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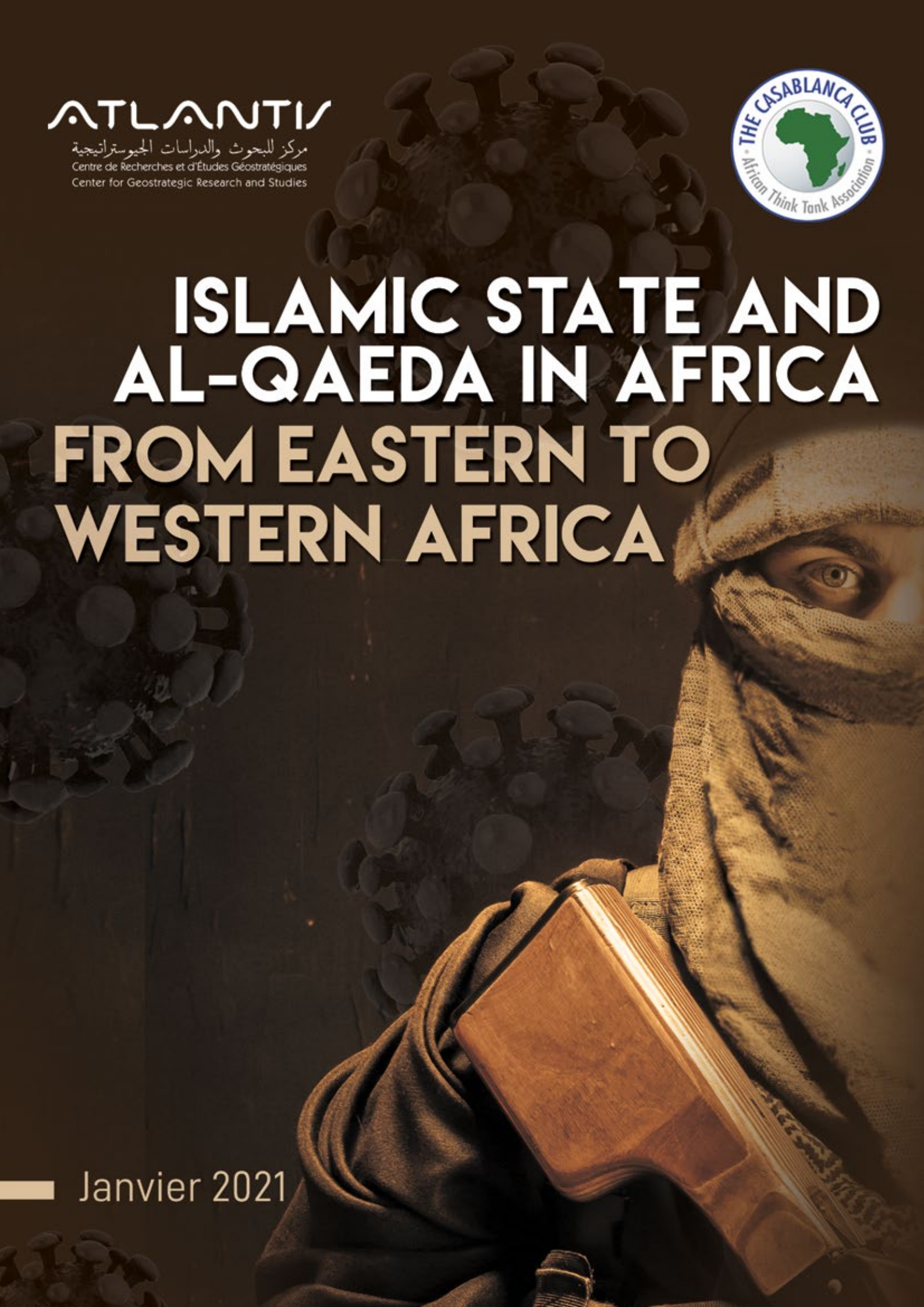
ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAEDA IN AFRICA

FROM EASTERN TO WESTERN AFRICA



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PREFACE

History may seem decisive and linear in retrospect but up close, as lived, the big moments are not in focus, and what becomes "history" is often a messy and too near a thing.

So it is with the world of anti-terrorism. What endures as success is too often shockingly sparse — and the losses, heartbreakingly preventable. The difference that preserves order becomes less clear as deflection gives way to defense, vigilance for which takes enormous commitment. Protection as defense is the most disadvantaged side of anti-terrorism's asymmetry, pursued nearly always under adverse and opaque conditions.

Terrorism seeks the visceral, fundamental, and feels all but rational on the target end. The target set is both direct and indirect. The main target is usually the indirect one. Hardening is the art and the key.

If terrorism is a fire, it is a grease fire — hit it with the wrong stuff, it spreads and can take the whole house and those within with it. The mission to protect is rarely a matter of defense, more a matter of deflecting, detecting and influencing terrorist targeting. That's the rational side. Responding after a major attack which achieved its objective is a different matter.
The pre-rational damage after breakthrough acts of terrorism demands relief, or some form of resolution. The pressure to respond, to do something however colossally stupid, is enormous. The need feels primordial, pressing us back into where we lived before public spaces existed.

At the state level, rationalizing a response to terrorism needs form and possibly fiction, and maybe an organizing axiom. Us and them. Recruit our fighters among your targets, direct and indirect. Join us or fight us. Then asymmetry takes over. Harm the innocent and anger the fence sitters. Then propositions reverse. Our targets recruit their fighters. In a place like Iraq, just before Islamic State got its start, the balance of sides got very wobbly.

This struggle does not lend itself to clarity, which is a problem for anti-terrorist policy where clarity of mission is step one to success. Terrorists seek to become insurgents in space and mind, possibly mind first. Aimed right, insurgent fictions can compete for belief among us.

An insurgent of the mind is depending on the possibility that we might believe anything. The main objective might be new recruits. But the intended target damage can be broad and self-perpetuating by design. The insurgency of the mind might intend that both the target and the recruit will trust only what can be believed, because what can be believed can be placed in doubt. Recruitment in this sense is not radicalization so much as it is reduction.Targeting follows a similar track. Trust in things public is the starting place for the safety of public spaces. Its reduction will be to a battle space. Things public tear apart from there.

Disarmingly, with unplumbed depth in irony, CP Snow called civilization a coat of varnish. When the enormity of what is beneath the foundation of our public trust becomes our focus, we are probably not looking at a recognized side of our public stuff.

When we devolve social trust and deference into what fits our belief, what fits matters most. Form presides over function. We fall into a perception exercise, often a deadly one. Appearances become a matter of life and death. Are you our group or theirs? Worse yet, how do we make sure we are us and they are them? It may be a targeting confirmation before a drone strike, or armed pastoralists taking on farmers.

