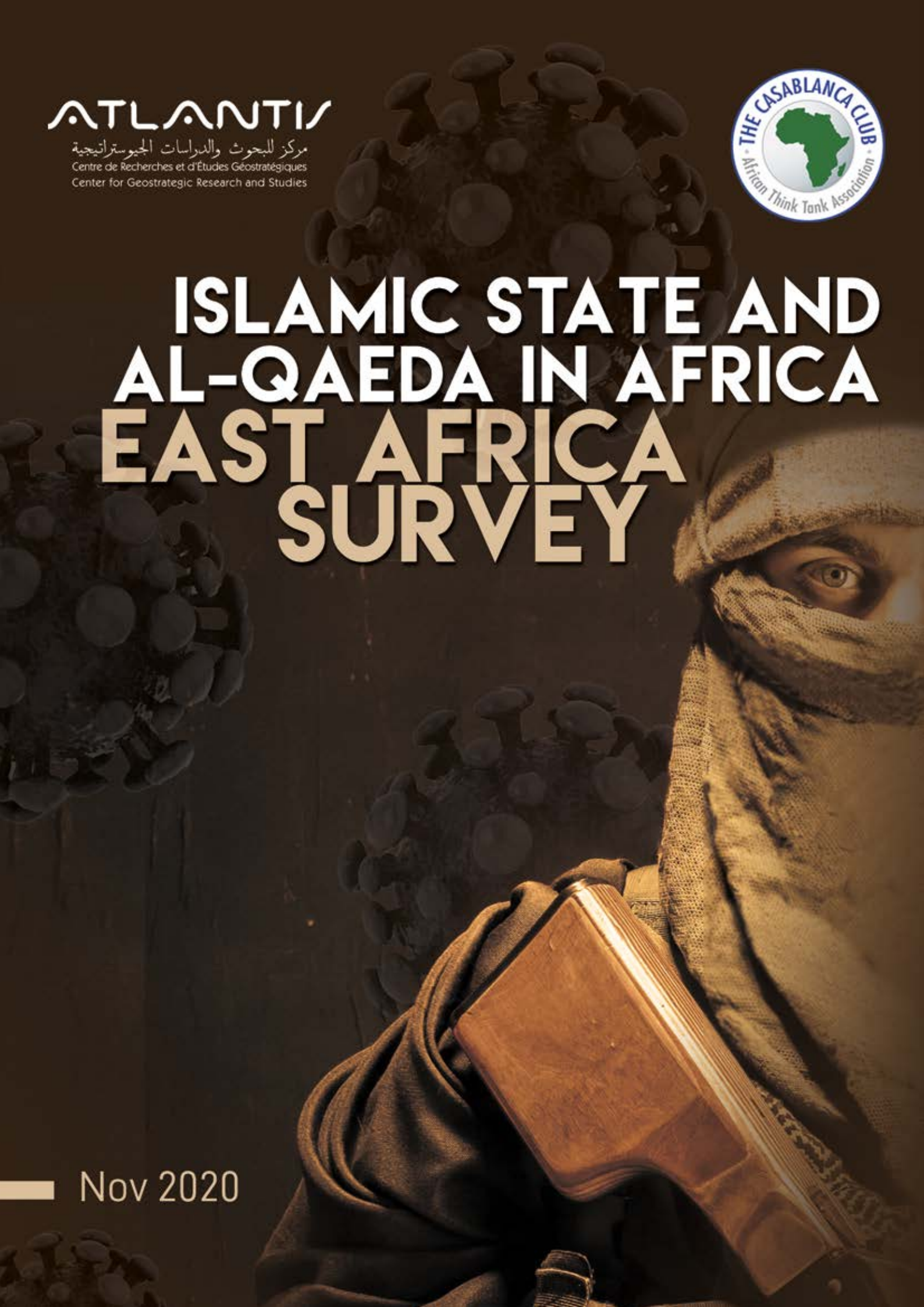
ATLANTIS
مركز للبحوث والدراسات الجيوستراتيجية
Centre de Recherches et d'Études Géostratégiques
Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies

THE CASABLANCA CLUB
African Think Tank Association

ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAEDA IN AFRICA

EAST AFRICA SURVEY



Nov 2020

PREFACE

History often seems decisive in distant retrospect but, up close, as lived, it is often a messy and too near thing — the victories are shockingly spare and the losses heartbreakingly preventable. So it is with the world of security. The difference that preserves order is too often messy and takes enormous commitment.

Disarmingly, with enormous depth in irony, CP Snow called civilization a coat of varnish. And, as it is abundantly clear to any security professional, the enormity of what is beneath the surface is rarely perceptible. Successes in prevention garner little in accolade, and failures are shocking and disruptive, however "foreseeable" in that proverbial retrospect.

Some studies suggest that this credulous dynamic — the expectation of order and its reflexive imposition at the cost of reason — reflects a human reflex of inventing certainty where there is none, drawing cartoonishly thick lines where full spectrum reality would not be so easily confined. Human progress may in fact depend on achieving an escape velocity from the gravity of this original place. It is an oxygen and light-starved place, a fictive world where conspiratorial simplicities thrive, flickering upon walls, where ideological certainties provide the wicked with a way to redirect the lost toward what might as easily be their demise or not.

The world is a complex place, its causes are broad and deep, as are the problems in which we continually find ourselves. We depend on each other and a shared commitment secures us. Yet we feel a need to simplify, and alleviate the burden placed upon us by facts — to dismiss genuine insight when it emerges and step back with our broadest brushes at the ready.

Ideological warfare is itself a complex thing and the term "terrorism" hardly captures the complexity. What follows in this series is deliberately not an exercise at painting in the thick lines, although the therapeutic value of such exercises may be welcome for the already exhausted. The pandemic is having its effect upon troubles that preceded it by decades. The persistence of social violence in a time that calls for knowledge, mercy, relief and fairness is the evidence of persistence in fear, and possibly a fear of failure on multiple levels: It is the failure to provide, the failure to justify, and, possibly, the failure to recognize ourselves in a social mirror.

Where climate change is erasing traditions of livelihoods, neighbors may be tempted to start setting upon each other to grab at what is left. Where a people have been divided so that some may be deprived of a promised future, a community's sense of fairness is stripped and they are mobilized, some to flee and some to fight until their plight is recognized, or until the violence they were driven into — whether by established leaders or more recent opportunists — is somehow justified.

Diplomatic failures tell us that relief must be shared along a path that begins on local ground. Security realities reflect the need for sustainability with a similar logic. There are lessons to be learned here, lessons that should be learned sooner than later as the cost of tuition will continue to grow.

Many have for too long suffered under the burden of imported struggles, in inherited frames that go untested for how they might lighten burdens or shed light upon local problems. If they offer a new recognition, a recognition for starting again from what is still shared locally, for what each can do and how these frames help restart groups on a path forward, toward becoming a community. It is the opposite of ideology, as the frame is not the picture, but it may be the birth of something that may become true and binding.

Perhaps the first point of traction is simply a decision to find a better way, and consciously adopt a new frame within which new constituents embrace a principle of fairness, and stop the suffering of innocents. Perhaps this is the point at which applying a new coat of varnish can begin, where the brushing of lines can indeed be broad.

The studies of this series are intended to be a step ahead of the tuition bill, displaying unvarnished facts in a brief shine of the light, not off walls in shadow, but on local paths, perhaps marking a way that may still be open.

Dr. Steven Fleischmann
Advisory Member of the Board
Atlantis Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies

Policy Brief
September 2020

Islamic state and Al-Qaeda in Africa

by
Julien Friedman
Research Project Manager
***Atlantis** Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies*

Atlantis Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies is a member of the Casablanca Club

ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAEDA IN AFRICA

EAST AFRICA SURVEY

Political violence in Africa has not been a predominately global Islamist undertaking but Al Qaeda (AQ) affiliates have been present on the continent for decades. During the mid-2010s, some competition emerged with factions starting to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS), reflecting the global high profile of its emergence in Iraq and Syria. Terrorism in Africa has kept pace with global trends and developments and, in light of broad exacerbating effects of the COVID-19 crisis, its evolution is bound to accelerate.

This survey is part of a three-paper survey and analysis, a selective survey of Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS/IS) affiliates in Western areas of sub-Saharan Africa, addressing key characteristics, organizational differences, as well as major risks and threats they pose to the continent.

Table of Contents

8 // INTRODUCTION //

10 // IS AND AQ GROUPS & ACTIVITIES TO WATCH OUT FOR //
- *Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP)*
- *Al Shabaab*
- *Islamic State in Somalia (ISS)*

13 // FUNCTION AND OBJECTIVES //

14 // STATE OVERVIEW //
- *Affected States & Organizations*
- *Less/Not Affected/Increasing Risk*

17 // CONCLUSION //

18 // BIBLIOGRAPHY //

ATLANTIS

INTRODUCTION

TERRORISM in Africa — from incidents to organizational growth — have been on the rise over the past decade. Political violence in Africa has not by any perspective been a predominately Islamist undertaking but Al Qaeda (AQ) affiliates have been present in the continent for decades. During the mid-2010s, some competition emerged with factions starting to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS). Terrorism in Africa has kept pace with global trends and developments.

Where Problems Persist

With the arrival of AQ and IS to prominence too often blocking the view back toward conditions precedent, it is worth noting that terrorism was not always an Islamist import to sub-Saharan Africa. Social, political, historical, and geographic contexts are the conditions that make imported AQ and IS affiliations with terrorism effective. This receptive context is the substrate for the struggle. It needs to be understood for crafting mitigating strategies and responses that strive to be effective as well.

In most cases, there has been plenty of strife and failure in these contexts, long before terrorist recruiters and fellow traveler exploiters and opportunists came on the scene.

Indeed, one size never fits all. A common issue in military response to terrorism around the world has been reducing the best chance for effectiveness by depending on the application of reductionist, formulaic, jingo-friendly "doctrinal" solutions for complex problems – a Jominian replacement of strategy by military technique. Africa offers no exception to the likely failure of doctrine without context.

What Solutions Look Like

First of all, an effective anti-terrorism strategy needs to include tactical and logistical considerations, nearly always a major issue across Africa.

There is building toward a shared vision and then there's planning for those horizons. The intractability of problems like transport logistics for securing remote outpost villages might need to be a central part of understanding what makes ideologically-driven terrorism increasingly successful in transport-starved Africa. And so forth.

The Approach Taken Here

The surveys in this series try to highlight some of these dynamics in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its various effects, particularly on social resilience and prospects for anti-terrorism efforts. It will include overviews of ongoing developments in terrorism on the continent to help make sense of underlying causes and recent trends, like attacks spreading from long-troubled areas into relatively untouched ones.

The overviews will be organized to fit together to bring coherence as a series, with the idea that revisiting these areas occasionally with relevant developments will make a useful incremental contribution, either by adding perspectives or insight.

While this series cannot address every terrorist, insurgent and separatist group in Africa – doing case-specific research can provide reference points and templates for colleagues, academics and analysts focused on solutions, policymaker recommendations and metrics for effectiveness, i.e., clarifying where policies should be reinforced and what could be improved.

Terrorist Development in East Africa

The situation in coastal East Africa has progressively gotten worse, with increased activity becoming disruptively dramatic in some areas, with hot spots shifting attention to areas where control has long been strained, such as the northern areas of Mozambique in particular.

The coastal East Africa region faces significant insurgent and terrorist threats from various organizations, particularly from those aligned with Al Qaeda (AQ) and Islamic State (IS).

Many see trends of increased spread from ethnic into regional footings, reflected in shifts from formerly ethno-centric organizations, like the Somali Al-Shabaab, to conducting international profile attacks like the D2 at Nairobi's Dusit Hotel and Westlands Mall in January 2019, which tellingly shifted to using Kenyan nationals not of Somali descent.

As discussed in our survey of west Africa instances, the spread of AQ and IS affiliates in eastern Africa as well have raised the specter of a pan sub-Saharan caliphate, joining in a swath across the continent in an Islamic state. Though major organizational and heritage differences between AQ and IS affiliates militate against this, as do local factors, further spread and evolution are not out of the question.

IS AND AQ GROUPS & ACTIVITIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

THIS PAPER SUMMARIZES MAJOR IS AND AQ THREATS TO EAST AFRICA TO PRESENT A PICTURE OF REGIONAL TERRORIST ACTIVITY WITH TWO MAJOR THREATS OUTLINED IN THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS.

Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) :

- *Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique.*
- *Increase in attacks in Mozambique with an increasing risk of forays into Tanzania.*

ISCAP is an IS-affiliated organization is based in Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado since 2017 under the local name Al Shabaab, distinct from Somalia. The majority of the force is from the Kiwani tribe.

ISCAP can be linked to longstanding insurgent and separatist movements in the region, influenced by economic deprivation and local mistrust of national government on the other side of the country in Maputo.

ISCAP officially joined IS in March-April 2019, when ISCAP started attributing attacks to itself in both Mozambique and in the DRC. Theological training is believed to come from Tanzania and DRC-based scholars – contributing to a transnational profile.

ISCAP's objectives seem to be the establishment of an Islamic state in Mozambique with access to the Indian Ocean for transit and sustenance. A likely driver is a power play led by its major tribal component. Propaganda offers a further aim to establish a caliphate in this part of Africa.

The declared IS-type objectives do not seem to be the most appropriate lens by which to look at this group. Local dynamics and disenfranchisement seem to be the main drivers. Moreover, with local factors left to deteriorate, ISCAP will likely only be one faction among others — other Islamist insurgent movements may gain traction locally as well.

There is little info on IS and Islamist actions in the DRC. IS Central Africa Province (ISCAP-DRC) is based in northeastern DRC, close to the Ugandan border, allegedly led by a Ugandan, Jamil Mukulu.

As insurgencies and tensions throughout the country have been simmering for decades, it is unknown since when they exist although it is believed they have been active since around 2017 when they identified as a jihadist movement, hence around the same time as their Mozambican counterpart. The group includes remnants of anti-Ugandan government militants, particularly from the Allied Democratic Forces. It has not been very active recently with activity mainly ramping up in Mozambique.

The organization's objectives seem to be the establishment of an Islamic state in the DRC which is already in the midst of a Civil War , and overall a caliphate in central Africa. Though it is still difficult to tell the extent of the linkage between itself and its Mozambican counterpart, structural and theological links between the two are quite strong tells as to collaboration at the very least.

COVID period: Attacks in Mozambique has been increasing, with the group taking over Mocimboa do Praia for a few days, and killing over 52 villagers. The pandemic does not seem to have slowed its operational tempo. This group was only recently profiled as a regional threat though it has been active longer. ISCAP represents a critical growing risk for Mozambique, and its neighbors.

Many attacks have been attributed to the group though most are likely from the AFD – very possible link between the two. Regional intelligence has suggested over 2000 local and foreign fighters have joined the group – still debatable.

Thus the group while representing a threat to Congo, is only one between a great many groups creating instability in the African state, and in terms of terrorist threats to East Africa, does not currently seem to be one of the most pressing threats – though it should not be overlooked.

