

Decoding the Drug Economy and Rising Maritime Terrorism in Mozambique: India's Interests and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The growth of maritime terrorism in Mozambique and a significant rise in drug trafficking along the East African coast is a worrisome combination for the domestic and international agencies involved in maintaining peace, security and stability in the region. The discovery of a vast amount of natural gas reserves in the region has attracted massive investments from worldwide, including India. Therefore the Islamist insurgency in the northern province of Mozambique presents grave challenges to India's core national interests. The grey areas in which these transnational criminal networks operate necessitate a more informed evaluation of the possibilities of the terrorism-narcotics trade nexus. However, minimal empirical evidence is available to suggest a direct linkage between the proceeds of drug trafficking is being used by extremist groups like Al-Shabab or Alu Sunna Wa-Jama'a (ASWJ) operating in the region. Against this backdrop, this article aims to connect the dots of a plausible nexus between the two and argues that a holistic approach is needed to understand and address the intersectionality of the non-traditional and transnational security threat the region forecasts.

Keywords: maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, western Indian Ocean, Mozambique channel, India, energy security

Introduction: Mozambique Channel a Security Hotspot

The escalating insecurity fuelled by the insurgent group Al-Shabab or Alu Sunna Wa-Jama'a (ASWJ) in northern Mozambique adds to the growing concerns of violence "at", "from" and "through" the seas in the Mozambique Channel, a critical transit route for global and regional trade and energy flow. Spanning between Madagascar and East Africa, the 1600 km long Mozambique Channel encompasses the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of several countries like Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Comoros, and France (Mayotte).¹ Situated on the "arc of energy",² the Mozambique Channel has some of the world's largest natural gas reserves. This has attracted massive investment from international companies such as Anadarko, Eni, TotalEnergies, ExxonMobil, BP, Shell, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC Videsh Ltd., among others, for exploration and exploitation of the natural gas reserves.^{3,4} However, the terror group ASWJ operating in the region has not only led to the disruption⁵ of exploration activities but has also made the maritime space vulnerable to the illicit flow of drugs and weapons. Although linkages between terrorism and the illicit drug trade are widely recognised by international agencies like the United Nations Security Council

(UNSC)⁶, a direct link between the illicit drug economy and ASWJ in Mozambique is missing due to the lack of empirical evidence. “While it is difficult to establish how widely terrorist groups are involved in the illicit drug trade, or the breadth and nature of cooperation between these two criminal groups, the magnitude of the numbers involved make the relationship worrisome.”⁷

The insurgency has reshaped the course of the flow of drugs, using the island states bordering the Mozambique Channel as a transshipment hub in the trafficking network.⁸ Therefore, the illicit financial flows become the ‘grey areas’ that fund the operations of terror outfits such as the ASWJ, which has reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS/) since 2019⁹, enhancing their tactical capacity to attack installations both ashore and offshore. The attack on the coastal town of Palma in the northern province of Cabo Delgado on March 24, 2021, demonstrated their capability to exploit seas for operational purposes.

According to a report released by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, “it appears that ASWJ has carved out an area of influence in Cabo Delgado that includes key landing sites for illicit trafficking on the coast and an important section of the main north-south tar road”¹⁰ allowing them to benefit out of the narco-trade. Against this backdrop, this paper has tried to examine the plausible link between narco-trade and maritime terrorism in the region. It has also looked at the ramifications of ASWJ’s capability to use the sea for operational purposes exploiting the limited maritime enforcement capacity and capabilities of the nearby island and coastal states bordering the Mozambique Channel. Lastly, the paper has examined India’s interest in the region and concludes with possible responses to meet the challenge.

The Mozambique Channel: An Arc of “Energy, Instability and Conflict”

The Mozambique Channel is located on what can be termed the “arc of energy” (with the discovery of a vast reserve of extractive energy resources along the east African coast), “instability and conflict” (as the region hosts several weak and fragile States). The discovery of a substantial amount of natural gas reserves in Area 1 and Area 4 of Mozambique’s deep-water Rovuma Basin in the northern part of the Mozambique Channel¹¹ has placed the region on the *arc of energy* — which extends from West Asia to the Eastern Coast of Africa. Mozambique currently holds 100 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of proven natural gas reserves and is the third-largest holder of proven natural gas reserves in Africa after Nigeria and Algeria. Mozambique produced 212 billion cubic feet (Bcf) and exported 148 Bcf of natural gas in 2018.¹² The offshore and deep-water recoverable natural gas reserves have led to a massive inflow of investments from the major actors in the field. Italy-based Eni is constructing an ultra-deep-water floating liquefied natural gas (FLNG) facility to process the natural gas produced in the Carol field, located in Area 4, with a capacity to process up to 447 million cubic feet of natural gas per day (MMcf/d). The waters of the Mozambique channel are becoming a major security hotspot. The development of major offshore energy projects and gas fields close to the Cabo Delgado in

