A) The facts

1/ On the 21st of February one person was killed and 6 injured during two attacks targeting the activities of the oil company Anadarko in the province of Cabo Delgado. These attacks were blamed on the Islamist insurgents, active in the area since October 2017. They were also the first ones directly targeting one of the oil and gas companies present in the region. The first raid happened on the road connecting Peaia to Palma, the general quarter of gas operations: armed men blocked the road and attacked the convoy with firearms. A second attack then targeted the convoy of a local company building an aerodrome for the group’s operations, leaving one worker dead.

2/ Two days later, in the same area, four persons were killed and 20 injured during three new attacks. The first attack hit the village of Matapata in the Palma district. The second attack targeted Quelimane, located 20km from Mocimboa da Praia, near the border with Tanzania. A third one happened against the village of Mucujo, 200km to the north of Pemba.

3/ The attacks in the province of Cabo Delgado and particularly in the Palma district (a gas-rich region where Maputo hopes to attract numerous energy firms) have multiplied these last months despite the enhanced security: since the end of 2017, the raids of Islamists against the population and the police forces have already killed almost 200 civilians and forced thousands of others to leave their villages, often burned down or destroyed, to find shelters in the urban areas of the area (in particular Palma). And the threat keeps worsening. Since the beginning of December 2018, at least about thirty attacks have been recorded in the north of the province. Furthermore, dozens of kidnapping of women have been reported by the population in the last few months.

All these incidents support the idea of the emergence of an almost insurrectional climate in the future gas hub of Cabo Delgado.
B) Comments

1/ The recent attacks have dramatically underlined the worsening of the security situation, visible for several weeks in the province of Cabo Delgado. The insurgents, who, until autumn 2018, only launched guerrilla operations from their hideouts in the forest against more or less remote villages and towns, far from the main roads and difficult to access, have diversified their attacks, now conducting vehicle ambushes. The probability of an attack against a foreign company or/and their interests has risen in a significant way over the last weeks with the jihadists’ operation taking place closer to the Anadarko area of activity. Thus, on the 21st of January, an attack would have targeted the village of Maganja, 7km away from the camp of Anadarko where the gas liquefaction factory is developed (2 dead). Even though a military base was located 4km away, in Quitupo, the soldiers only arrived on the next morning; the ones that were positioned in the camp of Anadarko did not move because they were only there to ensure the protection of the camp.

The major, which already exfiltrated its employees in June 2018 for security measures, is now conducting its operations according to “reinforced security” procedures. While using private security companies’ services, the American group has recently published a call for tenders in order to acquire armoured vehicles.

2/ This “new” tactic – reminiscent of the RENAMO former rebellion’s practices which between 2013 and 2016 almost interrupted the traffic on the EN1 axe in the centre of the country with its ambushes - has been used in reality since early November by the Islamist cells operating in Cabo Delgado. Facing this evolution, the security forces are struggling (see infra) and are said to force the public transportations to take on board a military as an escort; a solution judged to be inefficient and even counterproductive by the local population, who says that a military presence is making them an “even more interesting target” for the attackers.

3/ This evolution of the jihadists’ tactics shows that they now have the means and the desire to attack international companies. This evolution resembles other similar cases (such as in Nigeria or
in Sahel) where a syncretism of various grievances has led to “glocal” struggles: insurrections nourished both by local causes (local population discrimination, poverty, lack of wealth redistribution, land spoliations…), religious radicalisation and messianic and international agendas of international jihadist groups (fight against the West, reinstatement of a Caliphate…). Considering the blur surrounding the real objective of the insurgents (some of them initially advocated for the application of the Islamic law in this predominantly Muslim province) their organisation, their funding and the reality (and intensity) of their ties with other foreign jihadist groups (especially the Somalian Shabab), the possibility cannot be excluded that the different phenomenon are developing in parallel, nourishing each other.