Without public trust, we might soon belong to our fictions. The problem is itself a form of terrorism, so immediate a problem that sponsors can be effective and remain clandestine, to be identified later. We may not like to be disturbed from belonging to these fictions. And insurgencies of the mind do not depend on any one fiction. Maintaining movement between fictions is the key for their success. The insurgent cycling of fictions to keep targets in a vulnerable place may work until the very last linear moment, even if the belonging fictions end in kinetic violence. The target itself becomes a part of the weapon.

Some of the internal damage that comes from terrorism becoming insurgent in mind is from failing to deal with a fire that is set, an attack that got in. Some of it is like a poorly handled grease fire amid all good intentions, unintentionally inviting the attack in, a bungling self-inflicted amplification of damage. Some of it is fire spreading upon years of greasy neglect, leaving doors open to failures with damage all around.

Successes in the prevention of political violence may garner little in accolade, public trust is after all a given when it works. Failures by contrast tend to be shocking and disruptive at the outset, however "foreseeable" set fires may seem in retrospect.

Yes, societies are targetable. Yes, we are most vulnerable when we are blessed with a peaceful public order, and presumed public trust. Here is another place where totalitarians and terrorists converge. They see targets and enemies in the same space. Directed atrocities, call them terrorism, are almost always aimed at our indirect sense of order, to disturb the fragile sheen on our shared public order, that precious coat of varnish.

In times of repeated outrages and atrocities, we risk growing disoriented and numb. Disruption's effect comes in waves of violence experienced directly and indirectly. Less so in Africa, media siphons up images and words, fragments of symbols that are cast toward us from suddenly violent public spaces. Caught in a media cycle, we cannot help but perpetuate the disruption beyond those public symbols and spaces.

So, media is logically a key target for the insurgent of the mind. The attractiveness of that target is strong. Energetics have a particularly disruptive effect. Even more so, energetics in media become psychological, we feel we are losing so much so quickly, and we try to regain solidity, expectations of form, what is "foreseeable." (Shoes are still checked by security at many airports.)

If our political order fails to absorb the social shock, if it is already weakened, the damage may deepen and progress far from directly impacted public spaces. We continue, deeply and suddenly far less conscious than we think we are. Medical first responders call it shock. Insurgents of the mind may call it an opening.

We seem almost biologically predisposed to be vulnerable to political violence, and to the media that propagates its adoption and its disruptive effect. (We call that media social, an irony worthy of CP Snow.) We seem too easily reduced to a vulnerable credulous dynamic. Perhaps this pre-cognitive, sensory, even biological dynamic, is encoded in our primordial back brain. We respond before our reason can engage, before reason is how we live in real time, and we are targeted/recruited in the same order. In this sense, reason serves as rationalization, cranking out fictions for fitting the needed form to inconvenient facts.

Terrorist (and totalitarian) organizers work this disrupted pre-cognitive space. They promote access to it. They speak to a place they locate in each of their recruits where anger and fear live in muscles and organs. They offer relief with form, resonance with others, even a thrill or two in belonging for its own sake. And some of us will respond, who is allowed to belong may shift, so belonging can become arbitrary and more mindless certainties can be recruited. A state of terror, especially one that operates as an insurgent of the mind, is the ultimate self-consumer.

We share another pre-rational reflex that can bring us together, let's call it hope, but we also bond when we share in the inventing of certainty where there is none, especially when group cohesion needs a boost.

These are the binds that both tie and untie us. The opportunist sees us as gullible, especially when we huddle and proclaim ourselves cynical. We all want to follow cartoonishly thick lines, where full spectrum reality would not be so clearly confined. These cartoons offer relief from those realities and so we find ourselves, drawn in — with broad lines of certainty to secure us. And we can draw heroes in those lines. And, given the opportunity, we likely will.

Our progress toward fairness, peace and order may in fact depend on continuously achieving an escape from the dim gravity of that primordial back brain place. Or, if we falter, we may fall into the depths of our light-starved places, fictive worlds where a conspiracy of certain order spins endless simplicities, flickerings for un-lit walls. These ephemeral certainties will seem like madness to the securely reposed but they provide the wicked with a way to redirect the recruited, toward what might just be their demise.

For the rationally committed, there is a standing distance, sustained with significant effort, straining to stay above that primordial gravity. The strain required is another form of heroism, a quietly punishing one. The world of effects is a complex place, its causes are broad and deep, as are the dimly perceived problems in connecting them which rise up and in which we all continually hope to find ourselves firmly linked.

We will still get lost. We will depend on each other and a shared commitment to secure each and all of us. We are that social animal. At our best, we are ports in each other's storms.

"Safe haven" is redundant for emphasis because we really need it. (Occupied ports offer a terrifying symbol.) We know what we know and we struggle to stay in the know. It is decidedly not an effort blessed with certainty. And we will fatigue, we will feel a need to simplify, and alleviate the burden placed upon us by the intrusion of facts.

It is not easy work weeding in this shared mind garden. Priesthoods were dedicated just for this work. Across the fence that connects us, we know somewhere that we are not that different from each other. How we react to that nagging feeling of sameness is telling. Scientists come from the Enlightenment of Europe less equipped for this work. Without the effort to cross that line, build that bridge, either in openness to others or in a commitment of ourselves, we miss genuine insight in what we share — when inconvenient facts emerge before us. Facts that require effort are always inconvenient, sometimes deadly. The current pandemic is a perfect case in point.

We will always need to find a way. The effort predates all priesthoods. Without the effort, we get busy with badging and belonging, reading weed where there is sustenance, stumbling back into certainties of imagined order, with our broadest brushes at the ready. Abandoning what sustains us, we are either recruited or ready to be.

This study is deliberately not an exercise at painting in the thick lines. But it is clear that the pandemic is having a sharpening effect, most acutely on troubles that preceded it by decades. The pandemic is an acid test. It will be seen by some as a call for knowledge, mercy, relief and fairness but many will see a persisting failure on multiple levels: A failure to provide, to justify, and, possibly, to recognize ourselves in a social reflection on "others."

This study is about the resonant ubiquity of the where in charting political violence as much as the what. It points out where climate change is erasing traditions of livelihoods, where neighbors may be tempted to start setting upon each other to grab at what is left. It takes us to 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 and international intervention failures tell us that even the first steps toward social relief must be credible to chart a path back from disruption and violence on local ground. Security realities reflect the need for sustainability with a similar logic. There are profound local lessons to be learned here, lessons that should be learned sooner than later as the cost of deferred tuition will continue to grow.