Al Shabaab:

- *Somalia and northern Kenya*
- *Increasing attacks in Kenya - North Kenyan Somalis at high risk of state targeting and Al Shabaab penetration.*

Al Shabaab is an AQ-affiliated organization based in Somalia and active in Kenya, established in the late 1990s, having pledged allegiance to AQ in 2012. Its emir is Ahmad Umar aka Abu Ubaidah, who may or may not be dead with conflicting narratives surrounding him. The group has been using ethnic tensions to further its reach, particularly in Kenya where there are Somali minorities living close to the border.

The organization is thought to have an advanced leadership structure, made clear by its territorial administration and detailed policies concerning everything from religious worship to dispute resolution, reminiscent of Al Qaeda centrals edicts. Indeed, it has been controlling territory since 2006 and thus has a heavily bureaucratic nature.

The organization's primary goal is the toppling of the Somali government to establish an Islamic emirate within Somalia. Though recently it seems to be regional as it has intensified actions in Kenya, hinting towards a spread towards a 'Greater Somalia'. If ISCAP continues to expand into other countries and starts targeting them, al Shabaab might react by expanding or activating its own AQ networks in the region through Somali populations settled there. The group's strength is estimated at between 7000 and 9000 members.

COVID period: The group has been very active during COVID, setting up COVID-19 treatment center, taking advantage of the weak government response, and has been increasing its actions in southern Somalia with recent clashes against militias there in addition to Kenya.

Islamic State in Somalia (ISS):

The Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) is an ISIS affiliated organization based in Somalia's northern Puntland region, formed in October 2015, and led by former al Shabaab commander Abdulqadir Mumin. As is the case with most ISIS affiliates throughout Africa, the group had previously been a faction of an AQ loyal organization. The group has benefited from clan politics like al Shabaab to get recruits – marginalized groups in Puntland. As of yet it does not pose a very large threat to al Shabaab dominance. Indeed, territorial and financial gain seem to be its main prerogatives with actual administration not likely being one of them.

As such, the organization has three main objectives: extending its reach outside the Golis Mountains, obtaining new sources of revenue, and acting as a counterweight to al Shabaab. ISS is believed to have around 300-400 active members.

COVID period: May arrest of leader Abdulkarim Mumin along with dozens of fighters – several weapons and armored vehicles were recovered. There seems to be important pushback against the weaker group, between state forces and al Shabaab.

FUNCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Apart from al Shabaab which is already well established in Somalia, the 'East African Front' is undergoing important developments at the moment. IS-loyal organizations like ISCAP in both locations have generally similar types of objectives, though we are not likely to see a spread to join their territories any time soon. Particularly for ISCAP Mozambique, which seems to be aiming to consolidate there first, although it could very well spread into Tanzania and aim to establish a strong presence there.

Though both IS and AQ affiliates are more often than not insurgencies in Sub-Saharan Africa, they present vastly different characteristics inherited from their parent organizations and evident in the splits of previously AQ cells into IS affiliates.

It is important to understand how IS-affiliated organizations function, and with a highly 'franchised' aspect to them – they tend to focus on local insurgencies with local dynamics, providing mostly theological guidance without financial situations being much of a driver for the IS central command. On the other hand, Al Qaeda groups like Al Shabaab tend to be more closely linked to AQ central command, sharing their heritage in foreign terrorism and thus for more covert operations in general with a less insurgency-based movement. This does not mean they do not function as insurgencies, but rather are strategically affected by their heritage, accepting dialogue or avoiding too much attention.

This has likely made it more difficult for AQ groups to implant themselves, particularly in Western Africa where they have been quite strongly Arab-led – which has been resolved to some extent through intermarrying, a tested and tried AQ central tactic. Though, that does not stop them from adopting similar tactics to IS groups, still taking advantage of local dynamics and economic situations as drivers for recruitment.

If talking in terms of major developments, the strategies behind those tactics do not point towards a pan-Islamic caliphate though, with these local dynamics very apparent in the AQ affiliated Al Shabaab, seeming to be shifting attention towards Kenya, likely aiming to recreate a 'Greater Somalia' rather than a pan-Islamic Caliphate – for the moment at least. Though, further spread, resource plundering and the establishment of 'small' bases are most definitely not out of the question for states previously untouched or relatively untouched by the wrath of these affiliates.

With how AQ groups hail from a more covert, international-terrorist background and IS ones more insurgency-led franchises, they are not likely to join each other as they often have diametrically opposed strategic visions due to this and are likely to continue clashing against each other.

Although long-term objectives seem generally similar in every group –due to their different heritage. With AQ being a highly theological movement seeking to switch from terrorist to insurgent-plus (operating similar to a state) on a longer-term, preferring to be centralized and organized, IS separated from it and demarked itself as more violent, more short-termed in its vying for a caliphate and much less centralized with the nature of its wilayat (provinces). Due to these major differences, there could therefore be conflict if there is further development and stepping into each other's territory.

STATE OVERVIEW

Affected States & Organizations

Mozambique:

Northern Mozambique is in great danger of collapse or secession due to the increased insurgent activity there and lack of state support. It needs immediate support and effective governance.

The population in Mozambique is 19% Muslim, mostly concentrated in the north of the country. The creation of a state within a state is not impossible, although it is unlikely that the majority of Muslims in the country support the insurgents. Though with rising popular discontent, false promises of jobs and financing through gas projects in the region, support to insurgents or at the very least against the state could lead to further strife. Indeed, activity has been rising speedily, with the north of the country having increasingly been attacked with armed takeovers of territory, including an important port city for a period of time, Mocimboa do Praia.

While it is generally not advantageous for insurgent organizations to take over cities due to their relative weakness compared to conventional forces, they do tend to want to take over territory with cities being huge prize. Major resources can be siphoned as such and governance can be tested. The country had also avoided the issue before extremism became terrorism in 2017 in Cabo Delgado, and has long preferred downplaying the issue over facing it. The government only brought the issue up to the SADC after 2 years. Moreover, at the same time, it also supported targeted actions against civilians, with a record of disenfranchising and potentially radicalizing disproportionate attacks. With major importance placed on liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects led by Total in the northern, terrorism-stricken region of the country, terrorist activity is very likely to prove to be a bane to both the feasibility and potential benefits of such projects.

Heroin trafficking moving from Cabo Delgado toward markets as far away as Europe is believed to be a major driver in pursuing conflict by adding cash and weapons to the mix. Traffickers who used Kenya and Tanzania coastlines to receive Afghan production via Pakistan moved south to northern Mozambique due to increased interdiction in the neighboring states.

Somalia:

Al Shabaab's presence is likely to continue to rise in the country, and with poor governance, the group could continue to gain legitimacy with local populations through the provision of essential services as well as for flaring up nationalistic ideas of reestablishing a strong and large Somalia.

The governor of Puntland state was killed by al Shabaab on May 17. Since Somalia's current federal administration took power in early 2017, al-Shabab has carried out at least 1,598 attacks using improvised explosive devices (IED), and killing thousands of people according to the United Nations.

The country is officially fully Muslim with over 85% of the population being ethnically Somali. Despite generic common factors, the country is very tribal, politically weak and has been unable to curb banditry, terrorism and separatism under a single government or functioning state. The economy has a large number of daily subsistence dependent and very poor, and COVID seems to be affecting it quite a lot.

Kenya:

By contrast, Kenya has a strong state and capable government. The country is 85% Christian and as such is not likely to represent a prime candidate for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate.

Territorial integrity is a risk for Kenya if the alienation of its northern communities develops due to links to Somalia. As such it needs to develop effective social responses which can function in parallel to its kinetic ones.

The country's main threat has been from Al Shabaab, particularly targeting border areas to increase a risk of secession into an Al Shabaab led entity.

Kenya has announced the launch of an anti-terrorism police unit from within its DCI in June. Kenyan security forces have been very violent at times, killing civilians believed to be linked with Al Shabaab, particularly in Somali speaking communities close to the border.

Recently, Al Shabaab attacked U.S. military forces in Kenya on June 5 – its spread into Kenya seems to be intensifying with the North seen as at a high risk of terrorist activity, though generally Kenya has proven quite effective in its kinetic responses.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC):

Between civil wars, religious extremism, and the threat posed by COVID-19, the DRC and its population are facing major threats.

DRC rebels are believed to be behind some of the violence claimed by both ISCAP and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Over 400 people have been killed by the ADF since one year ago when the army started an offensive against it. In addition to the threat it faces from religious-extremist movements, the DRC is facing around 70 armed groups, and as such perhaps need to move to try to co-opt groups to divide rivals rather than neutralizing what are mostly decentralized groups.

According to UN Group of Experts – "an investigative panel of conflict and areas experts commissioned by the Security Council" - most armed groups get arms and ammunition from the army – state actors are behind most documented human rights abuses in the DRC.

To this point, extremist groups have had supporters in the military such as when Congolese officers partnered with the ADF to kill the head of the UN's FIB (Force Intervention Brigade. 2014 massacres killing 12000, FIB didn't notice that many in the military had made it possible, including General Mundos who had financed and equipped the ADF.

ADF though an Islamist group operates with local armed groups and authorities (Christian generally). The state is also currently embroiled in a civil war in the Kivu conflict, attacks from ISCAP have also occurred there.

Southern African Development Community (SADC):

As made evident by its lack of clear planning for the protection of Mozambican residents, the organization desperately needs to increase its cooperation to push states to reach out to it holistically rather than member states in their individual capacities.

It is an intergovernmental organization with 16 members including South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, DRC. The group has proven to be quite passive with a lack of cooperation in the past, such as when it did not acknowledge the growing terrorist threat in Mozambique until May 19th.

No clear strategy has been put forward by it, which while expected to take place in its June summit, did not amount to any indication that it was indeed paying attention to a rising threat which could very possibly spread to other parts of the region. To this point with the current chairperson, Tanzanian president John Magufuli not invited to the summit on Mozambique, even though Tanzania borders the state.

Less/Not Affected /Increasing Risk

Tanzania:

With links to the Mozambican Muslim population concentrated in its south, further instability in its backyard could mean further terrorism.

Tanzania has a 35.2% Muslim population. Its forces have been deployed along the Mozambique border to avoid spillover. Many Tanzanian religious scholars are believed to have been giving theological training to Mozambican terrorists. Indeed, Mozambican clerics have been training in Tanzania for more than a century with cross-border exchanges having been taken place for much longer than that – many Tanzanian radicals are believed to have taken refuge in Mozambique's insurgent factions following strong state responses against them between 2015 and 2017, around the time ISCAP started.

Uganda:

The Ugandan Muslims represent around 14% of the population. The country has hosted over 1.1 million refugees as of November 2018, most from South Sudan and DRC. It has very porous borders due it being a landlocked state, particularly in the mountainous borders between Uganda and DRC providing strategic depth to terrorist organizations in that area. The ADF also started there as it wanted to instill Sharia law but changed its focus to the greater plight of Muslims now that it is based in the DRC – Uganda thus very much remains at risk of increased instability along its border with the DRC.

It can be surmised that Uganda needs to be careful in its targeting of terrorist organizations around its borders with the DRC – there needs to be holistic cooperation between both sides or terrorist activity in Uganda might increase as retaliation.

Indeed, should Uganda increase its kinetic military activities against terrorist groups arounds its borders without addressing social factors as well, it might start to be more targeted by ISCAP, similar to how al Shabaab had attacked it during the 2010 World Cup.

CONCLUSION

Development in terrorist activity and spread is underway in several countries considered at risk and in countries where groups could take advantage and grow from staging successful attacks.

Nonetheless, in regard to the common theory of aggravating factors and conditions pointing towards pan-Islamic Caliphate cutting through a central sub-Saharan axis in Africa, this seems very unlikely at this point. At the very least not until there is further consolidation of power and more routine cooperation between the two major terrorist constellations, AQ and IS.

There are obstacles to consolidation and cooperation that seem likely to persist. Many of these obstacles stem from the difficulty of mobilizing forces and popular support and operating across states with stronger response options and inhospitable social dynamics. Indeed, mastering local contexts and ethnic relations are central to AQ's major efforts to gain support bases and establish ethnic links.

The same can be said for IS affiliates, as the majority of them had already been part of previously established organizations, some of them AQ-linked. Many of these IS-linked groups seem even more localized and franchised than AQ, possibly owing their 'insurgent' affiliates which do appear as very 'franchised' and thus loosely connected to IS central in the Middle East.

This does not stop them from having overlapping objectives and similar tactics, though that likely comes down to similar individuals and organizations turning towards IS more than there being some kind of central command.

As with our findings in a companion survey of West Africa, AQ groups do seem more closely linked to their central command due to their theological and terroristic heritage, highlighting their more centralized structures of power. Although, as has been stated for Al Shabaab, local dynamics and cultural heritages very much affect these affiliates – they hence pose different threats to IS factions.

While IS factions often take the shape of local insurgencies with lofty goals and highly violent methods, they represent dynamic and localized threats which will keep coming with governance failures and economic downturns as is currently the case due to COVID-19. Al Qaeda groups, though they do take advantage of these factors for their growth, are much more pervasive and ingrained as movements than their rivals. Hence, regional decision-makers should avoid targeting all groups the same way and seek to understand the underlying causes for their existence, their objectives, and their strategies in detail.

East African Takeaways:

In terms of East African terrorism/insurgency, the main risks have been highlighted as follows: the increase in insurgent activity in Mozambique alongside a spread of Al Shabaab-led terrorism into neighboring Kenya. These various factions do show some major differences, particularly when it comes to IS

Even a locked-in pandemic-accelerated cycle of violence can be broken with effective responses, focused resources and credible outreach. Regional and even international partners may be needed but local knowledge of underlying factors will be the key.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abi-Hanna, Thomas (January 15, 2020), "Al Shabaab Is Poised to Surge in East Africa", Stratfor.
https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/al-shabaab-militant-somalia-kenya-attack-us-troops

AFP Staff (April 13, 2020), "Extremists in Northern Mozambique Declare Goal of Caliphate", VOA News.
https://www.voanews.com/africa/extremists-northern-mozambique-declare-goal-caliphate

AFP Staff (June 5, 2020), "DRC conflicts leave some 1,300 civilians dead, half a million displaced", TRT World.
https://www.trtworld.com/africa/drc-conflicts-leave-some-1-300-civilians-dead-half-a-million-displaced-36997

Al Jazeera Staff (May 27, 2020), "At least 40 killed in latest DR Congo massacre", Al Jazeera.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/40-killed-latest-dr-congo-massacre-200527164912839.html

All Africa Staff (June 8, 2020), "Mozambique: UN Official Blames Terrorism On Drug Trafficking", All Africa.
https://allafrica.com/stories/202006080902.html

AP Staff (January 5, 2020), "Al-Shabaab kills three Americans in attack on US military base in Kenya", The Guardian.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/05/al-shabaab-attack-us-military-base-kenya

Aynte, Abid & Jackson, Ashley (December 2013), "Al-Shabaab engagement with aid agencies", Humanitarian Policy Group, Policy Brief 53.

Bahara, Premdeep & Bryden, Matt (July 2019), "East Africa's Terrorist Triple Helix: The Dusit Hotel Attack and the Historical Evolution of the Jihadi Threat", Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel, 12:6.