the northern province of Mozambique, which is at the centre of violent extremism spilling into the maritime domain of the western Indian ocean. France-based TotalEnergies, which has hugely invested in Mozambique's liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, declared "*force majeure*" owing to the evolving security situation and repeated militant attacks by ASWJ terror group on Mocimboa da Praia, a port town not far from TotalEnergies's LNG project, since March 2020 that has led to the withdrawal of Total Energies from all Mozambique LNG projects.¹³ The instability caused by the violent insurgency and conflict in Northern Mozambique is having ripple effects in the region far beyond Mozambique's continental borders.

The Mozambique Channel is a strategic shipping route and a critical chokepoint that accounts for 30 per cent of the global tanker traffic and is also home to some of the world's richest fishing grounds, where tuna fishing alone accounts for 2 billion USD in revenue annually.¹⁴ In addition, the discovery of vast reserves of natural gas has brought the region to the forefront of global security thought due to the severe non-traditional security threats it faces. Therefore, the Mozambique channel on the arc of energy, instability and conflict has created a favourable environment for non-state actors and transnational crime networks to exploit the region's fragility for their operations.¹⁵ Furthermore, the region with historical fault lines spilling into territorial and other disputes plays out in the construction of this hypothetical geographical curve called the arc of instability and conflict. The level of political stability, governance, ethnic and sectarian tensions, demographic stresses and differing pace of economic growth creates a mix of opportunities and risks in the region. A closer assessment of the evolving geopolitical environment indicates that most countries present in the region are affected by several security challenges, which have the potential to create an existential crisis in these states. The ongoing conflict in Yemen and Syria, in the West Asian region, located at the crossroads of three continents; Africa, Asia and Europe, presents severe consequences to the neighbours and beyond, disrupting lives and livelihoods. Pakistan is facing internal economic stress that can create shockwaves that will impact its political stability giving its army – which remains an extra-constitutional authority that aids non-state actors and provides them safe passage into the maritime domain – political control that will have severe ramifications on the peace and security in the region.¹⁶ The return of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, unstable Iraq, the ongoing conflict in Somalia and the current ASWJ insurgency in northern Mozambique are adding to the multiple and complex layers of vulnerability the region faces. The Al-Shabaab militant group remains focused on recapturing power in Somalia and continues to plot attacks in Kenya and Tanzania,¹⁷ Comoros (trying to consolidate political stability achieved after prolonged years of coup and conflict¹⁸), and Madagascar are facing extreme internal pressures and instability, which has a spillover effect in the entire region.

The region resting on the arc of energy and instabilities gives rise to various geostrategic concerns. The politically fragile region breeds hostility and violent conflict, which is a direct threat to human security and regional stability. This hostile environment, coupled with extreme poverty, compounds the threat of piracy and terrorism, which have a direct impact on the region. Therefore, the presence of weak and fragile states coupled with violent non-state actors has a severe bearing on the manifestation of non-traditional threats that the region is facing.

Maritime Terrorism: Mozambique's Growing Insurgency in the Maritime Domain

Extremists and terrorist groups across the world are exploiting the gaps and weaknesses in maritime security architecture to expand their operational outreach and forward their vested interests. These extremist groups exploit the sea blindness and limited maritime capacities and capabilities of the East African littoral and island states to smuggle fighters and weapons. They plan attacks on marine targets and fund their activities through illegal trafficking and taxation schemes. The launch Global War on Terror campaign in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attack unveiled a new form of terrorism to the world — maritime terrorism, which has emerged as a major security challenge throughout the Western Indian Ocean region in the 21st century. Terrorist groups operating on the high seas are not a new threat; various terrorist organisations have—or have had—well-developed capabilities to attack targets at sea. In addition to November 2008, Mumbai terror attack; the attack on the USS Cole (on October 12, 2000, by Al Qaeda suicide bombers who rammed their explosives-laden dingy into the naval ship, killing 17 US service members)¹⁹; *M/V Limburg* (on October 2002 when terrorists attacked the French oil tanker, *killing* 16 people and injuring many others, which also led to an environmental disaster in the Gulf of Aden due to the massive oil spill caused by the attack)²⁰; and the recent ASWJ attack in the Mozambique Channel has reinvigorated the need for ending the sea-blindness of governments in the region.