Perhaps a first moment for traction in getting back to safety, shared in private and public spaces, is simply a demonstrable decision by each to find a better way, such as to consciously adopt a principle of fairness and stop the suffering of innocents.

Decisions can be made rational — so there is a journey to get this far. Perhaps this is the where for applying a new precious coat of varnish, for the brushing of lines that can indeed be broad and shared. This will be a place marked out by heroes, whether remembered for history or not. This is also an ideal place for this study to land, a step ahead of traction, to highlight inconvenient facts in a brief shine of the light, not on walls for certain fictions but on paths locals can reach, perhaps marking ways that may still be open.

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Policy Brief

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ISIS
& Al Qaeda in Africa

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ISIS
& AL QAEDA
IN AFRICA

ABSTRACT

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 to established violent groups 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 study offers analysis and two selective surveys of Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS/IS) affiliates roughly located in Eastern and Western Sub-Saharan Africa, each section highlights key characteristics, organizational differences, as well as major risks and threats they pose to the continent.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THIS study touches upon the spread of two major insurgent/terrorist strains, Al Qaeda (AQ) and Islamic State (IS or Daesh). While tempting for simplicity, it is important not to view the affiliations they represent from only a broad-brushed viewpoint.

The urgent need for clarity should help in overcoming simplistic formulations but they often do not. When American troops entered Vietnam to take up a fight dating from France's colonial era, they labelled and targeted the enemy as a global threat, an instance of "Communists" in a global Cold War contest, and not as a conflict arising from local history, motives and grievances. The global anti-communist Cold War approach in the Washington-Moscow struggle was redeployed into ready-made political-military target solutions in remote Southeast Asia jungle and highlands, in this case into what became the high-water mark of fighting and material commitments that nearly broke US Cold War strategic resolve.

The war as fought obscured many local factors in regional if not global ones, favoring targetable threats and precluding effective stability options. The effect was generating more strife, instability and extreme material commitments and cascading damage for all parties for decades. The broad-brushed viewpoint the US used to globalize war in Vietnam has become a generational emblem for avoidable damage, whether strategic, regional, or local. The same two systems of governments are still in power and are fast becoming major economic partners, sharing significant strategic objectives.

The analogies of the US experience in Vietnam to the global reach of IS and AQ through local affiliates in Africa are not direct. The counterinsurgency lessons the US learned in Vietnam are several policy generations past. Identifying avoidable societal damage early is a key but difficult objective because policies and failures resulting in neglect are usually the main reason for the damage. There are many underlying causes in each case only briefly reviewed in this overview. Each case will reflect local realities, as well as successive failures to avoid damage and redress which precluded early remedy. Calling this just poor governance itself seems too facile but it is clear that sustainable solutions cannot be driven by military action. The need to include locally-informed perspectives in remedial planning is difficult to meet.

The strategic need is to ground international and regional responses in local perspectives, reduce the charging effect from AQ and IS affiliate use of politically-amplified violence to add to their base. Sometimes the contrary example is clarifying. Niger's ban on its fishing industry to prevent income to Boko Haram and Chad's decision to ban fisherman from using boats, ostensibly to stem insurgent logistics, deprived locals of livelihoods and left the disenfranchised vulnerable to criminal opportunists and regional insurgency recruitment. Both approaches generated numerous examples of broadly-construed policies having adverse and counter-productive local effects. Local stakes in a once-thriving pepper farm economy fared similarly.

Sometimes key local factors are long simmering and brought to the fore only when they come to boil. The legacy struggle for independence and civil war on top of a unique cultural identity in northern Mozambique, then aggravated by regionally competitive policies that led to demoting local stakes in a hydrocarbon gas rich border region, located on a historically strategic shipping channel in which illicit traffickers still see value. Here, key local factors shed light on accelerating causes for a violent and only ostensibly jihadist-affiliated eruption in what became a fast-moving emergency for Maputo, the political center at the other end of the long national coastline.

Viewing the strife in Lake Chad or Cabo Delgado as fueled only by external actors such as AQ or IS rather than as a product of local and endemic factors can clip the points needed for credible local engagement, and any basis for sustained counterinsurgency. Political confidence, material improvement,

i.e., governance that attracts allegiance, are necessary in any struggle to reset the basis for security, especially where hearts and minds are needed.

Sometimes general characterizations can be helpful to anti-terrorist policy formulation. For example, AQ-adhering groups tend to be more focused on international objectives to affirm AQ priorities and affiliated IS counterparts tend to be more localized. Anti-terrorist policies need to redress underlying aggravating conditions where IS might be more readily adapted, while improving controls over international links where AQ might be inclined to direct its affiliates to focus on its strengths.

So, it is not a surprise that policies covering both local and regional/international aspects are likely to be needed whether or not AQ and/or IS is involved, especially as affiliation can be and often is fluid.

IS and AQ affiliation often means 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 of these transnational efforts taking root is limited and affiliates can remain isolated, left with planning violence without destabilizing political effect. This recourse to stability is not available in the areas this study highlights but it has been a significant element in some areas, such as in Morocco's efforts toward sustaining a local advantage over persistent transnational threats.

Following 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 a 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 combination with 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 highlight.

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 diagnosing local causes.

These causes often are grievances that catalyze local support and impels violent groups into signature acts of terrorism to demonstrate reach and ferocity and then appeal for that support. If the response is violent and policy makers defer addressing underlying causes, hardening follows and transnational groups find local growth opportunities.

Violence shatters social order. The unremarkable tradesman can become the implacable militia leader. Leaving grievances and other catalysts for disruption un-remedied accelerates, sharpens and broadens the eventual violent edge that fuels insurgent movements, just as addressing these catalysts can slow the movement of violent cells on the path to self-sustaining insurgency and open paths back to reconciliation. In our selected cases, we try to highlight where we might be on these roads.

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 to 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.

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

One size never fits all in this space. A common issue in a military-led response to terrorism around the world has been marginalizing 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 likely offers no exception to the 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 study 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 are organized to fit together to bring coherence as a study, 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 study 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., providing input for clarifying by example where policies should be reinforced and what could be improved.

Geyer (1986), p. 536.

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

2. IS AND AQ GROUPS & ACTIVITIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

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 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 are Kimwani speakers. ISCAP can be linked to longstanding insurgent and separatist movements in the region, influenced by economic deprivation and local mistrust of the 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 public info on IS and Islamist actions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). IS Central Africa Province DRC (ISCAP-DRC) is based in northeastern DRC, close to the Ugandan border, allegedly led by a Ugandan national, Jamil Mukulu.