Beevor, Eleanor & Berger, Flore (June 2, 2020), "ISIS militants pose growing threat across Africa", IISS.
https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/06/csdp-isis-militants-africa

Brown, Will (June 4, 2020), "The Sahel squeeze", The Africa Report.
https://www.theafricareport.com/25128/the-sahel-squeeze/

Burke, Jason (January 31, 2020), "Militia raids kill dozens as DRC plunges deeper into instability", The Guardian.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/31/militia-group-raids-villages-in-eastern-drc-after-army-crackdown

Campbell, John (May 20, 2020), "Preventing the Next Boko Haram in Northern Mozambique", Council on Foreign Relations.
https://www.cfr.org/blog/preventing-next-boko-haram-northern-mozambique

CEP Staff, "Al-Shabab", Counter Extremism Project.
https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-shabab

Chikohomero, Ringisai (June 2, 2020), "Can SADC come to Mozambique's rescue?". Institute for Security Studies.
https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-sadc-come-to-mozambiques-rescue

Cleaves, Sam (February 17, 2015), "Profile: Ahmad Uma (Abu Ubaidah)", Critical Threats.
https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/profile-ahmad-umar-abu-ubaidah

CSIAC Staff (2019), "Al Shabaab", Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation.
https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/al-shabaab#highlight_text_13367

Dalsan Radio (May 22, 2020), "Somalia: Covid19 Slowing Fight Against Terrorism-AMISOM", All Africa.
https://allafrica.com/stories/202005221037.html

Dirie, Nuradin (May 27, 2020), "Somalia cannot defeat terrorism without accountable security", Daily Sabah.
https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/somalia-cannot-defeat-terrorism-without-accountable-security

Garowe Staff (May 26, 2020), "Somalia: Puntland forces arrest ISIS commander's driver in latest crackdown", Garowe Online.
https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-puntland-forces-arrest-isis-commanders-driver-in-latest-crackdown

Gartenstein-Ross, Daveed & Zenn, Jacob (January 2017), "Terrorists, Insurgents, Something Else? Clarifying and Classifying the 'Generational Challenge'", Lawfare Blog.
https://www.lawfareblog.com/terrorists-insurgents-something-else-clarifying-and-classifying-generational-challenge#:~:text=Terrorism%2C%20insurgency%2C%20and%20insurgency%2Dplus%20can%20be%20seen%20as,hope%20to%20grow%20into%20insurgencies.

Geyer, Michael, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914-1915", in Paret, Peter (1986), Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Isoke, Henry (December 2015), "The Dilemma of Porous Borders: Uganda's Experience in Combating Terrorism", Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School.

Jalloh, Abu Bakarr (April 9, 2020), "Increased terror attacks in Africa amid coronavirus pandemic", DW.
https://www.dw.com/en/increased-terror-attacks-in-africa-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/a-53066398

Matandiko, Kevin (May 21, 2020), "Sadc wades into Mozambique terror attacks", The Citizen.
https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/news/-Sadc-wades-into-Mozambique-terror-attacks/1840340-5559196-tnqf0lz/index.html

Matsinhe, David & Valoi, Estacio (October 2019), "The genesis of insurgency in northern Mozambique", Southern Africa Report, 27.

Morier-Genoud, Eric (February 2019), "Tracing the history of Mozambique's mysterious and deadly insurgency", The Conversation.
https://theconversation.com/tracing-the-history-of-mozambiques-mysterious-and-deadly-insurgency-111563

Muraya, Joseph (June 5, 2020), "DCI's Anti-Terrorism Unit Is Now Ready For The Job", Capital News.
https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2020/06/dcis-anti-terrorism-unit-is-now-ready-for-the-job/

Ohikere, Onize (June 11, 2020), "Brutal and brazen", World Magazine.
https://world.wng.org/2020/06/brutal_and_brazen

OWP Staff (April 21, 2020), "Islamic State In Somalia", The Organization for World Peace.
https://theowp.org/islamic-state-in-somalia/

SomaliAffairs Staff (June 19, 2020), "Ma'awisley vigilante group, Al-Shabaab clash near Baledogle airbase", Somali Affairs.
https://www.somaliaffairs.com/news/maawisley-vigilante-group-al-shabaab-clash-near-baledogle-airbase/

Sweet, Rachel (June 2, 2019), "Militarizing the Peace: UN Intervention Against Congo's 'Terrorist' Rebels", Lawfare.
https://www.lawfareblog.com/militarizing-peace-un-intervention-against-congos-terrorist-rebels

UNHCR Staff (May 31, 2020), "Uganda Refugees", UNHCR. ***https://ugandarefugees.org/en/country/uga***

Weiss, Caleb (April 2019), "Reigniting the Rivalry: The Islamic State in Somalia vs. al-Shabaab", CTCSentinel, 12:4.
https://ctc.usma.edu/reigniting-rivalry-islamic-state-somalia-vs-al-shabaab/

West, Sunguta (May 31, 2019), "Has Islamic State Really Entered the Congo and is an IS Province There a Gamble?", Terrorism Monitor, 17:11.
https://jamestown.org/program/has-islamic-state-really-entered-the-congo-and-is-an-is-province-there-a-gamble/

Whitehouse, David (July 23, 2020), "Mozambique's Islamic insurgency poses risks to Total's LNG project", The Africa Report.
https://www.theafricareport.com/34694/mozambiques-islamic-insurgency-poses-risks-to-totals-lng-project/

Wikipedia, "Kenya", Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya

Wikipedia, "Mozambique", Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozambique#Demographics

Wikipedia, "Somalia", Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalia#Religion

Wikipedia, "Uganda", Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda#Languages

Yusuf, Mohammed (June 16, 2020), "Civilians in Kenya's northeast targeted by both jihadists and the state", The New Humanitarian. ***https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/06/16/Kenya-Somalia-al-Shabab-conflict-human-rights***

Zenn, Jacob (May 26, 2020), "ISIS in Africa: The Caliphate's Next Frontier", Center For Global Policy.
https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-africa-the-caliphates-next-frontier/

ATLANTIS
مركز للبحوث والدراسات الجيوستراتيجية
Centre de Recherches et d'Études Géostratégiques
Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies

THE CASABLANCA CLUB
African Think Tank Association

ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAEDA IN AFRICA
WEST AFRICA SURVEY

Policy Brief
September 2020

Islamic state and Al-Qaeda in Africa

by
Julien Friedman
Research Project Manager
***Atlantis** Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies*

Atlantis Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies is a member of the Casablanca Club

ATLANTIS

ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAEDA IN AFRICA

WEST AFRICA SURVEY

Political violence in Africa has not been a predominately global Islamist undertaking but Al Qaeda (AQ) affiliates have been present on the continent for decades. During the mid-2010s, some competition emerged with factions starting to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS), reflecting the global high profile of its emergence in Iraq and Syria. Terrorism in Africa has kept pace with global trends and developments and, in light of broad exacerbating effects of the COVID-19 crisis, its evolution is bound to accelerate.

This survey is part of a three-paper survey and analysis, a selective survey of Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS/IS) affiliates in Western areas of sub-Saharan Africa, addressing key characteristics, organizational differences, as well as major risks and threats they pose to the continent.

past decade. Political violence in Africa has not by any perspective been a predominately Islamist undertaking but Al Qaeda (AQ) affiliates have been present in the continent for decades. During the mid-2010s, some competition emerged with factions starting to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS). Terrorism in Africa has kept pace with global trends and developments.

ATLANTIS

Table of Contents

26 // INTRODUCTION //

28 // IS AND AQ GROUPS
& ACTIVITIES TO WATCH OUT FOR //
- *AQ affiliated organizations*
- *IS-affiliated Organizations*

32 // FUNCTION AND OBJECTIVES //

33 // STATE OVERVIEW //
- *Affected States & Organizations*
- *Less/Not Affected/Increasing Risk*

37 // CONCLUSION //

38 // BIBLIOGRAPHY //

ATLANTIS

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism in Africa — from incidents to organizational growth — have been on the rise over the past decade. Political violence in Africa has not by any perspective been a predominately Islamist undertaking but Al Qaeda (AQ) affiliates have been present in the continent for decades.

During the mid-2010s, some competition emerged with factions starting to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS). Terrorism in Africa has kept pace with global trends and developments.

Where Problems Persist

With the arrival of AQ and IS to prominence too often blocking the view back toward conditions precedent, it is worth noting that terrorism was not always an Islamist import to sub-Saharan Africa. Social, political, historical, and geographic contexts are the conditions that make imported AQ and IS affiliations with terrorism effective. This receptive context is the substrate for the struggle. It needs to be understood for crafting mitigating strategies and responses that strive to be effective as well.

In most cases, there has been plenty of strife and failure in these contexts, long before terrorist recruiters and fellow traveler exploiters and opportunists came on the scene.

First of all, an effective anti-terrorism strategy needs to include tactical and logistical considerations, nearly always a major issue across Africa.

There is building toward a shared vision and then there's planning for those horizons. The intractability of problems like transport logistics for securing remote outpost villages might need to be a central part of understanding what makes ideologically-driven terrorism increasingly successful in transport-starved Africa. And so forth.

The Approach Taken Here

The surveys in this series try to highlight some of these dynamics in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its various effects, particularly on social resilience and prospects for anti-terrorism efforts. It will include overviews of ongoing developments in terrorism on the

continent to help make sense of underlying causes and recent trends, like attacks spreading from long-troubled areas into relatively untouched ones.

The overviews will be organized to fit together to bring coherence as a series, with the idea that revisiting these areas occasionally with relevant developments will make a useful incremental contribution, either by adding perspectives or insight.

While this series cannot address every terrorist, insurgent and separatist group in Africa – doing case-specific research can provide reference points and templates for colleagues, academics and analysts focused on solutions, policymaker recommendations and metrics for effectiveness, i.e., clarifying where policies should be reinforced and what could be improved.

First of all, an effective anti-terrorism strategy needs to include tactical and logistical considerations, nearly always a major issue across Africa.

There is building toward a shared vision and then there's planning for those horizons. The intractability of problems like transport logistics for securing remote outpost villages might need to be a central part of understanding what makes ideologically-driven terrorism increasingly successful in transport-starved Africa. And so forth.

The Approach Taken Here

The surveys in this series try to highlight some of these dynamics in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its various effects, particularly on social resilience and prospects for anti-terrorism efforts. It will include overviews of ongoing developments in terrorism on the

continent to help make sense of underlying causes and recent trends, like attacks spreading from long-troubled areas into relatively untouched ones.

The overviews will be organized to fit together to bring coherence as a series, with the idea that revisiting these areas occasionally with relevant developments will make a useful incremental contribution, either by adding perspectives or insight.

While this series cannot address every terrorist, insurgent and separatist group in Africa – doing case-specific research can provide reference points and templates for colleagues, academics and analysts focused on solutions, policymaker recommendations and metrics for effectiveness, i.e., clarifying where policies should be reinforced and what could be improved.

ATLANTIS

IS AND AQ GROUPS & ACTIVITIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

THIS PAPER SUMMARIZES MAJOR IS AND AQ THREATS TO EAST AFRICA TO PRESENT A PICTURE OF REGIONAL TERRORIST ACTIVITY WITH TWO MAJOR THREATS OUTLINED IN THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS.

Major Threats to West Africa

- **JNIM AND ASSOCIATES** *(INCLUDING KATIBA MACINA)*: PUSH FURTHER SOUTH, IVORY COAST SEEMINGLY MOST AT RISK *(ALTHOUGH NON-NEGLIGIBLE FOR NEIGHBORS)*.
- **ISGS:** ONGOING FIGHTING WITH JNIM COULD PUSH THEM FURTHER INTO NIGER - IF NIGER PRESENCE INCREASES MIGHT PHYSICALLY JOIN ISWAP.
- **ISWAP:** INCREASE OF PRESENCE IN CHAD, NIGER, AND CAMEROON THROUGH THE LAKE CHAD BASIN.
- **ANSARU:** INCREASE IN AQ PRESENCE IN NIGERIA.

AQ affiliated organizations

Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM):

Based in Mali, Algeria, Burkina Faso (BF) and Niger, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) is an Algerian terrorist organization created in 2007 after evolving from the preexisting Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat (GSPC). It currently has no official leader following the death of Abdelmalek Droukdel on June 3 by French forces. Based on the GSPC's structure of "centralized and deconcentrated power", there is central leadership with autonomous armed factions which represent the bulk of its military capacity. AQIM's importance has diminished since the appearance of JNIM and shift of attention from Algeria to the Sahel.

Its current strategy seems to be the removal of foreign forces in Africa – subservient to the long-term vision of a pan-Islamic caliphate. AQIM likely has around 1000 troops and has a generally homogenous Algerian leadership.

COVID period: The organization has not been very active recently, leader's killing is not likely to affect Al Qaeda (AQ) operations in the region.

Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JMIN):

Based in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen aka Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) is an Al Qaeda affiliate created on March 2, 2017 by AQIM as a merger between Ansar Dine, Katiba Macina, Al Mourabitoun, and the Sahara branch of AQIM. Its leader is believed to be the ex-leader of Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly. It has been responsible for over 65% of all terrorist caused fatalities in the Sahel. Its structure is more diverse than that of its superior with considerable ethnic links to Tuaregs due to its association with Ansar Dine though it has distanced itself from existing ethnic tensions – though that does not stop it from flaring them up for its benefit.

It has been known to marry members between different tribes and ethnic groups to increase linkage. This structure has a striking similarity to the Taliban model – biding time and open to 'negotiation'. Furthermore, it has similar propaganda patterns to its superior with similar concepts appearing in its productions such as unity, jihad, and references to the Almoravids.

Its goals have been very similar to AQIM – driving foreign forces out of Mali and imposing Sharia in addition to a longer-termed goal to spread throughout the region. It currently has an estimated 2000 troops spread throughout the region through its splinters.

COVID period: AQIM has been accused by IS of attacking its positions since April, blocking fuel supplies and detaining affiliated locals. The organization has recently been pushing even harder for a foreign expulsion from Mali in order for negotiations to take place with the state and cease the violence (Taliban method). JNIM has regained control over most of the Malian Gourma area, even chasing ISGS from some of its traditional strongholds in the Soum province north BF.

Katiba Macina:

Based in Mali and Burkina Faso, Katiba Macina or the Front for the Liberation of Macina created in January 2015 due to the aftermath of the 2013 French invasion of Mali, with as leader Amadou Koufa . The group is part of JNIM though it has been singled out by analysts much more than other JNIM components. It is generally Fulani-led as Macina was a 19th century Fulani Islamic state, this serves its strategic communications. Therefore, while the group has to some extent distanced itself from ethnic narratives since it joined JNIM, it has used grievances of Fulani herders to fuel tensions and is accused of targeting Dozo communities – this has made many local militias and the Malian military disproportionately target Fulanis, fueling its support base.

Its aims are thus, the installment of a Macina Islamic Republic, and what it seems subservient to, the larger AQIM goal to establish a Caliphate, through the strategic narrative of removing foreign forces for negotiation. While its size is unknown it should be < 2000 as it is part of JNIM. COVID period: Katiba Macina has recently attacked a military convoy in Mali killing 24 on June 15. It is also accused of having committed an attack on an Ivorian military base on June 11 – might be moving downwards, though this is new as their activities had previously been confined to central Mali and North BF.