However, the difficulties of defending the marine sector are widely acknowledged in academic and policy circles, and establishing robust and effective capabilities to counter maritime threats remains a complex task. In order to have a better understanding of the specifics behind how these violent non-state actors use the maritime domain requires a clear understanding of the term maritime terrorism. The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) defines maritime terrorism as “the undertaking of terrorist acts and activities within the maritime environment, using or against vessels or fixed platforms at sea, or in port; or against any one of their passengers or personnel, against coastal facilities or settlements, including tourist resorts, port areas and port towns or cities”²¹ From the operational point of view, maritime terrorism can be understood based on the utilisation of maritime space and the selection of targets. The maritime space has often been used as a medium for terror groups to wage attacks on land-based targets (sic Mumbai attacks on November 26, 2008).²² The maritime space also serves as an end where they target maritime installations and infrastructure to expand their interests and operations and exploit the ungoverned spaces. The 2017 attack of ASWJ extremist groups on coastal facilities and towns, violence at sea, attacking vessels, hijacking and taking hostages fits into the latter category.²³

Situating the Actor: Alu Sunna Wa-Jama'a (ASWJ)

The Islamist insurgency in Mozambique by Islamist jihadists group apparently seeking to establish a breakaway regime has escalated violent conflict in Cabo Delgado, a Muslim-

majority province bordering Tanzania. The conflict has affected the lives and livelihood of people and destabilised the region, which otherwise would have prospered by the influx of massive investment in the exploration and extraction of natural gas reserves discovered in 2011. The jihadist group is known by several names, including Alu Sunna Wa-Jama'a (ASWJ), Ansar al-Sunnah, ISIS– Mozambique and al-Shabaab (though it has no connection to al-Shabaab in East Africa).²⁴ The ASWJ comprises of native and foreign fighters attempting to seize the coastal town of Cabo Delgado. Since 2017, the group has waged several attacks that led to the loss of 3100 lives and displaced at least 800,000 people.²⁵ Since 2019, the ASWJ has reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS) Central Africa Province (ISCAP)²⁶, which is advancing its political goals. This association can translate ASWJ into a more structured terror outfit with improved assistance and training from ISIS. But, as of now, ISIS seems to be using ASWJ's narrative to promote its expansion further deep into the region having huge extractive energy resources.

ASWJ has shown strong capability and intent to utilise the sea for operational activities since March 2020. The terror outfit is constantly using boats and vessels to carry out amphibious assaults and transport fighters and supplies, as indicated by the August 2020 raid in Mocimboa da Praia, in which ASWJ fighters purportedly sunk an HSI-32 Interceptor patrol vessel with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG).²⁷ The ASWJ is now growing in strength to expand its area of operations. The attack on the Quirimbas Archipelago's neighbouring islands has formed a core part of its broader maritime expansion strategy. This, many analysts argue, has allowed the outfit to obtain control over the drug trafficking routes that have become one of the important sources of finance and import of foreign fighters to them.^{28,29}

Geographical proximity plays a significant role in ASWJ's maritime expansion. It provides them with island-hopping tactics that play out well in avoiding retaliatory actions from the security forces. A case in point is the distance between Mocimboa da Praia and Ilha Metundo island is 20 nautical miles (nm), while the island of Ilha Vamize is just 8 nm away from Ilha Metundo, which allows the ASWJ insurgents to carry out multiple strikes and return to the safety of these ungoverned and uninhabited island territories.³⁰ An alarming development is that ASWJ members are taking to hijacking and armed robbery at sea, which was the first of its kind incident concerning the ASWJ insurgency in the region. For example, between November 23-26, 2020, the ASWJ members attacked sailboats in the Mozambique Channel off Palma and Mocimboa da Praia, capturing at least seven sailboats and taking 20 passengers hostage.³¹ Incidents of this nature do not necessarily mean that the insurgent has the capacity to attack targets larger than sailboats. However, it shows the intent and poses a serious concern for security agencies to take note of such cases. Therefore, the geographical expansion of ASWJ towards the maritime zones of the Mozambique Channel showcases that the insurgent groups are augmenting their control over the key transit routes used by the trafficking network. These coastal towns would allow them to control the primary passageway of the drug trafficking network from Afghanistan to East Africa, Europe and the USA.