As insurgencies and tensions throughout the country have been simmering for decades, it is unknown when they emerged although it is believed they have been active since at least 2017, when they identified as a jihadist movement, 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 distinctively very active recently, with activity ramping up in Mozambique.

The organization's objectives seem to be the establishment of an Islamic state in the DRC and overall a caliphate in central Africa, from an area that has long been in the midst of civil conflict. Though it is still difficult to tell the extent of links between itself and its Mozambican counterpart, structural and theological links between the two seem quite strong and may reflect underlying operational collaboration.

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

Many attacks attributed to ISCAP are thought likely to have been committed by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Uganda/DRC group which could be linked to IS factions. Regional information suggests over 2000 local and foreign fighters have joined the group – numbers that are still debated. While representing a threat to eastern Congo, ADF is only one among many adding to instability in Congo. In terms of terrorist threats to East Africa, ADF does not currently seem to be one of the most pressing – but it should not be overlooked.

Al Shabaab:

- *Somalia and northern Kenya*
- *Increasing attacks in Kenya - North Kenya Somalis at high risk of 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 his fate. The group has been using pre-existing tensions to further its reach, particularly in Kenya where ethnic Somali minorities are living in the capital and close to the international border. The organization is thought to have an advanced leadership structure, manifest in its territorial administration and detailed policies concerning everything from religious worship to dispute resolution, reminiscent of Al Qaeda central edicts.

Indeed, Al Shabaab has been controlling territory since 2006 and has taken on heavily bureaucratic trappings.

The organization's primary goal is the toppling of the current Somali government to establish an Islamic emirate from within Somalia. Recently, it seems to be aspiring for regional objectives, having intensified actions in Kenya and invoking 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 dispersed Somali populations settled. Al Shabaab's core strength is estimated between 7000 and 9000 members.

COVID period: Al Shabaab has been very active in response to COVID, setting up a COVID-19 treatment center, taking advantage of weak government response to show contrast, and increasing actions in southern Somalia with recent clashes against militias there, in addition to operations in Kenya.

Islamic State in Somalia (ISS):

The Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) is an IS-affiliate organization based in Somalia's northern Puntland region. Formed in October 2015, it is led by former al Shabaab commander Abdulqadir Mumin. As is the case with most IS affiliates throughout Africa, the group had previously been a faction of an AQ loyal organization. Like al Shabaab, the group has used clan affiliations to recruit – focusing on marginalized groups in Puntland.

As of yet, ISS does not pose a major threat to al Shabaab dominance. Indeed, territorial and financial gain seem to be its main objectives, with actual administration not yet among them. As such, ISS has three main organization 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: Between state forces and al Shabaab, there seems to be an important pushback against ISS, the weaker group. In May, ISS leader Abdulkarim Mumin was arrested along with dozens of fighters – several weapons and armored vehicles were recovered.

3. FUNCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Apart from al Shabaab, which is already well established as an AQ-affiliate in Somalia, the 'East African Front' has been undergoing important developments. 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. ISCAP Mozambique seems to aim to consolidate first, although it could try to spread into Tanzania and establish a presence there.

Though both IS and AQ affiliates are more often than not engaged as insurgencies in sub-Saharan Africa, they present different characteristics reflecting organizational predispositions, something that can be observed when AQ groups shift into IS affiliates.

• *IS affiliate organizations function with a highly 'franchised' branded aspect to them. They tend to focus on developing into local insurgencies with local dynamics, providing mostly theological guidance without financial situations being much of a driver for 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 focus on foreign-based acts of terrorism and thus more focused on covert operations in general, with less focus on building insurgency-based movements. This does not mean they do not function as insurgencies, but rather are strategically influenced by priorities from their AQ affiliation, protecting clandestine operations and avoiding attracting too much attention.*

This emphasis on lower profiles seems to have made it more difficult for AQ groups to implant themselves in local communities, particularly in West Africa, where they have been quite strongly Arab-led – which has been resolved to some extent through intermarrying, a long established AQ insinuation tactic. Though, that does not stop them from later adopting similar tactics to IS groups, eventually taking advantage of local dynamics and economic situations as drivers for recruitment.

If AQ talk is in terms of major developments, the strategies do not point towards a pan-Islamic caliphate but one closer to the AQ group's circumstance. This seems the case with AQ affiliate Al Shabaab in Somalia, shifting targeting attention toward Kenya as part of an effort to create a 'Greater Somalia,' rather than a pan-Islamic Caliphate – for the moment at least. However, further spread, resource plundering and the establishment of 'small' AQ bases are most definitely not out of the question for AQ Al Shabaab where it has previously left relatively untouched.

As AQ groups seem to reflect a more covert approach to international terrorist operations, whereas IS ones tend to move more as insurgency-led franchises. They seem ill-fitted to join each other as these priorities seem to pull apart as strategic visions and likely to continue a tendency of working against each other where they cross paths.

By contrast, long-term objectives seem similar across AQ and IS groups. With AQ emphasizing theological pinnings to its movement, it is seeking to switch from terrorist to insurgent-plus, operating similar to a state on a long-term track, preferring to be centralized and organized. IS, distinctively from AQ, marks itself as high profile, more violent, and focused on short term opportunities for a caliphate. It also seems much less centralized with its wilayat (provinces). These differences could promote conflict with success, further development and crossing into each other's territory.

4. STATE OVERVIEW

Affected States & Organizations

Mozambique:

The situation in northern Mozambique projects a danger of collapse or even secession due to the increased insurgent activity and lack of state support. The list of needs begins with decisive support and effective governance.

The population in Mozambique is 19% Muslim, concentrated in the north of the country. The creation of a Muslim state within the Mozambique state is not impossible but it is unlikely that the majority of Muslims in Mozambique support the Ahlu Sunna wa Jama (ASWJ) 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, ASWJ activity has been rising sharply, with the north of the country suffering hundreds of attacks in 2020, having increasingly attacked with armed takeovers of territory, including an important port city, Mocimboa da Praia, from which ASWJ has been operating since August 2020.

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 defensible port cities being a 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 recently regionalized the issue at SADC after 2 years. Moreover, at the same time, the government seems to have also supported targeted actions against civilians, leaving a record of disenfranchising and potentially radicalizing disproportionate attacks.

International interest includes a global-class Rovuma Basin reserves with an onshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) asset in the same northern region of the country. The project seems to have not cut the northern locals in despite lots of interest in local content programs developed by now Occidental-acquired Anadarko, which sold its interest to Total last year. The interest of terrorist activity in disrupting the largely project seems likely to grow, and is very likely to prove to be a bane to both the feasibility and potential benefits of such projects in the region.