Ansaru:

Ansaru is an AQ affiliate based in northwestern Nigeria, which while it had been created in 2009 as a Boko Haram faction, became independent in 2012 and has revived itself from 'dormancy' since January 2020. It has for leader Usama al Ansari and is made up of a mix of ethnicities, from pre-existing Ansaru combatants, to ex-Boko Haram jihadists, to local bandits with a size of no more than 300 members. Though it is important to remember that in Africa 70% of fighters are recruited for attacks specifically.

With AQ organizations leaning more towards covert action due to their particular organizational heritage, their size can vary greatly, swelling in times of heightened activity – targeting potential local mercenaries could also limit their capabilities for action. It can be surmised that Ansaru's current aim is the reestablishment of an AQ presence in Nigeria. This group should be followed quite closely due to its activity.

COVID period: Recently killed 6 soldiers and abducted civilians on January 15 attack on a Nigerian Emir's convoy. Ansaru seems to be gaining momentum now by gaining the favors of local emirs and increasing banditry and attacks, likely in preparation for growth. Though they are still currently facing strong resistance from local militias/vigilante groups so still need to see where this evolves. In February it was believed the group had anti-aircraft rifles and GPMG.

IS-affiliated Organizations

Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS):

Based between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) is an ISIS affiliate, officially since 2019, created on May 15th, 2015 from a rift within the AQ group Al Mourabitoun – its current leader is Adnan Abu Walid al Sahrawi. It has since 'merged' with ISWAP since March 2019. It has a mixed ethnic makeup such as one its leaders Khalid al Fulani, a Fulani. ISGS has taken advantage of Fulani/Tuareg conflicts around the Mali-Niger border area.

Its aims are the installation of an Islamic caliphate on a more short-term than its AQ rivals, unwilling to negotiate its position. It is believed to have an average of 425 fighters as of August 2018.

COVID period: France is said to have caught an important leader from ISGS June 6th, recently pushed back by JNIM from some of its positions such as Soum province BF, with some fighters fleeing towards Mauritanian border.

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Barnawi):

Based in Lake Chad Basin particularly on the Nigerian side, the Islamic State's West Africa Province is an ISIS affiliated organization which was originally created as Boko Haram in 2002, though it has been rebranded since it separated from AQ after pledging allegiance to ISIS in March 2015. Its current leader is believed to be Ba Idrisa since March 2019 after Abu Musab al-Barnawi was ousted and perhaps killed in March 2019 for being too open to collaboration with AQ and dialogue with authorities. ISWAP is made up of several ethnolinguistic groups such as Kanuris, Fulanis, and Swahili speakers, all marginalized with ties across Africa.

The group is based in Lake Chad due to low governance, and has been leveraging on the growing poverty in the region due to the shrinking lake basin. It has for aim the creation of an Islamic state through West Africa, and has gotten more violent and in conflict with AQ since Barnawi's ousting. The group is believed to have around 3500 members.

COVID period: ISWAP have recently killed over dozens in Northeast Nigeria (Borno state) in a recent spike in attacks. Though, recently the Nigerian military has redoubled its efforts, these are not likely to stop it though.

Boko Haram/Jamaat Ahli as Sunnah (JAS) (Shekau):

Based in Lake Chad Basin particularly on the Nigerian side, Boko Haram split from ISWAP in August 2016 and kept its original name after ISIS ousted ISWAP's leader Abubakar Shekau being for being too egocentric among other reasons. While not officially affiliated to ISIS, there has been no retraction of recognition from either side. The group continues to stage raids, plunder, kidnapping civilians and commit suicide bombings and takes advantage of the same socio-economic conditions caused by the shrinking lake as ISWAP. It can be assumed its goal remains the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate though regaining ISIS loyalty could be a more pressing one. It is estimated the group has around 1500

It can be assumed its goal remains the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate though regaining ISIS loyalty could be a more pressing one. It is estimated the group has around 1500 members though that is likely an exaggeration.

COVID period: Jas is believed to have killed 92 Chadian troops in March 2020 and currently over 56 of its members were killed by Nigerian military – they still believe ISWAP is a splinter group of BH while it is the opposite. Still quite active with media presence from Shekau.

members though that is likely an exaggeration.

FUNCTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives tend to be similar enough for each group with the end goal of an Islamic caliphate, though the way and time-frame pursued can differ a bit. Though both AQ and IS affiliates are similarly-insurgent, their inherited characteristics are quite different as will be seen. Indeed, AQ groups are more open to dialogue and a 'Taliban type' deal, while IS groups are more concentrated on gaining followers and territory with no possibility for dialogue.

Short-term strategies are quite different – AQ: remove foreign powers form Africa, and IS: territorial control and popular subversion – this tends to be more localized. This epitomizes the main difference between the two sides, one inheriting a centralized and organized previously terrorist structure with central ideals and motives, and the other towards insurgency, less centralized and more interested in local dynamics than in an international project. Indeed, AQ groups are evidently more geared towards terrorism and covert action, with a core group of followers and use of external fighters for attacks.

AQ factions' more 'terrorist' approach means they really need to avoid active hostile suppression: hence why AQ factions are more open to dialogue. For IS groups there seems to be little structural coherence with IS central, and groups are smaller with most members being active insurgents in attacks.

This though, does not minimize the risk posed by AQ groups as it is evident that they have been making major advances in Western Africa with their attack patterns pointing increasingly towards either a shortening of their time-frame for the establishment of a caliphate, or a need for expansion in the face of a growing IS 'counter-culture'. Even if that is not the case, as they are more organized and strategically-driven than IS groups, they pose a significant threat to local governments.

Although this may well be the case, it would be more prudent to read the differences between the two sides from this data and thus conclude that though they both operate on local terms and local dynamics, it seems more likely that a pan IS-AQ caliphate will not happen due to these issues.

More than just objectives, it is evident that AQ and IS groups function and are implanted quite differently. Unlike East Africa which mostly has IS affiliates - which is not to say AQ ones are not bigger than all of them such as for the Somali Al Shabaab – West Africa hosts several interconnected AQ factions and to some extent, more connected IS factions. This signifies that, as many would note, that the threat is much more established and developed in West Africa, and with IS and AQ groups closer in total size to each other, competition and conflict between the two sides are bound to increase.

STATE OVERVIEW

Affected States & Organizations

Mali:

With its recent coups and increased insurgent activity, Mali is at a high risk of sinking into further disarray.

Bambara as largest ethnic group at 35%, Tuareg 10%, Fulani 17%, Dogon 13%. Has led to many local militias sometimes targeting Fulani fueling anti-government sentiments. There have been large protests in the country against the regime such as on June 5 with 20 000. EU training mission (EUTM) has seen the majority of it leaving the country – so halt in training for Mali army which is heavily under-equipped and poorly trained. Mali has not pushed for reforms in the security sector as had been supported by many European governments.

In that sense, the need for better local counterinsurgency has been greatly halted as of recently. Furthermore, ethnic fighting between Fulani, Dogon (many animist) and a continued Tuareg struggle for independence. In terms of military strength, the Malian army is very poor, with many members selling their equipment and committing abuses against the population.

The country has been willing to engage JNIM/Katiba Macina and have opened channels of communication, though these measures have been ad hoc and very inconsistent – e.g. community based org. Amical Jawambe du Mali claimed high ranking Malians instructed it to mediate with 'dormant cells' or people in villages with close ties to Katiba.

Burkina Faso:

With terrorism spreading southwards, the country is at a major risk of implosion.

Burkina Faso has many ethnic groups though the Mossi people are in great majority at around 52% and the Fula second at 8.4%. The north of the country is constantly attacked with nearly 850 000 displaced there, 10 times more than 1y ago. Indeed, until a year ago it had not really been a victim of terrorism. Though, the since the fall of its president Blaise Compaore in 2014, extremism started to rise. Like in Mali, army and militias have tended to single out the Fulani community as a whole – lack of services and its position as the 6th poorest economy are major factors for recruitment there. As BF is a barrier with the coastal states of Ghana, Togo, and Benin, BF security is a major concern. On a more positive note, it has recently had its first joint operation with Ivory Coast to take out a terrorist base in the south of BF as its threat has been spreading further south.

Niger:

Niger seems to be using the opportunity caused by terrorism to crackdown on opposition, all the while being heavily affected by it as well.

Most major attacks started from late 2019 to early 2020 such as Inates, Sanam and Chinagodar with at least 400 military casualties. Ethnic makeup: Hausa 55.4%, Zarma-Songhai 21%, Tuareg 9.3%, Fula 8.5%. Like most countries surrounding it, it is exceedingly Muslim (99.3%) . Niger has seen violent protests against lockdown measures during Ramadan .

Attacks in the country are generally in two spots, West with the border to Mali, and East around the Lake Chad basin both with more ISIS presence in general (ISGS and ISWAP respectively).

There is a possibility of reach of ISGS and ISWAP throughout the country, though it is still early to call this as the country is quite large to traverse. There have been big crackdowns on the population such as with the passing of a wiretapping law at the end of May, allowing the government to listen in to any phone conversation.

Chad:

Chad is hampered by its location, with security crises along the border with Libya and the Sahel scattering its forces, while also being a major target for terrorism.

March 23 represented the deadliest toll for Chad when JAS (Shekau faction still 'linked to ISWAP' attacked an army base in Boma. Terrorism mainly occurs in the Lake Chad region which is generally ungoverned and sparsely inhabited and it had previously never really been part of any state. Furthermore, the Chadian army is considered to be generally stronger than many of its neighbors though very brutal. Many different ethnic groups in the lake area making it difficult to provide a solution, barely any services or state presence there. There have been a string of measures hurting the local population such as banning the use of boats as they were used to get around the lake islands by ISIS, thus, fishermen are unable to feed their families.

Moreover, there is a major issue of mistrust between surrounding countries hence difficulty cooperating, particularly with Nigeria an English-speaking country.

Nigeria:

Poor border security with Niger and Chad has been enabling the influx of arms and jihadist movement, which coupled with trouble in the north and internal arms trafficking, puts the country in a difficult situation.

53.5% Muslim population, Hausa population, Yoruba and Igbo next. There is a big problem with misappropriation of funds meant for counterterrorism. Most terrorist presence around the Lake Chad region in the northeast of the country, particularly the Borno state, which has been happening since at least 2002.

In relations to the COVID-19 situation, there have been extended lockdowns in Nigeria with many falling ill, 40-45% increase in respiratory cases and many hospitals closing – north east state of Yobe with highest number deaths. There is poor border security with Niger and Chad which enables the influx of arms and jihadist movement.

Though, Nigeria has the fourth strongest army in Africa, ranked at 43 worldwide with over 181 000 personnel and 400 000 available manpower. The country has been increasingly relying on air force to attack insurgents , while it is still early to gage the results of such a shift in tactics, it is not likely to be an effective measure as is often the case when states are heavily reliant on airpower for counterinsurgency. As of now insurgent organizations have been slowly taking control of the population and government in Borno.

Some believe the war has been prolonged due to the presence of oil around the lake, inability of the government to access weapons due to its bad history of human rights abuses and some also see collusion as a reason. Finally, it has had some successes with counterterrorism when retaking ISWAP territory in 2015 – though the group quickly learned it could not win conventionally and thus retreated to rural strongholds.

G5 Sahel:

The G5 Sahel is an institutional framework for cooperation on development and security in West Africa between Mauritania, Chad, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso launched in February 2017.

For the G5 Sahel and its member states, social and more 'political' decision-making still trails behind – this is incredibly important in effective counterinsurgency as there is no military technical solution to larger societal issues.

It has seen major funding shortages and delays with not enough collective action from it ever since it was founded in 2014. The force is hampered by a lack of finding and even had an attack destroying most of its military headquarters in Mali in July 2018. Also has had preferences towards military solutions. 3 out of 5 of its militaries are very weak (BF, Niger, and Mali). Morocco has increased help to the organization particularly through training though.

The organization has been pushing for debt relief from the IMF, France etc. and many of its states will be getting some form of it in light of COVID. Security arrangements have gotten a bit better such as with the creation of the Joint Command Mechanism for troops in Liptako Gourma.

Multinational Joint Task Force:

The task force has proven effective than G5 in general due to its stronger military components, but unlike the G5, it is only a military task force and not a full organization so political gain/loss cannot be quantified.

Less/Not Affected/ Increasing Risk

Mauritania:

To this day Mauritania has not been affected, with no attacks since 20 December 2011 when a gendarme was kidnapped on the border with Mali.

Some have argued this because there was an agreement with AQIM (though this was possibly a scrapped idea) found in Bin Laden's compound dated to 2010 (many countries tried similar approaches to Mauritania and failed so maybe this is true). The state has used multidimensional approach with preventive and repressive measures such as deradicalization programs in prison with released members, and rapid reaction force.

Many Mauritanians have been part of AQ etc. Such as Mohammed Lemin Ould al Hassan who was an AQIM chief ideologue. Many have also travelled there for Islamic teachings – maybe it is in a situation like the UK had before, tacit agreement to let them come there as long as they do not attack. In terms of whether or not it could benefit from the spread of terrorism, that is not likely to be the case, though apathy could be an issue at this crucial stage.

Ivory Coast:

Being the country on the Gulf of Guinea with the highest percentage of Muslim population at 43% and political instability, it seems the likeliest candidate for a terrorist expansion, and not solely as a zone of depth or profiting.

Ethnic groups in the country are not the same as its Sahelian neighbors and thus less likely to be coaxed. While the state has generally not seen a spread of terrorism like its neighbors (apart from a 2016 JNIM attack killing 19), they are being very careful. Indeed, there has been an attack recently in the north of the country near the BF border in June. Thus, 1000 troops have been committed to Operation 'Comoe' with BF around the Comoe National Park.

This area in the north of the country is believed an area where terrorists in BF escape after attacking there, use for strategic depth though could very much mean a spread. There has also been an attack killing 10 at a military post near BF border.

Benin:

As the second Gulf of Guinea country with the second largest Muslim population and a Fulani contingent, if JNIM is unable to penetrate the Ivory Coast, it could represent the second-best option and as such should be closely monitored.

8.6% Fula population, 27.7% Muslim population with 48.5% Christians. It is believed livestock stolen in BF, Mali and Niger are sold in Benin, Ivory Coast and Ghana. Buyers from Ghana and Togo are believed to have been purchasing gold from mining sites controlled by extremists. Illicit trading has thus likely been both a bane and a source of profit for Benin. The state also has national parks and forests covering its border with BF, these have been used for strategic depth such as the Pendjari National Park where there has been kidnappings and killings in 2019.

Benin has experienced biggest deterioration of any country in peacefulness rankings, falling 34 places. There have been inquiries into intelligence sharing with terrorist groups recently, corruption remains a huge issue.

Togo:

Togo faces a similar situation to its neighbor Benin due to its presence of parks and forests on its border with BF making it a good location for strategic depth, and an entry point into the country.

The country has been in a stalled democratic transition since 1967, majority Christian 37%, 35% animist and 20% Muslim. Many believe in the presence of sleeper cells in the country. Togo has been spared big attacks so far, but its territory has been infiltrated and the armed forces are racing to ready for the worst. The 100km border between it and its neighbors serves smugglers, contraband sellers etc.