Decoding the Linkage between Drug Economy and Maritime Terrorism

Terrorists and insurgent groups are steadily turning to transnational organised crime (TOC) networks, particularly drug trafficking, to generate funding and acquire logistical support to carry out their violent acts. The ASWJ insurgent group operating in the region is no exception to such a trend. It is not only expanding its operations in the maritime domain but is also diversifying its activities to take control of the drug trafficking network resulting in the convergence of interest of these non-state actors. The illicit drug production, trafficking and consumption are linked to the growth of transnational organised crime networks that aid and promote illegal financial flows and terror financing to insurgent groups all over the globe. The United Nations Office on Drug Control's (UNODC) representative in Mozambique, Mr Cesar Guedes has clearly pointed out the main reason for conflict in Cabo Delgado province is the heroin trafficking that enters Mozambique via what is referred to as the maritime routes or the "southern route" where the Island states in the Western Indian Ocean have become the primary passageway and transshipment hub for Afghanistan (mainly but at times Pakistan and Iran) produced heroin en-route to the markets of Africa, Europe and the United States. The UNODC official argues that the drug trafficking network "prefer a situation of instability" in the region, which is caused by the ASWJ insurgent groups.³² While defence and security forces are actively engaged in suppressing terror operations, this leads to the need for more funds by the jihadist organisations, which in turn is being sourced through increased drug trafficking.

Heroin is trafficked from the southern coasts, especially from the Makran coast of Pakistan and Iran, by a Jelbut dhow (medium-sized fishing vessels). These boats are the primary delivery mechanism for heroin from Afghanistan to the east coast of Africa and to the island states of Comoros and Madagascar, which have become the primary passageways for the "smack track".

*"The motorised wooden dhows, in which much of the heroin is initially shipped along the coast, are between 15 m and 23 m in length, which allows them to travel at sea but makes them small enough to evade detection by satellite technology or patrol vessels. The dhows used for smuggling have concealed compartments, which can hold 100 kg to 1 000 kg of heroin. After anchoring 20 km to 100 km off the African coast in international waters, flotillas of small boats collect the drug consignments from the dhows and ferry them to various beaches, coves or islands, or offload them into small commercial harbours. Our information is that there are dozens of such landing sites all along the eastern seaboard, from just north of Kismayo to Angoche, Mozambique."*³³

The dhows are met out to sea by small fishing boats, where the product can be offloaded. They then unload the heroin consignments at local fishing harbours along the coast of Mozambique, sometimes in the island states. Further, the consignment is repackaged for onward shipment to markets, often via South Africa or countries in West Africa. While some of it supplies an increasing local market in Africa, most of the heroin makes its way to Europe and North America.

Drug trafficking organisations (DTOs) and militant groups like the ASWJ operating in the region systematically integrate their operations and activities in and around the Mozambique channel. This was evident from the incident of May 5, 2020, when 10-12 sailors and fishermen of Pakistani origin were arrested off the coast of Mozambique in the Beira harbour. “The police suspected that the Pakistanis were involved, either in supplying the terrorist groups fighting against the Mozambican government in the northern province of Cabo Delgado or in drug trafficking.”³⁴ The Mozambique police suspect them of collaborating with the insurgent groups trying to destabilise the Cabo Delgado province, as their boat was primarily not meant for fishing purposes. Similarly, in December 2019, two dhows were intercepted off the coast of Pemba in northern Mozambique, which was carrying heroin. The first dhow was set on fire by the crew members of the boat, destroying 1.5 metric tons of heroin suspected to be on board in the process, three sailors also lost their lives, and 12 Iranian nationals were arrested.³⁵ The second dhow was intercepted in the same month and led to the arrest of 13 Pakistani nationals and 450 kgs of drugs.³⁶

Mozambique has been one of the primary transshipment hubs for heroin trafficking via the northern Mozambique coast, and Islamic terrorism in Cabo Delgado is a recent development. Thus many argue that maritime terrorism and the drug economy have no linkages, which is not true. In reality, there exists a connection which can be corroborated by the fact that the production of heroin in Afghanistan (which is the major supplier of drugs to the region and beyond) has tripled in the period from 1994-2021, as detailed by the United Nation’s Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) data in the figure. 1. In its World Drug Report of 2021, the UNODC said that “83 per cent of all opiates (opium, morphine, and heroin) produced globally are sourced out of Afghanistan”.³⁷ In recent years this surge in production has also led to a massive increase in cross-continent shipment of heroin. The heroin shipped through the maritime routes to eastern and southern Africa has increased manifold during the last decade. Mozambique has been the central hub for this trafficking network. Since the end of the civil war in Mozambique, the heroin trade has made deep inroads through the tightly regulated transnational organised crime networks having the patronage of the political and ruling elites. The European Union funded ENACT Project published report “The Heroin Coast: A political economy along the Eastern African seaboard”, details the linkage which suggests that:

*“A small network, composed of a number of Mozambican families of Asian origin and with close ties to the ruling party, has controlled the transit heroin trade in the country for almost three decades. At the top of this network, allegedly, is Mohamed Bachir Suleman (known as MBS), who is accused by the US government of being an international drugs trafficker.”*³⁸

The US government’s USAID report of 2006 argues that the drug trafficking network in Mozambique has deep connections with South Asia and the ruling FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação Moçambique) party of the Government of the Republic of Mozambique (GRM). The report notes that:³⁹

“commerce in Maputo depends on the financial acumen of a small number of Muslims of South Asian-descent who contribute generously to the FRELIMO party. A major contributor

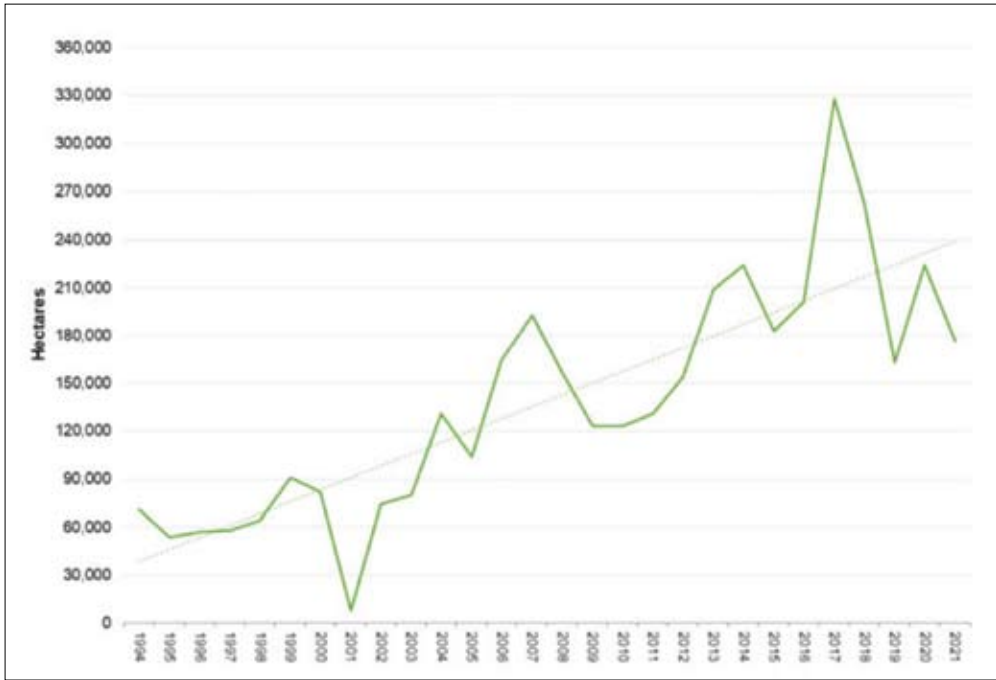
to former President Chissano and President Guebuza from this community, who resides less than a hundred meters from the Presidential Compound, Mohamed Bashir Suleman (MBS), is the owner of the MBS Group. Contacts at all levels have advised Embossos that MBS is a known large-scale narco-trafficker. They indicate that MBS uses his FRELIMO party connections, as well as his shopping mall, supermarkets, and hotels to import narcotics and launder money without official scrutiny. Other South Asian businessmen with ties to FRELIMO also operate a vast network of loosely-regulated money changing houses, which reportedly maintain financial ties with more radical organisations in Pakistan and elsewhere.”