The location sits on a shipping lane that has been strategic since the pre-Suez Canal era. Illicit activity has entered the mix. Heroin trafficking from South Asia moving into Cabo Delgado for markets as far away as Europe is believed to be fueling conflict by adding cash and weapons. And there is growing evidence traffickers who used Kenya and Tanzania coastlines to receive Afghan production via Pakistan moved south to northern Mozambique due to increased interdiction in the states up the coast. Mozambique has so far resisted any kind of external support but it is starting to seem likely that it will turn to regional support as local forces and mercenaries have not proven to be sufficient, faced with an insurgency on such a scale.

Somalia:

Al Shabaab's presence is likely to continue to rise in the country, and where poor governance persists, the AQ group could continue to gain legitimacy with local populations through the provision of essential services as well as for exploiting nationalist ideas of reestablishing a strong Greater 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 Shabaab has carried out at least 1,598 attacks using improvised explosive devices (IED), and killing thousands of people according to the United Nations.

Somalia is officially Muslim, with over 85% of the population being ethnically Somali. Despite generically appearing to be homogenous, the country is deeply tribal, with a center that remains politically weak and unable to curb banditry, terrorism and separatism under a single government or functioning state. The economy is subsistence dependent and very poor, and COVID seems to be affecting it quite a lot, as it does all those heavily dependent on an informal economy.

Kenya:

By contrast to Somalia, Kenya has a strong state and capable government. The country is 85% Christian and as such is hardly likely to present any kind of candidate for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate.

The country's main threat has been from Al Shabaab, particularly targeting border areas to promote 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.

Territorial integrity is a risk for Kenya where alienation of its northern communities develops into deeper links with Somalia-based groups. As such, Kenya needs to develop ever more effective social reinforcement confine its reliance on kinetic ones to precision counter-terrorism operations. Al Shabaab also attacked U.S. forces in Kenya – its spread into Kenya seems to be intensifying with the northern area seen at 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 needs to move to try to co-opt groups to divide rivals rather than neutralizing what are mostly decentralized groups.

According to the 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 and that 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. In 2014, massacres killing 12,000, the FIB did not report that many in the military had made it possible, including General Mundos who had financed and equipped the ADF. The ADF, though an Islamist group, operates with local armed groups and authorities (generally, Christian). The state is also currently embroiled in war in the Kivu civil conflict, where attacks from ISCAP have also occurred.

Southern African Development Community (SADC):

The SADC is a regional intergovernmental organization with 16 members, including South Africa, Mozambique,

intergovernmental organization with 16 members, including South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, DRC. In trade, the group has significant potential. In security matters, it is an evolving effort with individual states retaining the initiative. The SADC has proven to be quite passive when action at this level might need to be timely, such as when it did not acknowledge the growing terrorist threat in Mozambique until May 19th.

As made evident by its lack of clear planning for the protection of Mozambican residents, the organization will need to increase its levels of engagement to encourage states to reach out to it rather than deferring to member states in their sovereign capacities.

In this case, with the Cabo Delgado matter now before it, no clear engagement strategy has been put forward by it, despite its June summit, to counter a rising threat which could very possibly spread to other parts of the region. The current chairperson, Tanzanian president John Magufuli, was not invited to the first summit on the Cabo Delgado crisis, even though Tanzania borders the area and has significant interests in preventing the crisis from spreading. Though, with how the current Mozambique situation is advancing, SADC involvement in mitigating the crisis is seeming more likely.

Less/Not Affected /Increasing Risk

Tanzania:

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

Tanzania has a population that is 61% Christian and 35% Muslim. Its forces have been deployed along the Mozambique border to avoid violent spillover.

Furthermore, many Tanzanian religious scholars are believed to have been giving theological training to Mozambican groups with links to the terrorists. Historically, Mozambican clerics have been training in Tanzania for more than a century with exchanges having been in place for much longer than there has been a border there. Many Tanzanian radicals are believed to have taken refuge in Mozambique's insurgent factions following strong Tanzanian state responses against them, between 2015 and 2017, around the time ISCAP started.

On October 15, 2020, ISCAP staged its first attack in southern Tanzania, killing over 20 as well as for burning houses, destroying vehicles, and stealing money and military equipment.

Uganda:

Ugandan Muslims comprise around 14% of the population with the rest being Christian. The country has hosted over 1.1 million refugees as of November 2018, mostly 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 bring in Sharia law but changed its focus to the plight of Muslims now that it is based in the DRC.

Uganda remains at risk of increased instability along its border with the DRC. Uganda needs to weigh its targeting of terrorist organizations at its borders with the DRC with cooperation on both sides of the border or terrorist activity in Uganda might easily increase in retaliation.

If Uganda were to increase its kinetic military activities against terrorist groups arounds its borders without addressing social factors as well, it might invite targeting by ISCAP, an unwelcome echo of the AQ- affiliate al Shabaab attack on Uganda during the 2010 World Cup.

5. EAST AFRICA TAKEAWAYS

In terms of East African terrorism/insurgency, the risks highlighted follow the increase in IS-affiliate insurgent activity in Mozambique and a spread of AQ-affiliate Al Shabaab-led activity into Kenya. The various factions show some key differences, IS affiliates appear to operate 'franchised' and only loosely connected to IS operations in other areas, such as in the Middle East.

This franchise approach does not preclude overlapping objectives and similarities in tactics, though that likely comes more down to similarities between individuals and organizations turning towards IS more than there being some kind of central IS command imposing its views on tactics and priorities.

As with our findings in the companion survey of West Africa that follows, AQ groups do seem more closely linked to a central command and draw more heavily upon a shared theological overlay to terrorist methods, highlighted by similarities in centralized power structures and shared declared visions. Although, as with Al Shabaab, local dynamics and cultural heritages very much affect AQ affiliates as well – they hence pose different threats than compared to IS factions.

IS factions often take the objectives of local insurgencies adding their version of lofty goals and highly violent methods. As insurgencies, they represent dynamic and localized threats that will try to advance on the back of governance failures and economic downturns, as is currently the case under COVID-19.

Al Qaeda groups, though they do take advantage of insurgency-favoring factors for their growth, seek to become more pervasive and ingrained locally in order to advance as more deeply rooted movements.

Hence, regional decision-makers should avoid targeting groups without factoring in the underlying causes for their success, countering 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.

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1. TERRORIST DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

With major turmoil in the western Sahel region and around the Lake Chad Basin, many of the neighboring states face either terror or unrest, and increasing risk of intensification and spread from border areas. The survey provides an account of current threats and highlighted vulnerabilities likely to be exacerbated under the further pressure COVID-19.