Military has trained with the UN due to many peacekeeping operations and are primarily of the Kabye ethnic group – this fight against terror could serve to silence criticisms against the dictatorship as there had been mass demonstrations during 2017 and 2018 particularly from Muslims.

Ghana:

Ghana is in a similar situation to its neighbors overall, there is very much more to say on the possibility that the state might be profiting from terrorist finances to some extent, though terrorist spread throughout the country would likely not profit it.

Ghana is 16% Muslim. Also has forests/parks bordering BF. EU commission has argued on May 7 that Ghana poses a significant threat to its financial system due to little enforcement in money laundering.

Due to the 'low' percentage of Muslims in the country, although still consequent in size, the country is not likely to be a 'prime candidate' for spread into a major presence there, though terrorist profiting and resource pillaging could become even more of a major issue.

Cameroon:

Instability in Cameroon could lead to more terrorist traction there, though for the moment it is still hard to gage the overall likeliness of this risk.

10% Fulani population, Muslims represent around 18% of the population. President Biya has been one of the longest serving in Africa, over 37 years. Country has been engaged in clashes with Nigeria for decades over its possession of the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula which Nigeria has rejected.

The country has been facing separatism from its anglophone population bordering Nigeria which has supported it - Cameroon will have to fight on two fronts if jihadists decide to further their entry. Government responses to terrorist attacks have led to civilian casualties. Finally, the government has banned all mass protests posing threats to the security of the state and can detain anyone without trial.

CONCLUSION

Development in terrorist activity and spread is underway in several countries considered at risk and in countries where groups could take advantage and grow from staging successful attacks.

Nonetheless, in regard to the common theory of aggravating factors and conditions pointing towards pan-Islamic Caliphate cutting through a central sub-Saharan axis in Africa, this seems very unlikely at this point. At the very least not until there is further consolidation of power and more routine cooperation between the two major terrorist constellations, AQ and IS.

There are obstacles to consolidation and cooperation that seem likely to persist. Many of these obstacles stem from the difficulty of mobilizing forces and popular support and operating across states with stronger response options and inhospitable social dynamics. Indeed, mastering local contexts and ethnic relations are central to AQ's major efforts to gain support bases and establish ethnic links.

The same can be said for IS affiliates, as the majority of them had already been part of previously established organizations, some of them AQ-linked. Many of these IS-linked groups seem even more localized and franchised than AQ, possibly owing their 'insurgent'

West African Takeaways:

Here, the mains threats facing West Africa are thus, JNIM and its associated factions pushing further south putting the countries of the Gulf of Guinea at risk, ISGS moving deeper into Niger and this perhaps triggering a union with ISWAP which itself could very likely increase its presence in the countries of the Lake Chad Basin, and finally there is the question of the 'reawakening' of the AQ affiliate Ansaru in Nigeria.

Additionally, this research has also pointed out that though on the surface many of these organizations play on similar local grievances such as ethnic, economic, and religious ones, their strategies and defining characteristics are quite different even though their methods might sometimes seem similar. Indeed, it would be remiss to characterize the threats as 'the same' or simply as Islamist terrorism as deep analysis and reflection deserves to be made on what make IS and AQ affiliates tick, the extent to which they are localized, and how they expand.

While IS factions often take the shape of local insurgencies with lofty goals and highly violent methods, they represent dynamic and localized threats which will keep coming with governance failures and economic downturns as is currently the case due to COVID-19. Al Qaeda groups, though they do take advantage of these factors for their growth, are much more pervasive and ingrained as movements than their rivals. Hence, policymakers should avoid targeting all groups the same way and seek to understand the underlying causes for their existence, their objectives, and their strategies in detail.

Even a locked-in pandemic-accelerated cycle of violence can be broken with effective responses, focused resources and credible outreach. Regional and even international partners may be needed but local knowledge of underlying factors will be the key.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Addamah, Steven (May 27, 2020), "Benin: Prosecutor, police officer accused of alleged intelligence with terrorist group", Medafrica Times.
https://medafricatimes.com/20019-benin-prosecutor-police-officer-accused-of-alleged-intelligence-with-terrorist-group.html

AFP Staff (June 15, 2020), "Militants ambush kills 24 soldiers in Mali, many missing", TRT World.
https://www.trtworld.com/africa/militant-ambush-kills-24-soldiers-in-mali-many-missing-37305

AFP Staff (May 21, 2020), "Worried Togo finds itself on front line of Sahel's jihadist war", France 24.
https://www.france24.com/en/20200521-worried-togo-finds-itself-on-front-line-of-sahel-s-jihadist-war

African Bulletin Staff (June 11, 2020), "Jihadist groups extend their operations in the Sahel", African Bulletin.
http://www.african-bulletin.com/10299-jihadist-groups-extend-their-operations-in-the-sahel.html

Al Jazeera Staff (May 5, 2020), "Dozens of Boko Haram, ISWAP fighters killed in Nigeria", Al Jazeera.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/dozens-boko-haram-iswap-fighters-killed-nigeria-200505070849988.html

Allegrozzi, Ilaria (May 22, 2019), "Ailing Cameroon Separatist Leader Deserves Proper Medical Care", Human Rights Watch.
https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/22/ailing-cameroon-separatist-leader-deserves-proper-medical-care

Altuna Galan, Sergio (June 6, 2018), "Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wa l Muslimin: a propaganda analysis of al-Qaeda's project for the Sahel", Real Instituto Elcano.
http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/international+terrorism/ari70-2018-altunagalan-jnim-propaganda-analysis-al-qaeda-project-sahel

Alupo, Beatrice & Nketsia, William & Oginni, Oyewole & Opoku, Maxwell & Saka, Bernard (2020), "Societal perceptions of counterterrorism in Cameroon: The voices of those far from the battlefield", Journal of Human Rights, 19:2, pp. 220-237.

Anka, Yusuf & Salkida, Ahmad (October 16, 2019), "Investigation: Insecurity: Fears Trail Peace Efforts in North West Nigeria", Salkida.
https://salkida.com/insecurity-why-peace-efforts-in-northwest-nigeria-is-not-sutainable/

Antwi-Boateng, Osman (2017), "The Rise of Pan-Islamic Terrorism in Africa: A Global Security Challenge", Politics & Policy, 45:2, pp. 253-284.

Asadu, Chinedu (February 5, 2020), "Ansaru militants open fire on police helicopter in Kaduna, lose '250' fighters, The Cable.
https://www.thecable.ng/breaking-ansaru-militants-open-fire-on-police-helicopter-in-kaduna-lose-250-men

Balestrieri, Steve (May 20, 2020), "ISIS & Al Qaeda fight it out in the Sahel as security forces hammer both", SOFREP.
https://sofrep.com/news/isis-al-qaeda-fight-it-out-in-the-sahel-as-security-forces-hammer-both/

Balestrieri, Steve (May 27, 2020), "In a landmark move, two African militaries jointly raid a terrorist base", SOFREP.
https://sofrep.com/news/in-a-landmark-move-two-african-militaries-raid-together-terrorist-base/

BBC Staff (May 30, 2019), "Burkina Faso's war against militant Islamists", BBC News
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-39279050

Beevor, Eleanor & Berger, Flore (June 2, 2020), "ISIS militants pose growing threat across Africa", IISS.
https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/06/csdp-isis-militants-africa

Berger, Flore (June 4, 2020), "Sahel – a new battlefield between IS and Al Qaeda?", The Africa Report.
https://www.theafricareport.com/29184/sahel-a-new-battlefield-between-is-and-al-qaeda/

Brown, Will (June 4, 2020), "The Sahel squeeze", The Africa Report. https://www.theafricareport.com/25128/the-sahel-squeeze/
Burke, Jason (January 22, 2020), "Sahel faces surge in violence from terror attacks", The Guardian.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/22/sahel-faces-surge-in-violence-from-terror-attacks

Coleman, Julie & Demuynck, Meryl (March 12, 2020), "The Shifting Sands of the Sahel's Terrorism Landscape", International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. ***https://icct.nl/publication/the-shifting-sands-of-the-sahels-terrorism-landscape/***

Constellis Staff (February 2018), "Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) – Group Profile", Constellis Security Analysis.
https://constellis-production-tmp.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/file/112/CONSTELLIS_CONFIDENTIAL_JNIM_Group_Profile_February_2019.pdf

CSIAC Staff (2018), "Islamic State in the Greater Sahara", Center for International Security and Cooperation Stanford.
https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state-greater-sahara

Dunnigan, Jim (September 14, 2020), "Nigeria: Losing The North", Strategy Page.
https://www.strategypage.com/qnd/nigeria/articles/20200914.aspx

ECFR Staff (May 2019), "Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel", European Council on Foreign Relations.
https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/sahel_mapping/jnim

Erdogan, Cagatay Zontur (June 12, 2020), "Turkey condemns deadly terror attack in the Ivory Coast", Anadolu Agency.
https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-condemns-deadly-terror-attack-in-ivory-coast/1874003

Geyer, Michael, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914-1915", in Paret, Peter (1986), Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Hoije, Katarina (June 1, 2020), "Niger Adopts Controversial Wiretapping Law to Fight Terrorism", Bloomberg Quint.
https://www.bloombergquint.com/politics/niger-adopts-controversial-wiretapping-law-to-fight-terrorism

Hulme, Charlotte & Warner, Jason (August 2018), "The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells Across the Continent", CTCSentinel, 11:17. ***https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-state-africa-estimating-fighter-numbers-cells-across-continent/***

ICG Staff (December 12, 2017), "Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force", International Crisis Group.
https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/258-force-du-g5-sahel-trouver-sa-place-dans-lembouteillage-securitaire

ICG Staff (May 16, 2019), "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province", International Crisis Group.
https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province

ICG Staff (May 28, 2020), "Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Towards Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists", International Crisis Group. ***https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-malis-jihadists***

INS Staff (November 2015), "Etat et Structure de la Population du Niger en 2012", Niger National Institute of Statistics. ***http://www.stat-niger.org/statistique/file/RGPH2012/ETAT_STRUCTURE_POPULATION.pdf***

Institute for Economics & Peace Staff (June 10, 2020), "Global Peace Index: Global Peacefulness Falls With Sustained Rise in Civil Unrest in the Last Decade and Is Set to Worsen as Economic Impact of COVID-19 Takes Hold", CISION PR Newswire. ***https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/global-peace-index-global-peacefulness-falls-with-sustained-rise-in-civil-unrest-in-the-last-decade-and-is-set-to-worsen-as-economic-impact-of-covid-19-takes-hold-828660487.html***

ISSAfrica Staff (June 8, 2020), "ISS: Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa", DefenceWeb. ***https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/iss-breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa/***

Issoufou, Mahamadou (June 2, 2020), "[Tribune] Mahamadou Issoufou: le coronavirus, un cercle vicieux de souffrances au Sahel", Jeune Afrique. ***https://www.jeuneafrique.com/992497/societe/tribune-mahamadou-issoufou-le-coronavirus-un-cercle-vicieux-de-souffrances-au-sahel/***

Jalloh, Abu Bakarr (April 9, 2020), "Increased terror attacks in Africa amid coronavirus pandemic", DW. ***https://www.dw.com/en/increased-terror-attacks-in-africa-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/a-53066398***

Kasraoui, Safaa (June 14, 2020), "Morocco Calls for Commitment to Resolve Worsening Situation in Sahel", Morocco World News. ***https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2020/06/305788/morocco-calls-for-commitment-to-resolve-worsening-situation-in-sahel/***
Kennedy Boudali, Lianne (April 2, 2007), "The GSPC: Newest Franchise in al Qaeda's Global Jihad", Combating Terrorism Center. ***https://www.ctc.usma.edu/the-gspc-newest-franchise-in-al-qaidas-global-jihad/***

Klatt, Christian (June 17, 2020), "It's business as usual in Mali", International Politics and Society. ***https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/africa/article/show/its-business-as-usual-in-mali-4438/***

Kone, Hassane (December 6, 2019), "How has Mauritainia managed to stave off terror attacks?", Reliefweb. ***https://reliefweb.int/report/mauritania/how-has-mauritania-managed-stave-terror-attacks***

Le Roux, Pauline (February 22, 2019), "Confronting Central Mali's Extremist Threat", Africa Center for Strategic Studies. ***https://africacenter.org/spotlight/confronting-central-malis-extremist-threat/***

Lewis, David (July 10, 2019), "Greater response needed to worsening West African violence: U.N. heard", Reuters. ***https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-africa-security/greater-response-needed-to-worsening-west-african-violence-u-n-head-idUSKCN1U51TU***

Mateso, Martin (June 18, 2020), "Terrorisme en Côte d'Ivoire: "Une longue guerre s'annonce" dans la région, selon des spécialistes", France Info: Afrique. ***https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/niger/terrorisme-en-cote-d-ivoire-une-longue-guerre-s-annonce-dans-la-region-selon-des-specialistes_4011289.html***

Mondafrique Staff (June 3, 2020), "Afrique, le Covid-19 à l'origine de ravages économiques", Mondafrique. ***https://mondafrique.com/afrique-le-covid-19-a-lorigine-de-ravages-economiques/***

News Desk Report (May 22, 2020), "European Commission's 'dirty money' tag for Ghana unfortunate – Finance Ministry", Graphic Online. ***https://www.graphic.com.gh/business/business-news/european-commission-s-dirty-money-tag-unfortunate.html***

North Africa Journal Staff (May 18, 2020), "Nigeria: Insurgency risks expanding beyond the northeast", Nigeria Analysis. ***https://north-africa.com/2020/05/nigeria-insurgency-risks-expanding-beyond-northeast-nigeria/***

Nwezeh, Kingsley (March 2, 2020), "Nigeria: Boko Haram – Maximising Nigeria's Military Power", All Africa. ***https://allafrica.com/stories/202003030799.html***

Obaji, Philip (November 13, 2019), "Mali Attack Demonstrates Growing Strength of the Islamic State in Africa", ReliefWeb. ***https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-attack-demonstrates-growing-strength-islamic-state-africa***

Ogbaje, Sumaila (June 17, 2020), "Boko Haram/ISWAP terrorists succumb to military onslaught in NE-DHQ", The Sun. ***https://www.sunnewsonline.com/boko-haram-iswap-terrorists-succumb-to-military-onslaught-in-ne-dhq/***

Ogbonnaya, Maurice (February 4, 2020), "Has counter-terrorism become a profitable business in Nigeria", Institute for Security Studies. ***https://issafrica.org/iss-today/has-counter-terrorism-become-a-profitable-business-in-nigeria***

Owonikoko, Saheed & Momodu, Jude (August 7, 2020), "Environmental degradation, livelihood, and the stability of Chad Basin Region). Small Wars, 31:6, pp. 1295-1322.