4/ It is to be feared that the situation continues to deteriorate further, especially since the security forces – despite the authorities’ ranting – seem unable to curb the attacks. On the contrary, it seems they contribute in fact to worsen the problem. Many testimonies of exactions appear, reporting on arbitrary arrests of civilians, released after paying bribes, along with farmers on the grounds that they were in possession of machetes. The intrinsic quality of the Mozambican army is also a problem: lack of discipline, low military valour. In this regard, several soldiers have already been killed by insurgents (nine on the 1st of February, by “large calibres” automatic guns near Litingina, in the district of Nangade, where several ambushes have happened in the last weeks against vehicles.

- The announcement of the special forces’ deployment after the attacks against Anadarko to fight the insurgents and protect the activities of gas and oil companies looks like an admission of failure. Furthermore, the special forces – whose brutality and expeditious methods are not a secret – will probably not get a different result. Considering the failure of these same special forces to eradicate the Renamo guerrilla in the province of Sofala and to reduce its Mount Gorogonsa maquis (located in the very centre of the country), it is legitimate to think that the same thing will happen in an environment characterised by dense forests, porous borders, an increasingly hostile population and insurgents clearly better organised and increasingly well equipped.
- The nervousness of the authorities is also noticeable with the “blackout” they try to impose in the area, prohibiting its access to any journalist and arbitrary imprisoning the ones they intercept. On the 21/02 the NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) thus denounced the arbitrary arrests of journalist and declared that the government was trying to “silence the media in Cabo Delgado (…) about the military operations and the suspected abuses”.

5/ This blackout of the authorities, in addition to the suspected abuses of the security forces is complicating the perception of the movement’s evolution, especially since they strongly insist on the presence and the influence of foreigners in the group. While minimizing or silencing the importance of underdevelopment and structural discriminations against local Muslim population in the explanation of the phenomenon.

- The presence of Ugandans seems to be proven and could imply the development of international recruitment (or funding) networks with jihadist groups from Eastern and Central Africa. At the end of January, the Mozambican police indicated that they had arrested three Ugandans in the forest near Mocimboa da Praia, presented as “jihadist leaders”. One of the suspects is named Abdul Rahman Faisal. According to an official of Kampala, this man was the chief of the Usafi mosque, considered by the Ugandan police as a “radicalisation centre” who had escaped a raid in April 2018. This individual allegedly claimed to be part of the Shabab (Somalis) but to not belong to groups carrying out attacks in Cabo Delgado, adding he was in Mozambique only to “free its imprisoned chief”.
- Almost 200 persons suspected to belong to the group are currently judged in Pemba, chief town Cabo Delgado. Among them, there are some Tanzanian, Somali, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo nationals. All the suspects, except one “have confessed that the group was trying to create instability to prevent the gas exploitation and, ultimately to create an independent State, constituted by districts region of Cabo Delgado and of regions from the South of Tanzania” according to a document from the prosecution.
- These accusations must be taken carefully, especially since some testimonies claim that arbitrary arrested civilians (who could no pay the bribe) are among those suspects.

26.02.2019
Furthermore, the perpetuation of attacks and their intensification in an area relatively expanded tend to confirm that **the group is organized in several quite autonomous cells**. If the presence of foreigners in the leadership of all or part of these cells is very likely, it is though delicate to state – without any clear revendication made by an identified chief – that it is completely controlled by Ugandan (or Somalians).

6/ **The emphasis from Maputo authorities on the international and exogenous character of the movement appears to be part of a desire to:**

- **Minimise the importance of the movement** by referring to it as aboveground and thus easy to quell, of uprooting to reassure the investors.
- **Obtain the international community’s support in the fight against the group**, particularly for the protection of the economic interests, which allow them to get a blank cheque to sanction the looming insurgency, with complete impunity.
- **Avoid any questioning on the way the economic impact is managed** (and on the government corruption) as well as on the region’s underdevelopment.
- **And finally justify, in the name of the war against terrorism, the continuation of repressive policies** against insurgents, local opponents and local population’s rights defenders.