The situation in West Africa has increasingly been a center of attention for protecting the areas surrounding it, especially for spreading insecurity and terrorism. IS and AQ-affiliated groups have been making progress across Africa, some of which we highlighted in the companion study on East Africa that precedes this section. As in East Africa, many of these groups in West Africa are rallying for a grand endeavor, a 'pan-Islamic caliphate.' Affiliates of IS and AQ are also showing signs of rivalry in West Africa, with affiliates of the two organizations either looking to integrate with each other or supersede each other in the grand endeavor.

In fact, at first glance their affiliates seem similar enough. They operate within local population dynamics and often pre-existing conflicts. Their strategic and affiliated narratives with their Middle Eastern counterparts often do not translate smoothly. Indeed, though they both might seem to aim for the establishment of Islamic caliphates, this being an objective for many factions, the strategic and tactical lines of effort tend to differ quite a bit, perhaps further explaining why even purportedly ideologically-aligned factions on the same side of the AQ and IS divide have often been at odds.

General affiliate alignments have shared some features. AQ groups have, generally speaking, inherited AQ's focus on highly secure cell-based clandestine attack development operations, its "terroristic" methods, which means here preferring to operate more covertly, being more inclined toward ideological objectives and generally prioritizing responsiveness to AQ command and control, explaining their more centralized command structure to some extent and closer ties to what passes for a central AQ authority.

In Africa, 70% of fighters are recruited specifically for attacks. With AQ organizations leaning more towards covert action, AQ affiliates' size can vary greatly, swelling in times of heightened activity. Preemptively targeting potential local mercenaries could limit AQ affiliates' capabilities for action. On the other hand, as seen elsewhere in Africa, IS-affiliated groups seem more 'franchised'. Reflecting predecessor organizations in other countries, they seem more focused on advancing through insurgency--exploiting weak government function, especially territorial control.

When comparing AQ and IS groups on a terrorism-insurgency spectrum, IS groups seem much more emmeshed in their local contexts and dynamics, operating as insurgents, with organizing narratives that are much less ideologically-driven than AQ. Here a cautionary note is needed. This application of affiliate influences and legacy styles may only work so far with such a broad brush in formulating effective anti-terrorism/insurgency campaigns for regaining legitimacy and control, as well for hearts and minds.

The prospects of a grand endeavor such as a pan-African caliphate being realized are quite low, but the symbolic impact of the undertaking can be quite valuable to those promoting the effort organizationally. The remoteness of success does not diminish the urgency of the need to reverse the spread of what will remain dangerous trends fostering growth in these organizations.

This regional survey seeks to present the major IS and AQ threats to West Africa as part of a bigger picture of terrorist activity, as the second of three sections on this risk to Africa.

2. IS AND AQ GROUPS & ACTIVITIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

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):

Operating in Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) is an Algeria-origin terrorist organization created in 2007 after evolving from the pre-existing Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC). It currently has no official leader following the death of Abdelmalek Droukdel on June 3 after action by French forces deployed to the region.

Based on the GSPC's clandestine insurgent structure of "centralized and deconcentrated power," AQIM operates somewhat anomalously for an AQ-affiliated organization with a central leadership and autonomous armed factions that represent the bulk of its military capacity. AQIM's regional importance has diminished since the appearance of JNIM and a shift of activity from Algeria more broadly to the Sahel.

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

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

Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM):

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, founded 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. This a large and powerful structure, and the group has been responsible for over 65% of all terrorist-caused fatalities in the Sahel. Moreover, its structure is more diverse than that of its founder, AQIM, with considerable ethnic links to Tuaregs due to its association with Ansar Dine.

Although it has distanced itself from existing ethnic tensions, – that strategy has not stopped it from flaring ethnic tensions up for its benefit. JNIM has even been known to marry members between different tribes and ethnic groups to increase organizational linkage. This structure has a striking similarity to the Taliban model – including biding its time and offering to be open to 'negotiation.'

JNIM and AQIM have similar propaganda patterns with similar motifs appearing in its media, such as unity, jihad, as well as references to the legendary Almoravids of medieval Islam. JNIM's 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. JNIM currently has an estimated 2000 troops spread throughout the region through its sub-groups.

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 expulsion of foreigners from Mali before negotiations with the state and a ceasefire (the 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 in north Burkina Faso.

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 its leader Amadou Koufa. The group is part of JNIM though it has been singled out by analysts much more actively than other JNIM components. It is generally Fulani-led. Macina was a 19th century Fulani Islamic state, and serves as its strategic center for 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, in turn fueling recruitment for its support base.

The aims of Katiba Macina include the resurrection of the Macina Islamic Republic, and secondarily to that, the larger AQIM goal of establishing a Caliphate, including the strategic narrative of the prerequisite withdrawal of foreign forces for negotiations to take place. While its current size is unknown, it is believed to have under 2000 members as part of JNIM.

COVID period: Katiba Macina attacked military convoys in Mali, killing 24 on June 15 and was accused of an attack on an Ivorian military base in June – which would be moving their targeting significantly south as their activities had previously been confined to central Mali and north Burkina Faso.

Ansaru:

Ansaru is an AQ affiliate based in northwestern Nigeria. Ansaru was founded in 2009 as a Boko Haram faction, became independent in 2012 and revived itself from 'dormancy' in January 2020. Its leader is Usama al Ansari and includes a mix of ethnicities, previous Ansaru combatants, ex-Boko Haram jihadists, and local bandits, numbered up to 00 members.

Ansaru's current aim is the re-establishment of an AQ presence in Nigeria. This group should be followed quite closely due to its activity.

COVID period: Ansaru has killed soldiers and abducted civilians. Ansaru seems to be gaining momentum by gaining the favors of local emirs while increasing banditry and attacks, likely in preparation for growth. Ansaru is still facing strong resistance from local militias/vigilante groups. In February, Ansaru acquired anti-aircraft rifles and automatic weapons.

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 IS affiliate, officially since 2019, founded on May 15th, 2015 out of a rift within the AQ group Al Mourabitoun. ISGS's current leader is Adnan Abu Walid al Sahrawi. ISGS 'merged' with ISWAP in March 2019. ISGS has a mixed ethnic makeup, one of its leaders, Khalid al Fulani, is as the name suggests, a Fulani. ISGS has taken advantage of Fulani/Tuareg conflicts around the Mali-Niger border area.

ISGS aims include the installation of an Islamic caliphate in the short-term, in contrast to its AQ rivals, and is unwilling to negotiate. ISGS is believed to have an average of 425 fighters as of August 2018.