Penny, Joe (December 16, 2018), "The G5 Sahel Force, Failing the Region and Failing Itself", PassBlue. ***https://www.passblue.com/2018/12/16/the-g5-sahel-force-failing-the-region-and-failing-itself/***

Porter, Geoff (August 2018), "The Renewed Jihadi Terror Threat to Mauritania", CTCSentinel, 11:7. ***https://ctc.usma.edu/renewed-jihadi-terror-threat-mauritania/***

Reuters Staff (March 20, 2017), "Al Qaeda branch rallies jihadists to join forces after Mali merger", DefenceWeb. ***https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/national-security/al-qaeda-branch-rallies-jihadists-to-join-forces-after-mali-merger/?catid=49%3ANational%20Security&Itemid=115***

Taub, Ben (December 4, 2017), "Lake Chad: the world's most complex humanitarian disaster", The New Yorker. ***https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/lake-chad-the-worlds-most-complex-humanitarian-disaster***

The Defense Post Staff (June 14, 2020), "Jihadists Kill Dozens in Northeast Nigeria Attacks", The Defense Post. ***https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/06/14/iswap-nigeria-attacks/***

UNSC Staff (June 10, 2020), "Terrorists Capitalize on COVID-19 to Erode State Authority, Attack National, International Forces in Sahel, Peacekeeping Chief Tells Security Council", Reliefweb. ***https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/terrorists-capitalize-covid-19-erode-state-authority-attack-national-international-0***

Walsh, Jonathan (April 24, 2020), "Burkina Faso struggles to tackle terror threat", France 24. ***https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20200424-reporters-burkina-faso-struggles-to-tackle-terror-threat***

Warner, Jason (January 2017), "Sub-Saharan Africa's Three "New" Islamic State Affiliates", CTCSentinel, 10:1. ***https://ctc.usma.edu/sub-saharan-africas-three-new-islamic-state-affiliates/***

Weiss, Caleb (January 17, 2020), "Ansaru publicly returns to Nigeria", FDD's Long War Journal. ***https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/01/ansaru-publicly-returns-to-nigeria.php***

Whitehouse, David (May 14, 2020), "Ghana: up enforcement to avoid EU money-laundering blacklist", The Africa Report. ***https://www.theafricareport.com/27921/ghana-up-enforcement-to-avoid-eu-money-laundering-blacklist/***

Wikipedia, "Bakassi", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bakassi***

Wikipedia, "Benin", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benin#Religion***

Wikipedia, "Burkina Faso", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burkina_Faso***

Wikipedia, "Cameroon", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameroon#Languages***

Wikipedia, "Ghana", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana***

Wikipedia, "Ivory Coast – Ethnic groups", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivory_Coast#Ethnic_groups***

Wikipedia, "Mali – Ethnic Groups", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali#Ethnic_groups***

Wikipedia, "Multinational Joint Task Force", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multinational_Joint_Task_Force***

Wikipedia, "Niger – Ethnic Groups", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger#Ethnic_groups***

Wikipedia, "Nigeria – Ethnic groups", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria#Ethnic_groups***

Wikipedia, "Togo – Ethnic groups", Wikipedia. ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Togo#Religion***

Zenn (August 2, 2016), "Mamman Nur and Abu Fatima – Pallasa (Expose)", Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria. ***https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/29/mamman-nur-and-abu-fatima-pallasa-expose-august-3-2016/***

Zenn, Jacob (June 14, 2020), "Negotiating With Jihadists in the Sahel and Nigeria", Lawfare. ***https://www.lawfareblog.com/negotiating-jihadists-sahel-and-nigeria***

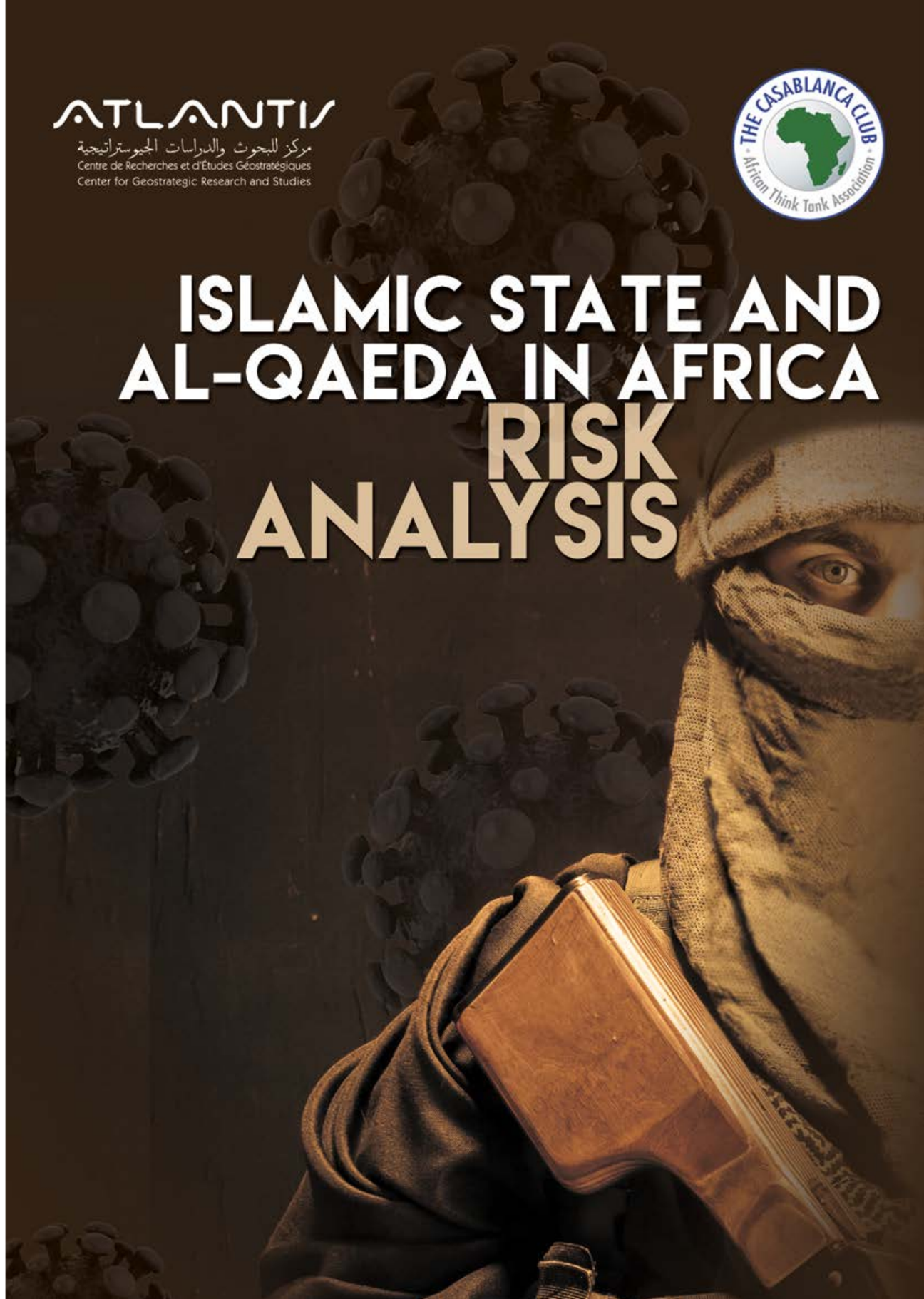
Zenn, Jacob (May 26, 2020), "ISIS in Africa: The Caliphate's Next Frontier", Center For Global Policy. ***https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-africa-the-caliphates-next-frontier/***

Zenn, Jacob (November 13, 2015), "The Sahel's Militant 'Melting Pot': Hamadou Kouffa's Macina Liberation Front (FLM)", Terrorism Monitor, 13:22. ***https://jamestown.org/program/the-sahels-militant-melting-pot-hamadou-kouffas-macina-liberation-front-flm/#.Vkpt5XYrLIU***

ATLANTIS
مركز للبحوث والدراسات الجيوستراتيجية
Centre de Recherches et d'Études Géostratégiques
Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies

THE CASABLANCA CLUB
African Think Tank Association

ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAEDA IN AFRICA RISK ANALYSIS



Policy Brief

September 2020

Islamic state and Al-Qaeda in Africa

by
Julien Friedman
Research Project Manager
***Atlantis** Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies*

Atlantis Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies is a member of the Casablanca Club

ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAEDA IN AFRICA

RISK ANALYSIS

Political violence in Africa has not been a predominately global Islamist undertaking but Al Qaeda (AQ) affiliates have been present on the continent for decades. During the mid-2010s, some competition emerged with factions starting to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS), reflecting the global high profile of its emergence in Iraq and Syria.

Terrorism in Africa has kept pace with global trends and developments and, in light of broad exacerbating effects of the COVID-19 crisis, its evolution is bound to accelerate.

As part of a three-paper survey and analysis, this paper offers the analysis for two selective surveys of Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS/IS) affiliates in Western and Eastern Sub-Saharan Africa, each a paper respectively, to address key characteristics, organizational differences, as well as major risks and threats they pose to the continent.

Table of Contents

48 // EXECUTIVE SUMMARY//

50 // INTRODUCTION //

51 // MAJOR TERRORISM INDUCED RISKS //
- East Africa

53 // SEPARATING HOME-GROWN ROOTS FROM STEALTH TRANSPLANTS AND OPPORTUNISTIC AIRINGS //

55 // REASONING FOR AFFILIATION //
- Declaring affiliation to get recruits and resources
- Joining an operations structure through which kinetic capacities can expand
- Leading rhetoric with tactical success on the ground

57 // TERRORIST AIMS & ORGANIZATIONAL MAKEUP //

60 // CONCLUSION //

62 // BIBLIOGRAPHY //

ATLANTIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THOUGH this study touches upon the spread of two major insurgent/terrorist strains, Al Qaeda (AQ) and Islamic State (also IS or Daesh), it is important not to view the threats they represent in this paper from only a broad-brushed view.

When American troops entered Vietnam to confront the Vietcong, labelled and targeted as a global threat, they were communists to be fought rather than as a force arising from local motives and grievances. The global anti-communist approach required the adoption of ready-made political-military target solutions, some of it aging post-colonial strategic perspectives imported into US thinking.

The result was lumping many local factors as regional if not global and therefore targetable threats, precluding effective stability options and generating more strife, instability and extreme material commitments that ensured cascading damage to all parties for decades. The prescriptive US approach to a globalized war in Vietnam has become a generational emblem for avoidable damage, whether strategic, regional, or local.

Though the lessons for the US in Vietnam are several policy generations in the past, many of them do bear repetition.
For this study, we must acknowledge that the problem of identifying avoidable damage early is a key objective and there are many underlying causes to each case that more often than not reflect local realities and successive failures to appreciate or remedy them. Calling this just poor governance itself seems too facile and it is clear that sustainable solutions cannot be driven by military-technical doctrine. And it is also clear that the need for broader perspectives is difficult to make a priority, and not without precedence elsewhere. Examples of a strategic need to ground responses in local perspectives in addressing current problems are readily available and identifiable.

Chad's decision to ban fisherman from using boats, ostensibly to stem insurgent logistics, deprived locals of livelihoods and left the disenfranchised vulnerable to insurgency recruitment, offering a clear example of broadly-construed policies having counter-productive local effects.
Sometimes key local factors are long in simmering and are brought to the fore only when they come to boil. The legacy of independence and civil war as well as a unique cultural identity in northern Mozambique were aggravated by policies allowing the demoting of local interests in a hydrocarbon gas rich region. Here, before significant transnational pressures, key local factors shed light on accelerating causes for a violent eruption in what became a fast-moving political emergency for Maputo.

Viewing either the strife in Lake Chad or Cabo Delgado as fueled by external actors such as AQ or even more so IS rather than as both local and endemic can only lead to limited insight for sustained counterinsurgency efforts. Political confidence, material improvement and strong governance are also necessary in any struggle for security, especially to ensure hearts and minds are sustainably and voluntarily given.

Sometimes indulging in general characterizations can be helpful to anti-terrorist policy formulation. For example, A-adhering groups tend to be more focused on international objectives to affirm AQ priorities and affiliated IS counterparts tend to more localized.

Anti-terrorist policies would be well-advised to be targeting underlying aggravating conditions where IS might be more readily adapted, while considering international aspects where AQ might be inclined to direct its affiliates to focus on its strengths.

So, it is not a surprise that covering both local and regional/international aspects is likely to be needed whether or not AQ and/or IS is involved.

In relation to IS and AQ affiliated factions, there might be transnational flows of knowledge, armament, and/or finances. But left without local support or, at the very least without a minimum local discontent towards their respective states, the risk from these transnational efforts can remain isolated. This has been significant element in Morocco's efforts toward sustaining a local advantage over transnational threat.

Following through along these lines, the risk of further local violent group growth can likely be reduced through highly localized efforts, such as promises kept and material governmental or government-mandated support.

Factions that have gained a local foothold can be progressively minimized in this highly localized approach, with operators increasingly isolated and vulnerable to being targeted with higher precision, more regularized as a matter of law and order with stronger localized stakeholder interests, resulting in greater interdictory effect.

African states have had success here as well. Engaging the local population is a solid first step, even in regional and international efforts, to chart the path back. Resource constraints will likely need to be identified and resolved – possibly with regional and/or international support. Local grievances can be addressed with a concentration of policy and remediation.

To this point, it is important to identify these contributing and aggravating factors and the extent to which they are pervasive, the importance of which this study aims to clarify.

Even so, whether this set of case studies is persuasive or not, the record indicates policymakers will find that the best first step depends on clearly distinguishing case-specific grievances.

These grievances often are catalysts for local support that impels groups into signature acts of terrorism. If the response is violent while policy makers defer addressing underlying causes, hardening follows and transnational groups find opportunity.

Leaving grievances and other catalysts for disruption unremedied accelerates the effect, just as addressing these catalysts slows movement toward self-sustaining insurgencies. In our selected cases, we try to find where we are down that road

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism in Africa — from incidents to organizational growth — have been on the rise over the past decade. Political violence in Africa has not by any perspective been a predominately Islamist undertaking but Al Qaeda (AQ) affiliates have been present in the continent for decades. During the mid-2010s, some competition emerged with factions starting to pledge loyalty to the Islamic State (IS). Terrorism in Africa has kept pace with global trends and developments.

Where Problems Persist

With the arrival of AQ and IS to prominence too often blocking the view back toward conditions precedent, it is worth noting that terrorism was not always an Islamist import to sub-Saharan Africa. Social, political, historical, and geographic contexts are the conditions that make imported AQ and IS affiliations with terrorism effective. This receptive context is the substrate for the struggle. It needs to be understood for crafting mitigating strategies and responses that strive to be effective as well.

In most cases, there has been plenty of strife and failure in these contexts, long before terrorist recruiters and fellow traveler exploiters and opportunists came on the scene.

Indeed, one size never fits all. A common issue in military response to terrorism around the world has been reducing the best chance for effectiveness by depending on the application of reductionist, formulaic, jingo-friendly "doctrinal" solutions for complex problems – a Jominian replacement of strategy by military technique. Africa offers no exception to the likely failure of doctrine without context.

What Solutions Look Like

First of all, an effective anti-terrorism strategy needs to include tactical and logistical considerations, nearly always a major issue across Africa. There is building toward a shared vision and then there's planning for those horizons. The intractability of problems like transport logistics for securing remote outpost villages might need to be a central part of understanding what makes ideologically-driven terrorism increasingly successful in transport-starved Africa. And so forth.

The Approach Taken Here

The surveys in this series try to highlight some of these dynamics in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its various effects, particularly on social resilience and prospects for anti-terrorism efforts. It will include overviews of ongoing developments in terrorism on the continent to help make sense of underlying causes and recent trends, like attacks spreading from long-troubled areas into relatively untouched ones.