7/ **The case of the South-African Andre Hanekom is, in this regard, symptomatic of the possible excess that the fight against terrorism could generate in Mozambique.** He had owned a marina for 26 years in Palma and died in custody late January in blurry conditions after he was arrested in July 2018, accused to have links with Islamists. **According to the Mozambican public prosecutor’s office, the sexagenarian was one of the leaders of the Islamist group**, accusations that his relatives dubbed absurd. His family claims that he was poisoned and that he was “indirectly victim of gas exploration”: **his property had a direct access to the sea near the worksite**. Still according to his family, he received some death threats in January. The case, closed by Pretoria, should not rebound but the its numerous grey areas give rise to questions.

8/ **Local protests begin to appear: on the 13th of January**, after an ambush against a minibus (15 dead), more than 200 Palma residents demonstrated to require the suspension of the worksites linked to the gas projects as long as insecurity remains in the area, before being dispersed by the police who used firearms (shots in the air). On the 16th of January, demonstrators blocked the road with trunks to block the traffic of Anadarko's vehicles. These claims are likely to further increase because the areas touched by the attacks (such as Maganja and Quitupo see supra) are the ones where the population is to be relocated, especially people from the Afungi peninsula, expected to be expelled as part of the gas projects.

9/ Finally. the Islamist threat encourages a new security investment from big powers in the context of securing the energy interests and regional competitions for the access to resources.

- Several hundred militaries coming from about ten countries of the region, along with France, Canada and Netherlands, have participated in **naval military exercises coordinated by the United States (Cutless Express 2019) between the 29th of January and the 7th of February**. The objective is to fight against piracy, drug trafficking, human being and wildlife trafficking. In parallel with this exercise, Washington has officially expressed his willingness to help Maputo in the fight against Islamists in Cabo Delgado.
- **France also wants to reinforce its position in the area: after having opened again, in September 2018, its military mission in Maputo** – 20 years after closing it – Paris has started a reinforcement of naval cooperation with Mozambique (affectation in Maputo of a navy captain formerly posted in Pretoria).
- These gestures from Paris can be explained by the **attractiveness of the Mozambican economic potential** (which generates the interest of several big French economic operators already presents in Africa) but also by the **proximity of Mayotte (500km away from Pemba) with the future gas hub of Cabo Delago**, which bodes that the gas fields currently developing off Mozambique could extend to the economic exclusion area (EEZ) of this French territory; not to mention...
the fact that Paris is geopolitically present in the Mozambique Channel controlling several “tiny” islets which possess huge EEZ, the « Scattered Islands » (Glorioso, Europa, Juan de Nova, Bassa da India).

**PERSPECTIVES**

- The security situation should keep on worsening in the coming months, despite – and potentially because of – the reinforcement of the security mechanism.
- The security forces have until now shown their inability to curb the guerrilla movements, both in of the Renamo in the centre of the country between 2013 and 2016, and of the Islamist in Cabo Delgado. This inability is likely to endure despite the announced deployment of special forces.
- The effort will likely be put on securing of foreign installations, main roads (with the use of militarised convoys such as during the Renamo guerrilla) and on large urban centres, at the expense of a counter-insurgency and of the local populations’ protection. The latter will most certainly continue to suffer from the group’s raids.
- In case of worsening of the situation, the popular resentment will probably increase face to the inability of the authorities to ensure their security; resentment that could be increasingly expressed against foreign groups, especially if the population relocations continue in “dangerous” areas.
- The brutal behaviour of the authorities towards a predominantly Muslim and historically discriminated population in addition to the corruption issues and the management and redistribution of the manna derived from the gas exploitation, could foster the rootedness and the development of the insurgency.
- If the Mozambican Shabab remain relatively confidential (no clearly identified chief, no identified communication channels...), the arrest of foreigners and the possibility that they belong to the group’s leadership, as well as the development of transnational links with other groups (especially the Somalian Shabab) could lead to another “professionalisation” of certain elements and to a metastasis of the phenomenon as it has been seen elsewhere on the continent, with important consequences, especially for the security of missionaries and foreign grips in the area.