COVID period: France is thought to have caught an important ISGS leader in June. ISGS was pushed back by JNIM from some of its positions, such as in the Soum province of Burkina Faso, with some fighters fleeing towards the Mauritanian border.

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP -Barnawi):

Based in the Lake Chad Basin, particularly on the Nigerian side, the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) is an IS-affiliated organization originally created as Boko Haram in 2002, though it has been rebranded since it separated from AQ after pledging allegiance to IS 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 to 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 weak regional governance, and has been leveraging growing poverty in the region due to economic damage from security policies, internal displacement and the shrinking resources of the lake basin. ISWAP seeks the creation of an Islamic state throughout West Africa, and has gotten more violent and has pursued conflict with AQ since Barnawi's ousting. ISWAP is believed to have around 3500 members.

COVID period: ISWAP has killed dozens in Nigeria (Borno state). The Nigerian military has redoubled its efforts but it has not been effective, let alone decisive.

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

Also based in the Lake Chad Basin on the Nigerian side, JAS split from ISWAP in August 2016 and kept its original name after IS ousted ISWAP's leader Abubakar Shekau for being too 'egocentric' among other reasons. While not officially affiliated to IS, there has been no retraction of recognition from either side. The group continues to stage raids, plunder, kidnap civilians and launch suicide bombings to exploit the same socio-economic conditions as ISWAP. JAS's goal likely remains the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate though regaining IS loyalty could be a prior one. JAS asserts it has around 1500 members, though that is likely an exaggeration.

COVID period: JAS is believed to have killed 92 Chadian troops in March 2020, though on the other hand, over 56 of its members were killed by Nigerian military – who asserts ISWAP is a splinter group of JAS while the opposite is the general view. JAS is still quite active with media generated from Shekau.

3. FUNCTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Objectives tend to be similar enough for each group of affiliates with the end goal of an Islamic caliphate, though the way and time-frame pursued can differ a bit. Both AQ and IS affiliates are inclined toward insurgencies, their typical characteristics are different as will be seen. Indeed, AQ groups are more open to dialogue and a 'Taliban-type' deal, while IS groups concentrate on gaining followers and territory with no openness to dialogue.

Short-term strategies are different. AQ: Remove foreign powers from Africa. IS: Territorial control and popular subversion, which tends to be more localized. This contrast epitomizes the central difference between the two sides, AQ inheriting a centralized and organized terrorist operations structure with centralized axioms and motives, and IS favoring insurgency, a less centralized strategy and more interest in local dynamics than an international project. AQ groups are evidently more geared towards terrorism from covert action, with a core group of followers and ready use of external fighters for mounting attacks.

AQ factions' more covert 'terrorist' approach means they really need to avoid triggering effective, active suppression, hence why AQ factions are more open to dialogue. For IS groups, there seems to be little structural coherence or coordination with an IS central. Groups affiliated with IS tend to be smaller, with most members being active as insurgents in attacks.

This though, does not minimize the risk posed by AQ groups. AQ groups have been making major advances in western Africa. Their attack patterns point increasingly towards either shortening their time-frame for establishment of a caliphate, or a need for expansion in the face of a growing IS 'counter-culture'. AQ affiliates tend to be more organized and strategically-driven than IS groups, and they do pose a significant threat to local governments.

A pan IS-AQ caliphate seems unlikely to happen due to more than just objectives, it is evident that AQ and IS groups are implanted quite differently. With the notable exception of the Somali Al Shabaab, East Africa mostly has IS affiliates. West Africa hosts several interconnected AQ factions and, to some extent, more connected IS factions. This suggests that the threat from IS and AQ is more established and developed in West Africa, with IS and AQ groups closer in total size to each other. Competition and conflict between the two affiliate constellations are bound to increase.

4. 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.

In terms of its ethnic makeup, Mali is 35% Bambara, 10% Tuareg, 17% Fulani and 13% Dogon. These demographic divisions have led to many local militias to target Fulani, fueling anti-government sentiments among the Fulani. Protests in the country against the regime led to a coup. The EU training mission (EUTM) has seen the majority of its staff leave the country – leading to a halt in training for the Malian army which was already under-equipped and poorly trained. Mali has not pushed for reforms in the security sector supported by many European governments.

The push for a better local counterinsurgency capability in the face of faltering efforts was a key factor in the coup. Furthermore, ethnic fighting is ongoing between Fulani, Dogon and a continued Tuareg struggle for independence. In terms of military effectiveness, the Malian army is very weak, with many selling equipment and committing abuses against the population.

The country has been willing to engage JNIM/Katiba Macina in talks and has opened channels of communication, though these efforts have been ad hoc and suffer from the inconsistency. Community-based Amical Jawambe du Mali claimed high ranking Malians instructed it to mediate with 'dormant cells' or people in villages with close ties to Katiba Macina.

Burkina Faso:

Burkina Faso has many ethnic groups though the Mossi people represent the majority at around 52% with the Fulani second at 8.4% of the population. Furthermore, the north of the country has been constantly attacked with nearly 850,000 displaced there, 10 times more than 1y ago. Indeed, until a year ago Burkina Faso had not really been a victim of terrorism. Though, since the fall of long-term controversial president Blaise Compaoré in 2014, extremism had started to rise.

Like Mali, the army and militias have tended to single out the Fulani community as a whole. A lack of services in the 6th poorest economy on the globe are major factors for insurgent recruitment. As the former Upper Volta is a buffer for the coastal states of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin, a breakdown in Burkina Faso's security is a major regional concern.

On a more positive note, joint operations with its neighbors to the south appear to be an emerging trend.

Niger:

Niger's ethnic makeup is Hausa 55.4%, Zarma-Songhai 21%, Tuareg 9.3%, and Fula 8.5%. Like most countries surrounding it, it is Muslim (99.3%).

Niger seemed to spend the year potentially using terrorism to pursue political agendas, cracking down on opposition, while suffering heavily.

Major attacks started late 2019 with at least 400 military casualties.

Niger had violent protests against lockdown measures during Ramadan. Attacks in the country generally occur in two spots, on the western border with Mali, and on its east around the Lake Chad basin, both with more IS presence in general (ISGS and ISWAP respectively).

The reach of ISGS and ISWAP appears to be throughout the country, though it is quite large to traverse. There have been crackdowns and policies affecting the general population, such as the passing of a wiretapping law at the end of May allowing the government to listen in on any phone conversation.

Chad:

Chad has security issues along its borders with Libya and along the Sahel, thinning the effectiveness of its forces, all the while also being a major target for terrorism.