The overviews will be organized to fit together to bring coherence as a series, with the idea that revisiting these areas occasionally with relevant developments will make a useful incremental contribution, either by adding perspectives or insight.

While this series cannot address every terrorist, insurgent and separatist group in Africa – doing case-specific research can provide reference points and templates for colleagues, academics and analysts focused on solutions, policymaker recommendations and metrics for effectiveness, i.e., clarifying where policies should be reinforced and what could be improved.

MAJOR TERRORISM INDUCED RISKS

East Africa

- **JNIM AND ASSOCIATES** *(INCLUDING KATIBA MACINA)*: PUSH FURTHER SOUTH, IVORY COAST SEEMINGLY MOST AT RISK *(ALTHOUGH NON-NEGLIGIBLE FOR NEIGHBORS)*.

- **ISCAP** *(MOZAMBIQUE)*: THE IS AFFILIATE HAS BEEN INCREASING ITS ACTIVITIES IN MOZAMBIQUE, EVEN TAKING CONTROL OF THE IMPORTANT PORT-CITY OF MOCIMBOA DO PRAIA IN THE TERRORISM-STRICKEN CABO DELGADO PROVINCE . DUE TO ITS PROXIMITY TO THE TANZANIAN BORDER AND RELATIONS TO TANZANIAN ISLAMIC SCHOLARS, THE THREAT LEVEL THAT TANZANIA FACES IS CONSIDERED VERY HIGH.

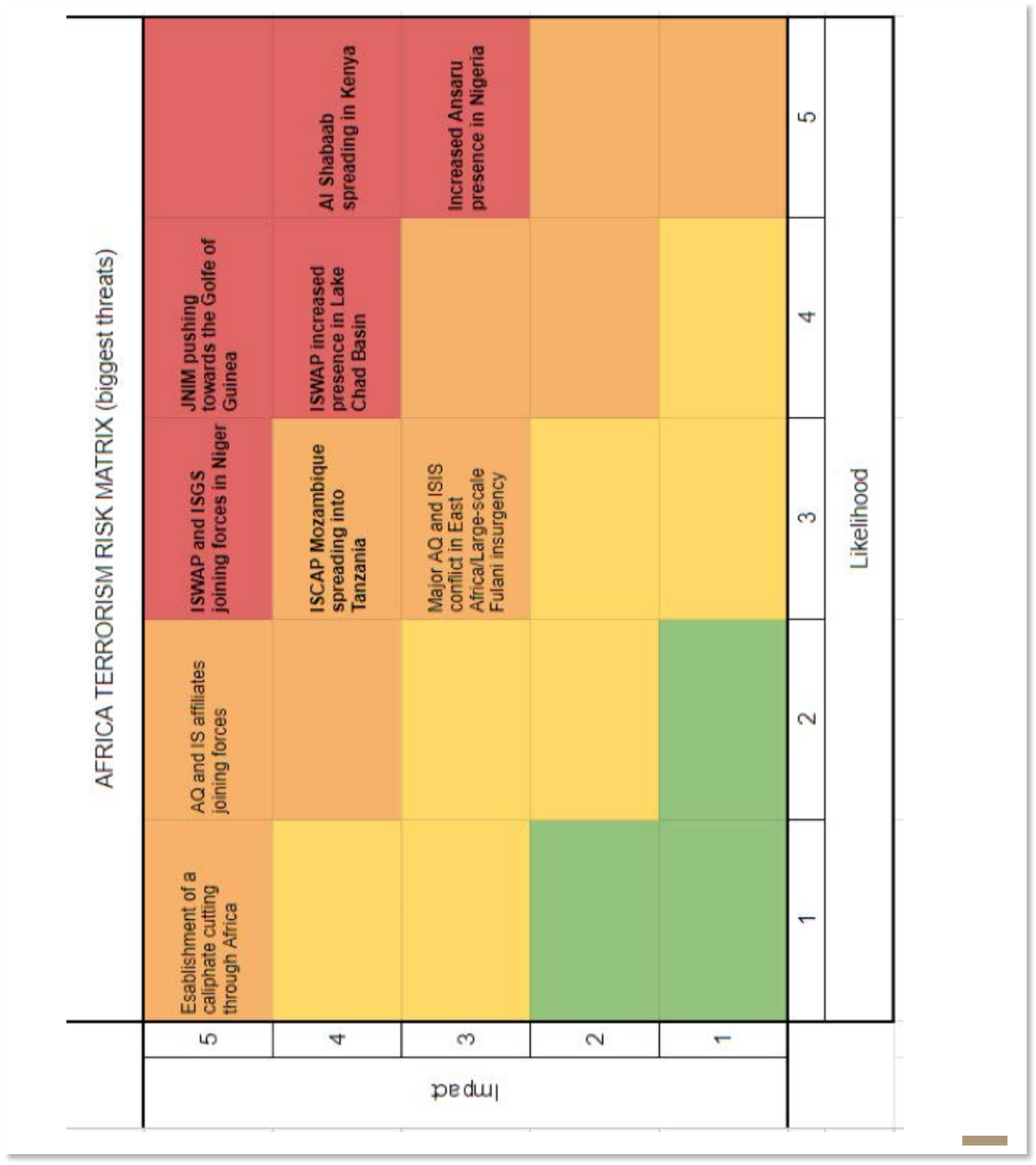
- **AL SHABAAB:** THE AQ AFFILIATE HAS BEEN INCREASING ITS ATTACKS IN NORTHERN KENYA , AND A POSSIBLE SPREAD FROM THIS FORAY INTO THE COUNTRY CANNOT BE NEGLECTED. WITH THE PRESENCE OF ETHNIC SOMALI COMMUNITIES ALONG THE KENYAN BORDER, THE STATE NEEDS TO BE MORE VIGILANT WHILE AVOIDING DISPROPORTIONATE TARGETING, RISKING ITS ALIENATION AND HENCE ADVANTAGING AL SHABAAB.
WEST AFRICA

- **JNIM AND ASSOCIATED CELLS** *(INCLUDING KATIBA MACINA)*: THERE IS A CURRENT PUSH TOWARDS THE GULF OF GUINEA BY JNIM AND ITS ASSOCIATE AQ-AFFILIATE FACTIONS, WITH INCREASED ACTIVITY DIRECTED TOWARDS THE IVORY COAST IN PARTICULAR – POROUS, FORESTED BORDERS BETWEEN THE COASTAL STATES AND BURKINA FASO ARE FORECASTED TO REMAIN AT AT HIGH RISK .

- **ISGS:** THOUGH THERE IS CURRENT FIGHTING WITH AQ AFFILIATED GROUPS IN THE SAHEL , THIS COULD PUSH IT EVEN MORE TOWARDS NIGER AND THUS SEEK A PHYSICAL RAPPROCHEMENT WITH ITS WESTERN AFRICAN FACTION, ISWAP.

- **ISWAP:** THE GROUP HAS BEEN INCREASING ITS ATTACKS AND PRESENCE IN THE GENERALLY NEGLECTED AND UNGOVERNED LAKE CHAD BASIN REGION , POSSIBLY USING THIS AS A LAUNCHPAD TO FURTHER SPREAD INTO THESE STATES.

- **ANSARU:** THE AQ AFFILIATE HAS BEEN INCREASING ITS PRESENCE IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA, POSSIBLY SIGNALING A RETURN TO FORCE BY AQ IN THE AREA WHICH COULD VERY WELL LEAD TO MUCH MORE INSTABILITY AND FIGHTING WITH SURROUNDING IS AFFILIATES – ITS GROWTH NEEDS TO BE CLOSELY MONITORED/



SEPARATING HOME-GROWN ROOTS FROM STEALTH TRANSPLANTS AND OPPORTUNISTIC AIRINGS

Even though multiple violent groups might seem to operate separately from each other, they might need to be treated together where they each influence and affect each other. Areas like funding and supply tend to warrant such treatment. A concerted multi-group anti-terrorism approach means adding a level of complexity that is often beyond most ongoing efforts that are largely localized efforts. Such solutions may mean regional and even international efforts may be required.

Resolving the gap between what is needed and what can be done is worth an extended policy discussion in appropriate forums. This review hopes to contribute to preparations for such discussions.

For many terrorist groups, the substrate that supports them locally have similarities; and many of the root causes for local sustainability are remarkably the same. Notably economic dislocations providing both fighters and similarly affected sympathizers who conceal, shield and support them.

For example, success for terrorism might seem to suddenly emerge but they have root causes that were left to deteriorate along the growth of terrorist violence, only to be rediscovered as this violence becomes a regional or international crisis. It seems to be common sense that focusing on solutions that address local aggravating factors may limit risks of violent outbreaks, and leaving local root causes out of solutions may preclude sustainability.

Indeed, federating agendas differ from personal ones although there are some exceptions. While there are intra-organizational differences (AQ and IS), most AQ organizations tend to follow their parent-organization more closely than IS groups, which seem more disconnected although both still have many shared interests, beliefs, and objectives.

AQ has managed to create a quite integrated group in Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimin (JNIM) despite its semi-autonomous leadership structure, whereas IS has managed only one major merger of IS in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and West Africa Province (ISWAP) which, until there is a physical connection – which might be possible through Niger – offer more symbolic links than anything else.

The Western and Eastern “fronts” also have very different populations, religious makeups, and political dynamics. Thus, while it is possible that there might be some advancements in the creation of a caliphate stretching through both sides, it does not appear likely that this will happen any time soon.

Groups are generally concentrating on increasing territorial control, as well as expanding operations in neighboring states. It would be remiss to ignore these developments. Further spread presents a massive danger to populations already under considerable economic and environmental stress, straining already-strained states and resources, particularly with the evolving COVID situation.

Furthermore, strategic lines of effort differ greatly, with AQ factions more willing to negotiate with states due to their different aims (particularly in the Sahel), and IS affiliates ruling out accommodation completely as an operational, recruiting and discipline tactic, among many other differences.

Although on the surface, AQ and IS factions often appear quite similar in objectives and activities, in fact, they are generally quite committed to presenting themselves as different from each other. There may be funding associated with these displays of distinctiveness, but there has been an increase in fighting between affiliates of the two, and divergence in their growth and attack strategies.

Similarities across the two strains are somewhat contextual. In the Sahel there has been coordination between AQ and IS affiliates. Still, it seems highly unlikely that there will be any significant increase in coordination or conflict between IS and AQ groups, whether on the battlefield or the media, as local groups tend to have priorities more immediate and senior than promoting one strain over another (unless they are specifically funded to do so).

REASONING FOR AFFILIATION

There is a further distinction to make between IS and AQ factions. Generalizations are not always helpful here. While AQ is much more terrorist event oriented in its approach – which is made more evident in its localized African factions which are relatively close to AQ central – IS factions tend to resemble 'franchises' of the central organization, more insurgent in their formation and much less led by international jihadi dynamics than AQ factions. AQ command structures tend to be smaller and more compartmented, presenting a model resembling a covert action cell. Statistics indicate that roughly 70% of AQ operators are recruited for specific attacks and can even include members of IS factions.

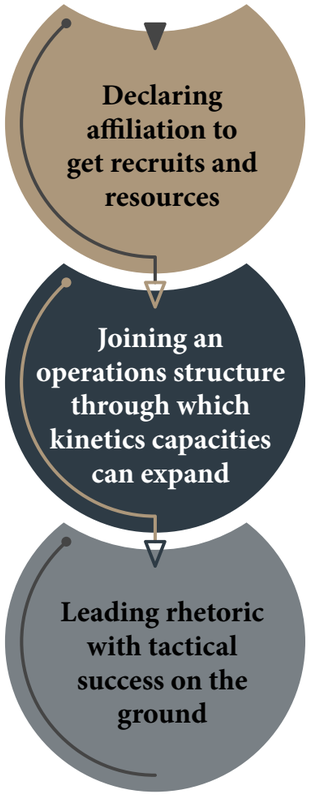
Could flying the black flags of insurgents and terrorists alike in sub-Saharan Africa represent something more involved than 'affiliation'? Furthermore, to what extent are they directed by Middle East-based organizations, as putative 'overseers'?

Operators in IS factions in Africa seem more incentivized by needing to make a living, rather than from a deep wish to bring about an IS Caliphate.

As such, it seems more fitting to question the substantive basis for the affiliation of a supposed IS-led group, particularly in light of much debate on their relations, as is the case between the Mozambican Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jammaa which has often also been called Islamic State Central African Province and has no real social or political standing of its own.

Conversely, groups like Al Shabaab from Somalia or JNIM in the Sahel are already 'semi-territorial' and showing sustained operating capabilities, while being AQ-affiliated and entrenched in communities providing sources of funding and recruitment; much less common in African IS affiliates. As insurgencies have been announcing allegiance to IS at a much faster pace than to AQ, it seems wise to concentrate on the substance and nature of their affiliations, and on potential motives for joining larger Islamist movements like IS.

Thus, we identify three major hypotheses for affiliation to organizations of the like.



Declaring affiliation to get recruits and resources

Declaring affiliation can lead to a higher return than not doing so, bringing in more recruits due to the 'brand name effect' and possibly leading to more resources. Though, in terms of resources it is a more complicated affair. If talking about IS factions, there have been studies surrounding the influx of weaponry and know-how from IS in Libya. On the one hand it is known that that has been the case with influx from Libya to both Syria and Iraq. With weapons and ammunition known to originate from other conflict-affected regions, it should not be a stretch to assume this to be possible.

On the other hand, it is hard to pinpoint formal relations between IS and its sub-Saharan 'affiliates' other than claiming responsibility for attacks and internal IS and external faction news outlets claiming subservience to the 'caliph'. As such it seems more difficult to state resources as being a cause for affiliation, although recruitment is certainly one.

Joining an operations structure through which kinetic capacities can expand

In terms of seeking to affect kinetic operations, affiliation can seem a potential solution to operational woes; joining organizations with more warfare know-how for knowledge transfer could make sense.

There has been confirmation of training camps being set up by IS factions in multiple locations serving to train fighters from around Africa; several Mozambican men have admitted to receiving training in Eastern Congo. Though, lacking cultural embeddedness in most African states, it seems difficult to argue that these groups which for most lack "social, political, and military coherence" would be able to successfully conduct military operations and sustain support from religious leadership.

From another perspective, affiliation, as formal as it may be could provide links to other more developed IS factions in Africa for training purposes if not more. This is made more evident by the alleged merger of ISGS and ISWAP. As such, even if there is nothing more to affiliation than publicity and brand imagery, it could facilitate access to training and perhaps armament from other more established IS organizations.

Leading rhetoric with tactical success on the ground

Finally, on the point of strategic communications which has been referred to previously, affiliation could mean effective and internationally-driven rhetoric following tactical successes, perhaps serving as a bridge for tactical operations to lead to strategic outcomes in a more decisive way. This is not a long-shot. Even if affiliation is superficial and only an alliance of convenience for a local cause, the publicity that can emanate from tactical successes such as IS claiming responsibility for attacks, can be a useful tool for groups seeking to expand, legitimize or aggrandize the threat they pose.

