and Sanline, provided military support for many governments, often achieving significant successes<sup>23</sup>.

However, using the services of private military companies is connected with serious threats. The example of Executive Outcome operating in Angola and Sierra Leone has clearly shown that winning the armed conflicts and creating trained armies does not necessarily mean building a stable, long-term peace.

---

<sup>22</sup>Institute for Security Studies, <https://issafrica.org/chapter-3-private-military-and-security-companies-and-the-nexus-between-natural-resources-and-civil-wars-in-africa-mpako-h-foaleng>, accessed 13.04.21.

<sup>23</sup>JASON Institute, <https://jasoninstitute.com/2020/07/19/a-very-private-war-the-failure-of-mozambiques-approach-to-defeating-an-islamist-insurgency/> accessed 13.04.21.

## Bibliography

ACAPS, <https://www.acaps.org/country/mozambique/crisis/violent-insurgency-in-cabo-delgado>, accessed 03.04.21.

BBC, *Mozambique: Why IS is so hard to defeat in Mozambique*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56597861>, accessed 05.04.21.

Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Mozambique: The Problem with Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Designations*, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/mozambique-problem-foreign-terrorist-organization-fto-designations>, accessed 30.03.21.

Chr. Michelsen Institute, *War in resource-rich northern Mozambique – Six scenarios*, <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/7231-war-in-resource-rich-northern-mozambique-six-scenarios.pdf>, accessed 30.03.21.

Council on Foreign Relations, *The Military-First Approach in Northern Mozambique is Bound to Fail*, [www.cfr.org/blog/military-first-approach-northern-mozambique-bound-fail](http://www.cfr.org/blog/military-first-approach-northern-mozambique-bound-fail), accessed 30.03.21.

Eminetra, *Mozambique looks to the private sector in a war with Islamists*, <https://eminetra.com/mozambique-looks-to-the-private-sector-in-a-war-with-islamists/429956/>, accessed 03.04.21.

Energy Voice, *Mozambique, mercenaries accused of war crimes*, <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/africa/303697/mozambique-war-crimes-private/>, accessed 01.04.21.

Global Policy, *PMSCs: Risks and Misconduct*, <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/pmscs/contractor-misconduct-and-abuse.html>, accessed 30.03.21.

Global Risk Insights, <https://globalriskinsights.com/2021/02/too-many-mercenaries-in-mozambique/>, accessed 30.03.21.

Jackson Institute, *A Very Private War: The Failure of Mozambique's Approach to Defeating an Islamist Insurgency*, <https://jasoninstitute.com/2020/07/19/a-very-private-war-the-failure-of-mozambiques-approach-to-defeating-an-islamist-insurgency/>, accessed 01.04.21.

Małgorzata Zachara, 2009, *Starcie praktyki i prawa. Prywatne Firmy Wojskowe (PMC) we współczesnym systemie bezpieczeństwa*,

[https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/item/244479/zachara\\_starcie\\_praktyki\\_i\\_prawa\\_2009.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/item/244479/zachara_starcie_praktyki_i_prawa_2009.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), accessed 13.04.21.

Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies, 2016, *Private military and security companies policy in africa: regional policy stasis as agency in international politics*, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/smsajms/article/download/151279/140856>, accessed 01.04.21.

Zoe Salzman, Private military contractors and the taint of a mercenary reputation, <https://nyujilp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/40.3-Salzman.pdf>, accessed 01.04.21.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---



**Klaudia Badzyńska.** She studies international relations at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her research interests include international security, armed conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East, with a particular emphasis on ethnic conflicts.

## IF YOU VALUE THE INSTITUTE OF NEW EUROPE'S WORK, BECOME ONE OF ITS DONORS!

Funds received will allow us to finance further publications.

You can contribute by making donations to INE's bank account:

95 2530 0008 2090 1053 7214 0001

with the following payment title: „darowizna na cele statutowe”