This MBS-linked cartel is alleged to control the coast from the Tanzanian border south to Angoche. This 700-kilometre region includes the large deep container ports of Pemba and Nacala and a string of small islands close to the beach, which highlights the fact that they facilitate drug trafficking along these routes. These scattered islands along the coast of Mozambique and Tanzania are shaped by their remoteness or insularity. They often tend to be ignored by security agencies rendering them highly prone to becoming a safe haven for illicit activities of TOC networks who use them as transshipment points. The present government, under Nyusi’s Presidentship since January 2015, have endeavoured to inverse some of this monopolisation and restraint some of the more rapacious illegal trading in the country. However, this is also the period when Mozambique’s coastal region has seen a spike in violent attacks, leaving no doubt that there exists a deep connection between the ASWJ group and the drug cartels. The proceeds from the heroin trade may have contributed to the funding of terror activities to destabilise the region. At the same time, the drug-terror is mainly opportunistic, providing a mutually favourable environment to function and operate. The nexus is critical as it involves not only the transfer of drugs but also weapons and militant fighters and serves as a means for their tactical command over the region. The transnational nature of this nexus is a grave threat to the region witnessing a massive inflow of foreign investment in the recently discovered gas fields. It poses a distinct destabilising effect on the region’s peace, security, economic growth and stability.

India’s Interests and Challenges

The Republic of Mozambique has been one of the fastest growing least developed countries since the early 1990s when it emerged out from the clutches of a lengthy civil war. It has gradually reduced poverty and attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) thanks to the discovery of massive natural gas reserves and some degree of political stability and solid macroeconomic management in recent years. Mozambique, in particular, was able to attract large-scale industrial foreign investments, or “mega-projects,” which have boosted economic growth and improved the country’s image as an FDI destination.⁴⁰ A sharp increase in militant attacks in the Cabo Delgado province of Northern Mozambique has drawn increased international attention. The insurrection that erupted in 2017 has now put Africa’s largest gas project in jeopardy. After taking control of the port town of Mocimboa

Figure 1: Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, 1994-2021 (Hectares)



Source: World Drug Report 2021. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021

da Praia in August 2020, the Islamic State-affiliated insurgent group ASWJ carried out its most brutal and sophisticated attack in March 2021. It took control of the coastal town of Palma, which is close to the Total Energies-operated liquefied natural-gas project.⁴¹ This has severely affected Mozambique’s growth and development, undermining its economic potential and associated benefits such massive investment in “mega projects” would have brought in the lives of the local communities.

India and Mozambique share deep historical, cultural and trading linkages that predate the colonial period. The ancient people-to-people connection between India and Mozambique has been the backbone of the current bilateral relationship based on regular political contacts, ever-deepening economic engagement, and a well-integrated Indian community in Mozambique. Economic interests have been the most important driver of India-Mozambique ties in the 21st century, especially after the thrust provided by Prime Minister Modi’s visit to the country in July 2016. Indian corporations have substantially invested in Mozambique’s energy resources, accounting for about 37 per cent of India’s total Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa.⁴² The natural gas and coal industries have seen the most significant investments. India is the biggest stakeholder in Area-1 of the Rovuma gas field. It has a 30 per cent stake in Area-1 of the Rovuma gas field with a commitment to invest USD 20 billion, out of which USD 7.2 billion has already been executed. Two Indian public sector undertaking (PSU) companies, ONGC

Videsh Ltd. and Oil India Ltd., finalised the acquisition of a 20 per cent share in Area 1 of Mozambique's massive Rovuma gas block in 2014. This was in addition to another Indian PSU, Bharat Petro Resources Ltd, owning a 10 per cent share in the same block.⁴³ Besides Indian investment in Area 1, TotalEnergies, the French petroleum giant, has a 26.6 per cent stake, Japan's Mitsui has a 20 per cent stake, PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited of Thailand has an 8.5 per cent stake and Mozambican company Empresa Nacional de Hidrocarbonetos (ENH) has a 15 per cent stake.⁴⁴

In the coal mining business, International Coal Ventures Private Ltd, a consortium of five Indian public sector enterprises (Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC), Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), Coal India Limited (CIL), and National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), bought a 65 per cent share in Rio Tinto's coal holdings in July 2014. Jindal Steel and Power Limited (JSPL), Jindal South West (JSW), Coal India Ltd, Tata Steel, Essar, Midwest Africa, and Sunflag Group are some other notable Indian firms having a presence in the coal mining sector in Mozambique. Other important Indian interests include the Essar group's involvement in establishing a coal terminal at Beira port, as well as Pure Diets, Rajarambapu Group, HK Jalan Group, and Asian Tea Company's stakes in commercial agriculture. Indian corporations are increasingly interested in investing in innovative industries in Mozambique, such as healthcare, education, information technology, pharmaceuticals, etc. In addition to the investment, bilateral commerce has grown rapidly in recent years. Between 2010 and 2015, the value of commerce between the two nations increased fivefold, reaching a high of USD 2.4 billion in 2014-15. The downturn in the global commodities market prompted a drop in trade values to around USD 1.5 billion in 2015-16 and 2016-17. However, overall commerce between the two nations was 1.83 billion dollars in 2017-18 and 2.17 billion dollars in 2018-19. Refined petroleum products and medicines are the most significant Indian export commodities, whereas coal and cashew are the most important Mozambican exports to India.⁴⁵

