



Russia Strengthens Military Ties with Mozambique

OE Watch Commentary: Military ties between Russia and Mozambique were on full display recently when a Russian Air Force An-124 transport aircraft unloaded a Mi-17 helicopter as well as other equipment in the southern African country. As the accompanying passage from the South African website *DefenceWeb* reports, the transport aircraft left Eastern Europe on 24 September, unloaded its cargo in the northern port city of Nacala on 25 September, and headed home the following day.

It is difficult to know the full extent of Russian involvement in Mozambique. Mozambican papers reported that there were at least 160 Russian military personnel in the Cabo Delgado Province to help prevent attacks in the region from an Islamist group, Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama, also known as Ansar al-Sunna. The Russian embassy, however, denied reports of Russian soldiers operating in Cabo Delgado.

Despite the uncertainties about the extent of Russian involvement in Mozambique, they are involved. The two countries signed a resolution allowing Russian military vessels to dock at Mozambican ports, with Russian military equipment now being observed at these locations. There are also security agreements providing for the Russians to train Mozambican military forces, and Russian advisors have reportedly already been deployed to the country.

Russian ties to Mozambique extend beyond just military ones. Following the devastation of Cyclone Idai, Russia provided disaster relief. It also forgave 95% of Mozambique's debt, and Russian oil producer Rosneft signed an energy deal with the country, providing much-needed investment.

The Russian-Mozambique partnership appears to be strengthening as mutual benefits accrue. One aspect that will be particularly interesting to observe in the long term is its impact on Ansar al-Sunna. As the article mentions, Russian advisors and equipment will help strengthen the Mozambican military's capabilities against them. Furthermore, given that the terrorist group often recruits members from the country's large pool of unemployed young people, Russian financial assistance and investment may cause a decline in those numbers, by potentially facilitating employment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



With military ties strengthening, Russia recently delivered an Mi-17 helicopter similar to this one to Mozambique.

Source: Parfaits via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mil_MI-17,_Russia_-_Air_Force_AN1738473.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0

“A Russian Air Force An-124 transport aircraft has delivered an Mi-17 helicopter and other equipment to Mozambique as reports continue to indicate Russian military activity in the southern African country.”

Source: “Russian military hardware delivered to Mozambique,” *DefenceWeb (South Africa)*, 29 September 2019. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/russian-military-hardware-delivered-to-mozambique/>

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Whilst Russian soldiers may indeed be deployed to Mozambique, experts have not ruled out that personnel and equipment may be from a private military contractor. In November 2018 the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) reported that Mozambique's government was handing over security responsibilities in Cabo Delgado to a private security company.

Since 2017 there have been dozens of attacks in Mozambique, mainly focused on the Cabo Delgado region, with hundreds killed. According to the Institute for Security Studies, the upsurge in brutal violence in northern Mozambique, including the beheadings of women and children, has sounded alarms that a violent jihadist movement like Boko Haram or al-Shabaab could be evolving. Those allegedly responsible for the attacks apparently call themselves Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (often abbreviated to al-Sunnah).