Furthermore, tactical success can bring further sponsorship opportunities, particularly for armament and further financial gain. Indeed, there is tactical use to affiliation, not only strategic, considering this can bring more tactical success due to the aforementioned factors – in what generally do not seem to be very forward-thinking entities, this can represent a valid cause for sponsorship.

TERRORIST AIMS & ORGANIZATIONAL MAKEUP

While an East/West "front" merger is not considered practical for the foreseeable future, underlying factors strongly favor further terrorist spread.

The impact of the COVID crisis on the policies that might inhibit development of terrorist organizations in Africa's two major Western and Eastern operating areas exacerbates but does not transform the major risks facing the continent. It does not appear to elevate factors promoting unions between Islamic State (Daesh or IS) and Al Qaeda (AQ) factions over those keeping them separate and operating as rivals.

Pre-existing links:

AQ and IS-linked groups around Africa have complex makeups and motivations, between local factors and ethnic links.

A common denominator is the origin of the majority of IS affiliates in the continent: the majority of them, ISGS, ISWAP, Islamic State in Somalia (ISS), among others, have either previously been affiliated to AQ like ISWAP , or splintered from AQ groups like ISGS and ISS.

This signifies that there are pre-existing relations, whether good or bad between groups.

This, while underscoring possible cooperation or coordination from them, has also led to conflict between the two sides due to one major factor: strategy, often pointing towards the current landscape as being the most accurate depiction of relations, quite bad.

Long Term Aims and Short-Term Tactics:

Although content is localized, AQ and IS affiliate groups display many parent organization characteristics and strategies. Both aim for the establishment of a caliphate but this appears as a short-term objective for IS affiliates — no doubt mirroring IS central's drive to establish a state— while an AQ trademark has been in removing "foreign invaders" first and move into subverting society on their terms at a slower pace.

AQ allows for negotiation to some extent, to which IS affiliates tend to be diametrically opposed. This short-term/long-term divide thus marks an evident difference in their strategies.

Although the context is localized, it is evident that AQ and IS groups have retained many of their parent organizations' characteristics in this aspect – though, short-term strategies (taking over specific states, targeting particular ethnicities etc.) are very much localized.

While both AQ and IS often use similar tactics, their factions tend to be at different ends of a structural spectrum. While AQ groups are more terroristic, IS ones tend to lean heavily towards insurgency. In terms of structure, several key differences can be pointed out. Indeed, AQ groups hold a heritage steeped in terrorism. They are able to have a lighter touch and their central command structure is evidently related to this as well; terrorism and clandestine operations need command and control.

To some extent, this can explain why AQ factions in Africa have tended to be more closely linked to AQ central as well as for being more willing to negotiate. With AQ being a foreign based terrorist organization with heavy theological/scholastic roots, it makes sense that its groups would be different than rival IS ones, no matter the importance of local dynamics.

Ethnicity:

In terms of factors bringing them closer together, most AQ and IS factions are ethnically diverse, particularly the larger ones such as JNIM and ISWAP, yet use ethnic tensions to further their own objectives. The Macina Liberation Front is a good example of this as while its name and short-term objective of recreating the Macina, Fulani-led Islamic state , which has brought it many followers from a marginalized population throughout West Africa, its willingness to compromise with authorities and moving away from ethnic-targeted propaganda as part of JNIM has pushed some Fulanis to instead join ISGS – which has some Fulani leadership such as Khalif al Fulani.

Fueling ethnic tensions has led to the development of terrorist groups through supporting particular ethnic groups like the Kimwani for ISCAP, and the spread to other states like due to the targeting ethnic Somalis by Kenyan authorities. Ethnic links between sides though has not appeared to be a particularly important component in cooperation. This is yet another indicator that not only do local dynamics form much of basis for the existence of these tumor-like organizations, but organizational heritage and structure does as well.

Coordination:

Collaboration has taken place in the past, particularly between JNIM and ISGS, unlike the constant fighting that had been taking place in other regions of Africa. While some have stated this as having taken place mere months prior , JNIM and ISGS are back to fighting full force. Indeed, JNIM has been regaining control over the majority of the Malian Gourma area, and even chasing ISIS from some of its traditional strongholds in Burkina Faso's northern Soum province .

This is likely to have taken place due to the continued spread of these groups and need for supporters and recruits which have led them to stray onto each other's territories; this could be denoting a regional spread for new territories, and perhaps once again coordination if there is no need to infringe on their rival's sovereignty.

Though, more cooperation than what can be considered basic logistical coordination is quite unlikely. Due to the very different profiles of IS and AQ affiliates, finding common ground between them becomes more tactical than strategic or even operational.

Leadership:

In a region where 70% of fighters are employed for specific attacks , leadership can play a major role in inter-terrorist organization cooperation. During Barnawi's lead of ISWAP, there were alleged relations between the IS offshoot and AQ and even openness to negotiation that is not often found in IS factions. Though, one cannot conclude much from this as he was deposed in March 2019 .

The group has since increased its violence, written off negotiation and become much more critical of AQ in its media outputs, like its Saharan partner ISGS . Thus, deciding what is preferable, between an AQ friendlier IS that can accept some negotiation but runs the risk of teaming up with their rivals, or conflict between the two groups meaning a disunited front, but increased violence which seems to be the current situation.

Intra-Affiliate Mergers:

More pressing than AQ/IS collaboration is the merger of IS organizations as AQ organizations are generally understood to be closer linked due to overseer groups like AQIM and large conglomerates like JNIM. While IS groups seem disunited and solely linked to ISIS by their pledges of allegiance and attack attributions, there has been a recent effort to 'merge' factions like ISGS and ISWAP in 2019 . This is considered to be a major factor in bringing together a seemingly heterogenous force through a single axis. Particularly pressing are ISGS and ISWAP's forays into Niger – a physical meeting of forces could lead to a massive increase in activity and reach for them, mirroring JNIM's rise after its creation from several organizations.

It is still debatable as to whether these groups can actually prove to merge effectively rather than as a PR stunt. IS organizations are extremely localized, finding common ground other than in tactics and perverse readings of scriptures is not straightforward. It remains to be seen whether these mergers are possible in IS organizations, and if so, could prove or disprove the primacy of internal or local dynamics over external ones.

West-East Merger:

While there are significant developments in both the East and West of Africa, most groups are busy either developing themselves in their respective states, such as Ansaru or ISS, or potentially spreading to other countries in their region, such as JNIM in the Gulf of Guinea or Al Shabaab in northern Kenya.

Indeed, to do so would mean fully spreading through states with minority Muslim populations, which while they can be utilized as support bases and for resources, they are likely not large enough to create enough support for full takeovers with extremist regime change; jihadi governance is unlikely.

With the size of the continent and the military pressure that these groups face from every single nation there, it seems highly unlikely that terrorist organizations from either front will be joining forces any time soon, even less-so if that includes AQ and IS groups banding together all around the continent – most alliances have been local and more 'alliances of convenience' than anything.

CONCLUSION

Development in terrorist activity and spread is underway in several countries considered at risk and in countries where groups could take advantage and grow from staging successful attacks.

Nonetheless, in regard to the common theory of aggravating factors and conditions pointing towards pan-Islamic Caliphate cutting through a central sub-Saharan axis in Africa, this seems very unlikely at this point. At the very least not until there is further consolidation of power and more routine cooperation between the two major terrorist constellations, AQ and IS.

There are obstacles to consolidation and cooperation that seem likely to persist. Many of these obstacles stem from the difficulty of mobilizing forces and popular support and operating across states with stronger response options and inhospitable social dynamics. Indeed, mastering local contexts and ethnic relations are central to AQ's major efforts to gain support bases and establish ethnic links.

The same can be said for IS affiliates, as the majority of them had already been part of previously established organizations, some of them AQ-linked. Many of these IS-linked groups seem even more localized and franchised than AQ, possibly owing their 'insurgent'

Analytical Takeaways:

Though we did not offer an encyclopedic survey of insurgent, terrorist, and separatist movements in Africa, AQ and IS affiliates in Africa illustrate where and how states could see increased risk in violent activity. The COVID-19 pandemic is no doubt aggravating risk and weakening state resources, and may have an accelerating effect on the risk of adverse developments, especially if a substantive countervailing effort to bolster state efforts is not undertaken.

African policy-makers are already grappling with understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic can affect their priorities and counterterrorism responses need to be part of that effort. There will likely be a need to reinforce regional and international cooperation to counter acceleration in these threats, which can be made more effective by understanding and addressing underlying local drivers in these regional and international efforts.

Ideally, this results in effective counters that will at least mitigate the risk of spread, and better yet, separate groups from each other and recent gains. The hospitability of the local operating environment is a key factor, and likely means material redress, credible policy reform on the localized end, as well as outreach operations that support and reinforce the reform.

A more of the same approach, with bigger guns and maybe more aircraft, is likely not a recipe for regionalized success. Making the shift from what precipitated the initial problems, building a consensus locally around it, and making it stick with regional support will be the real achievement.

Affected states with limited resources can help regional and international partners coming to their assistance with developing detailed information and modeling that makes policy effective when resources are made available.

Regional and international partners will need to strengthen local governance and preclude getting coopted by policies and interests that perpetuate the underlying drivers for conflict. These are often difficult to unpick without strong and broad local cooperation, an area that even limited resource states can support.

Where more resources are available, material relief must be backed by a policy that promotes full local engagement and implicit operate as counter radicalization programs. Some of this will be nation building, which grows less onerous where national institutions have faltered or failed.

There will be key policy objectives that rise to the top. Ethnic targeting needs to become unproductive for hostile violent groups, and policies need to fully engage local populations in local solutions, including crisis management.

A legacy of imposed borders and bureaucracy has left much African ground fertile for the spread of violent groups with attractive ideologies, especially if the spread of violence, from terrorism to insurgency, is left backed by lucrative illegal trading, occasionally energized by militarized responses displacing socio-political ones.

Even a locked-in pandemic-accelerated cycle of violence can be broken with effective responses, focused resources and credible outreach. Regional and even international partners may be needed but local knowledge of underlying factors will be the key.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

African Bulletin Staff (June 11, 2020), "Jihadist groups extend their operations in the Sahel", African Bulletin.
http://www.african-bulletin.com/10299-jihadist-groups-extend-their-operations-in-the-sahel.html

Almeida dos Santos, Francisco (May 2020), "War in resource-rich northern Mozambique – Six scenarios", CMI Insight, 2.

Anka, Yusuf & Salkida, Ahmad (October 16, 2019), "Investigation: Insecurity: Fears Trail Peace Efforts in North West Nigeria", Salkida.
https://salkida.com/insecurity-why-peace-efforts-in-northwest-nigeria-is-not-sutainable/

Beevor, Eleanor & Berger, Flore (June 2, 2020), "ISIS militants pose growing threat across Africa", IISS.
https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/06/csdp-isis-militants-africa

Bencherif, Adib (2020), "From Resilience to Fragmentation: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Jihadist Group Modularity", Terrorism and Political Violence, 32:1, pp. 100-118.

Berger, Flore (June 4, 2020), "Sahel – a new battlefield between IS and Al Qaeda?", The Africa Report.
https://www.theafricareport.com/29184/sahel-a-new-battlefield-between-is-and-al-qaeda/

Burke, Jason (January 22, 2020), "Sahel faces surge in violence from terror attacks", The Guardian.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/22/sahel-faces-surge-in-violence-from-terror-attacks

Byman, Daniel (April 29, 2015), "Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different goals, different targets", Brookings.
https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/comparing-al-qaeda-and-isis-different-goals-different-targets/

Campbell, John (May 20, 2020), "Preventing the Next Boko Haram in Northern Mozambique", Council on Foreign Relations.
https://www.cfr.org/blog/preventing-next-boko-haram-northern-mozambique

CGTN Africa Staff (June 15, 2020), "Al-Shabaab militants kill Kenyan police reservist in northeast region", CGTN Africa.
https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/06/15/al-shabaab-militants-kill-kenyan-police-reservist-in-northeast-region/

Clarke, Colin & Zenn, Jacob (May 26, 2020), "Al Qaeda and ISIS Had a Truce in Africa—Until They Didn't", Foreign Policy.
https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/26/al-qaeda-isis-west-africa-sahel-stability-jihadi-groups/

Conflict Armament Research Staff (December 2017), Weapons of the Islamic State (London: Conflict Armament Research Ltd.).

CSIAC Staff (2018), "Islamic State in the Greater Sahara", Center for International Security and Cooperation Stanford.
https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state-greater-sahara

Erdogan, Cagatay Zontur (June 12, 2020), "Turkey condemns deadly terror attack in the Ivory Coast", Anadolu Agency.
https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-condemns-deadly-terror-attack-in-ivory-coast/1874003

Geyer, Michael, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914-1915", in Paret, Peter (1986), Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Lagneau, Laurent (February 14, 2020), "Pour le général [2S] Castres, ex-chef des opérations à l'EMA, la France a commis cinq erreurs au Sahel", Zone Militaire: Opex360.
http://www.opex360.com/2020/02/14/pour-le-general-2s-castres-ex-chef-des-operations-a-lema-la-france-a-commis-cinq-erreurs-au-sahel/

Le Roux, Pauline (February 22, 2019), "Confronting Central Mali's Extremist Threat", Africa Center for Strategic Studies.
https://africacenter.org/spotlight/confronting-central-malis-extremist-threat/

Ohikere, Onize (June 11, 2020), "Brutal and brazen", World Magazine.
https://world.wng.org/2020/06/brutal_and_brazen

OWP Staff (April 21, 2020), "Islamic State In Somalia", The Organization for World Peace.
https://theowp.org/islamic-state-in-somalia/

Paquette, Danielle & Warrick, Joby (February 22, 2020), "Al-Qaeda and Islamic State groups are working together in West Africa to grab large swaths of territory", The Washington Post.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/al-qaeda-islamic-state-sahel-west-africa/2020/02/21/7218bc50-536f-11ea-80ce-37a8d4266c09_story.html

Warner, Jason (January 2017), "Sub-Saharan Africa's Three "New" Islamic State Affiliates", CTCSentinel, 10:1.
https://ctc.usma.edu/sub-saharan-africas-three-new-islamic-state-affiliates/

Warner, Jason (January 2017), "Sub-Saharan Africa's Three "New" Islamic State Affiliates", CTCSentinel, 10:1.
https://ctc.usma.edu/sub-saharan-africas-three-new-islamic-state-affiliates/

Yusuf, Mohammed (June 16, 2020), "Civilians in Kenya's northeast targeted by both jihadists and the state", The New Humanitarian.
https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/06/16/Kenya-Somalia-al-Shabab-conflict-human-rights

Zenn, Jacob (June 14, 2020), "Negotiating With Jihadists in the Sahel and Nigeria", Lawfare.
https://www.lawfareblog.com/negotiating-jihadists-sahel-and-nigeria

Zenn, Jacob (May 26, 2020), "ISIS in Africa: The Caliphate's Next Frontier", Center For Global Policy.
https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-africa-the-caliphates-next-frontier/

ATLANTIS
مركز للبحوث والدراسات الجيوستراتيجية
Centre de Recherches et d'Études Géostratégiques
Center for Geostrategic Research and Studies

41, Rue Kharzouza - CIL. 20200
Casablanca. Maroc
+212 522 945 710
contact@atlantis-center.org
atlantis-center.org