But with an acceleration in the intensities and complexity of Islamist armed violence in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, India's vital interests and investments are at risk. The state-run oil major ONGC Videsh Ltd. Along with has put the LNG project in Mozambique on hold due to force majeure. The ONGC said in a statement that:

*"Considering the evolution of the security situation in the north of the Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique, the Area 1 Operator, Total E&P Mozambique Area 1 Limitada informed the withdrawal of all Mozambique LNG project personnel from the Afungi site. This situation leads Total E&P Mozambique Area 1 Limitada, as operator of Mozambique LNG project, to declare force majeure,"*⁴⁶

BPRL Ventures Mozambique, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Indian company Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL), which holds a 10 per cent stake in the Mozambique LNG Project, led by the French multinational TotalEnergies, has announced that its liquefied natural gas project may restart in the first half of 2023. Speaking at the Annual General Body Meeting of the company on August 29, 2022, its Managing Director Mr Arun Singh said:

*“Now, with the efforts of the Mozambican Government, supported by a regional coalition, progress is being made in improving the security situation in the region, and the project will resume as soon as the security situation is stabilised sustainably”. The director, also announced that “BPCL is expected to invest a further USD 1.8 billion over the next three or four years in Mozambique”.*⁴⁷

The Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi, speaking at two-day gas and energy conference in Maputo on September 14, 2022, requested the major stakeholders in the energy projects to resume work as he claimed that “the security situation is ‘now better’ than before the attack, with ‘greater stability,’ in the surrounding region”.⁴⁸ However, the chief executive, Patrick Pouyanne, of TotalEnergies, which is the major operator of the Mozambique LNG Project, speaking at the Energy Intelligence Forum in October 2022, said that the company “hopes to make a decision early next year on lifting a *force majeure*, once it completes an audit on the security situation in the northeast region of Cabo Delgado”.⁴⁹

Therefore the deteriorating security in the wake of rising acts of terrorism has severe implications for India’s energy and mining interests in Mozambique. However, India and Mozambique have resolved to speed up efforts to combat terrorism and implement deradicalisation measures to ease the situation in the region. China’s significant presence in Mozambique makes it even more critical for India to engage with Mozambique more frequently than before. Therefore, when India’s defence minister, Shri Rajnath Singh, visited Mozambique in 2019, the Mozambique government requested India’s assistance in combating the rising threat of terrorism and radicalisation. During that visit, the Indian defence minister Shri Rajnath Singh announced communication equipment support and signed two memorandums of understanding (MoU) on exchanging white shipping information and hydrographic cooperation. These concerns topped the agenda of Mr Vikram Misri, Deputy National Security Adviser (NSA) of India, when he paid an official visit to Mozambique from May 3-5, 2022 and held bilateral discussions on wide-ranging issues related to defence and security.⁵⁰ It was decided to convene a meeting of the Joint Working Group on Defence that will further strengthen the effort to bring peace and stability to the region. During this visit of the Deputy NSA of India to Mozambique, it was decided that strategic cooperation in counter-terrorism operations, combating illegal narco-trafficking, deradicalisation of the youth and ensuring maritime security. Mr. Misri met with key Mozambican officials, including presidential advisers, and formally launched two Fast Interceptor Crafts that India has gifted to the Mozambique security forces to patrol the Mozambique channel, which the Indian Navy has classified as one of its core areas of maritime interest.⁵¹ India is aware that future attempts to attack Indian critical infrastructure (offshore/onshore) would be from terror outfits having their roots in the East African seaboard. Therefore, India should scale up its engagement with the East African littoral and Island states and forge deeper ties in the defence and security sector.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The spread of transnational organised crime, drug and human trafficking, corruption and money laundering dominate the littoral and island states of East Africa. The financial

proceeds of these illicit activities are often used to finance terrorist activities. Terrorism and transnational organised crime, in turn, destabilise governments and undermine peace, security, and economic and social development. The linkages between the non-state actors operating in the region and beyond require greater appreciation. Dr Anneli Botha, a terrorism prevention expert, says, “with the local groups deriving a number of benefits from association with, or allegiance to the established terrorist groups where, allegiance means training, intensified movement of fighters, and finances – threats that cannot be taken on by any single country alone and which require initiative-taking preventive action, intensified cooperation, and strengthening of the border management measures.”⁵²

Therefore, weak maritime enforcement capability and underdevelopment are two significant reasons that have led the ASWJ terror group to use the seas to expand their operations. The Mozambican government’s capacity to respond in real-time to assaults at sea is hampered by a lack of operable equipment and long-standing coastal neglect. At the same time, the years of economic underdevelopment allow fringe groups to create an anti-government narrative to recruit youth in their extremist operations. To fill this shortfall in enforcement capability, private air assistance is being deployed, and it has already been used to destroy several of the terrorist boats. However, due to worries of crossfire and the possibility of mistaken identity, this operation has limited access to parts of the waterways that fishermen may utilise, making it an unviable long-term approach. The weak maritime capabilities of the regional states have aided in developing a symbiotic relationship between these insurgent groups and other transnational organised crime networks dealing in the smuggling of weapons and narcotics. The former exploits the maritime enforcement gaps, and the latter aids and finances the operations of the former in targeting the maritime installations. This helps the latter have an ungoverned space to freely traffic illicit goods in the region.

The drug economy and maritime terrorism nexus indicate that narco-terrorists operating in the Mozambique channel are increasingly involved in the transportation, and distribution of banned narcotics, either directly or indirectly. The ASWJ terrorist organisations seem to offer protection for drug traffickers carrying their wares across areas controlled by them or their sympathisers. Several major criminal and terror groups, including ASWJ, are said to rely on drug money as one of several important financing sources, regardless of the shape, it takes or the extent of involvement in drug trafficking. The drug trafficking network is also a means to create cohesion between foreign militant groups and the ASWJ. The foreign recruits provide ASWJ with a potent force to enhance their operational and combat capabilities.

These trends necessitate regional and extra-regional powers to work with the GRM toward the region’s stability. Enhancing the capacity and capability of Mozambique’s security agencies to police and govern its land and maritime frontiers in a better and more efficient way is an important objective to be achieved. To weed out the menace of the Islamic insurgency in the region requires a proactive and pragmatic approach informed by the deeper intricacies of the social constructs, economic development and political structures — the key lie in a collaborative approach that can leverage as well as strengthen the existing institutions. The counter-terror operations must be complimented on both land

and sea. Forging partnerships and building more robust local and regional institutional mechanisms will go a long way in achieving the desired goals for the region. The counter-efforts should not be limited to security but should be a long-term plan for peace, stability, and prosperity through sustainable development. The lack of actionable data remains a challenge for managing terror risk within the region. In order to develop scientific information to be useful for evidence-based risk management and adaptation, more efforts are needed to systematically collect, manage and make relevant data and information available for security agencies to take action. This can be done through the strengthening of the “information network” within the region under the structural ambit of the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) based in Madagascar; Regional Centre for Operational Coordination (RCOC), Seychelles; Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), India. Further, the existing mini- and multi-lateral organisations such as the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and Southern African Development Community (SADC) must be leveraged in order to create a maritime governance architecture that bridges the existing loopholes and end the sea blindness of many countries on the East African coast.

These institutions could serve as a platform to provide assessment, education and action at the local, national, sub-regional and regional levels, which are required to capture the spatial variability of risk better and inform the targeted response in anti-piracy operations. Therefore, India, being one of the major stakeholders in the region, a ‘preferred security partner’ and ‘first responder’ to any crisis in the many littoral and island states of East Africa, has a significant role in maintaining peace security and stability in the region and beyond. India should strengthen and give a concrete shape to its “Look West Policy” to “Link and Act West”. It should work to create conditions of sectoral partnerships in areas of defence and security like intelligence sharing, counter-insurgency, development cooperation, etc. Inviting the east African littoral and island state representations in multilateral naval exercises to share best practices and information sharing would help bridge the capability deficit. Also, the need for in-depth research on Africa in matters related to security must be promoted at institutions in Africa and India. It should collaborate with like-minded partners to replicate the success achieved in counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden region to weed out the germinating menace of terrorism in the Mozambique channel. This can be done by setting up measures to enhance the capacity and capabilities, creating a more holistic approach focusing on multi-sectoral development and engagements, creating information-sharing institutions to support information management and increasing coordination among various agencies dealing with disaster response. The legal finish is a critical aspect of sustaining peace and security. Therefore the criminal justice and law enforcement capabilities must be strengthened, which will help to create rule-based order in the region. As a result, the counter-response will be efficient and effective and might play a critical role in addressing future security threats and fostering secure settings conducive to long-term development.

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