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. Many different ethnic groups inhabit the lake area making it difficult to provide a solution with barely any services or state presence there. There have been a string of governmental measures hurting the local population such as banning the use of boats as they were used by IS to get around the lake islands, leaving fishermen unable to feed their families.

Moreover, Chad's relations with its neighbors are not conducive to cross-border cooperation, especially with Nigeria.
Chad's army is considered to be stronger than many of its neighbors though very brutal in its tactics.
In March JAS (Shekau faction still linked to ISWAP) attacked an army base in Boma.

Nigeria:

Nigeria has the fourth strongest military in Africa, 43rd worldwide with over 181,000 personnel and 400,000 in available manpower, More to the point, the military has been operating at the center of Nigerian politics for decades.

So, having major difficulties in culling the terrorist and insurgent threats carries major domestic significance. The country has been increasingly relying on the air force to attack insurgents. While it is still early to gauge 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.

Porous borders with Niger and Chad haves enabled flows of arms, traffickers and armed movement, which puts the country in a difficult situation politically and from a security perspective.

Nigeria's population is 53.5% Muslim, with major ethnic groups being the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo people in descending order. Nigeria is plagued with corruption, particularly the misappropriation of funds meant for counterterrorism. In terms of its security situation, the majority of the threat is around the Lake Chad region in the northeast of the country, particularly in Borno state, where security has been a problem 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.

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 funding and even had an attack destroying most of its military headquarters in Mali in July 2018; the G5 has also so far geared itself towards military solutions. 3 out of 5 of its militaries are very weak (Burkina Faso, 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 more effective than the 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 this could hold some merit). The state has used a 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 - as with the United Kingdom pre-2001, some might deduce the possibility of there being a tacit agreement to let terrorists and radicals 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:

It is the country on the Gulf of Guinea with the largest Muslim population at 43%. With political and social instability, it seems the likeliest candidate for a terrorist expansion in the northern regions, and not solely as a zone of depth or profiting. Indeed, insurgency generally becomes possible when the state has not made clear to its constituents that it is the provider of security and safety.

Ethnic groups in the country are not the same as its Sahelian neighbors and thus less likely to be coaxed by Sahelian terrorists. While the state has generally not seen a spread of terrorism like its neighbors (apart from a 2016 JNIM attack killing 19), it has been increasingly cautious and aware. Indeed, attacks have been occurring in the country, with one having happened as recently as June in the north of the country near the Burkina Faso border. Thus, 1000 troops have been committed to Operation 'Comoe' with Burkina Faso around the Comoe National Park.

This area in the north of the country is believed to be an area where terrorists in Burkina Faso escaped after attacking there. Its use for strategic depth could very much mean a spread in the near future. There has also been an attack killing 10 at a military post near Burkina Faso border, the first in over four years.

Benin:

If JNIM is unable to penetrate the Ivory Coast, Benin could represent the second-best option and as such should be closely monitored.

Benin's population currently has 8.6% Fulani, with a 27.7% Muslim contingent and 48.5% Christian one. Livestock stolen in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are often 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 Burkina Faso. These have been used for strategic depth such as for the Pendjari National Park where there have been kidnappings and killings in 2019.

Benin has experienced the biggest deterioration of any country in peacefulness rankings, falling 34 places. In addition to this, there have been inquiries into intelligence sharing with terrorist groups recently, corruption thus remains a huge issue.

Togo:

Togo faces a similar situation to its neighbor Benin due to the presence of parks and forests on its border with Burkina Faso 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, its population is divided as follows: Christian (37%), animist (35%) and Muslim (20%). Many academics and researchers have noted the alarming presence of terrorist 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 prepare for the worst. The 100 km border between it and its neighbors serves smugglers, contraband sellers etc.

With a political dynasty that has been in power for over 57 years, skewed, debt-fueled economic growth, and high levels of corruption, Togo's political and economic landscapes present advantageous grounds for insurgencies of all kinds.

Togo's military, primarily composed of Kabye ethnic group soldiers, has trained with the UN due to many peacekeeping operations. Not only could terrorist organizations try to flare up ethnic tensions in the country, but for Togo 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:

Having one of the most sophisticated financial systems of the region, Ghana is at a more advanced stage of development than its neighbors in the north. Ghana's protective position includes managing the perception of risk to its growth and to its financial system as main concerns, as well as keeping terrorist funds out of its system. An EU study in May 2020 noted Ghana has a significant threat to its financial system, flagging a need for enforcement in money laundering to prevent regional criminal and insurgent financial activity.

Ghana's population is measured as majority Christian (71%) and 16% Muslim. Like its coastal neighbors, the forests bordering Burkina Faso are directly exposed to climate change and the rains upon which Ghana used to depend for hydropower in the north have failed many times in recent decades.

There is a wide expectation that the country is not a 'prime candidate' for a spread of terrorism though there are other problems, precipitated by instability in countries neighboring Ghana. Terrorist opportunism in these border areas could become more of an issue.

Cameroon:

Cameroon's borders, from the Gulf of Guinea to Lake Chad, include widely different areas and associated sets of issues for security and related risk. The country has been facing separatism from its Anglophone population on the Gulf of Guinea Bakassi peninsula bordering Nigeria.

The Lake Chad area, shared between Cameroon and its neighbors is particularly affected by terrorism due to drying through climate change which, coupled with stringent and restrictive policies and low governance has led to the loss of livelihood for many and thus promotes criminality and recruitment by terrorist organizations.

of religion in the country. About 10% of the population are Fulani, mostly living in the north of the country, in the corridor between Nigeria and Chad, and further north around the Lake Chad basin.

Instability in Cameroon could lead to more terrorist activity, though for the moment it is still hard to gauge the overall risk. In terms of its political situation, Paul Biya has led Cameroon for over 37 years. Government responses to terrorist attacks have led to civilian casualties. The government has banned all mass protests as threats to the security of the state and can detain anyone without recourse to trial.

5. WEST AFRICA 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.

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1. MAJOR TERRORISM INDUCED RISKS

East Africa

• **ISCAP** *(MOZAMBIQUE)*: THIS 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 LINKS TO TANZANIAN-BASED SUPPORTERS, THE THREAT THAT TANZANIA FACES IS CONSIDERED HIGH.

• **AL SHABAAB:** THIS AQ AFFILIATE HAS BEEN INCREASING ITS ATTACKS IN NORTHERN KENYA, AND HAS ACTIVE NETWORKS IN KENYA, REPRESENTING A THREAT TO THE COUNTRY THAT CAN EXPLOIT NEGLECT. WITH ETHNIC SOMALI COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN CROSS BORDER ACTIVITY ALONG THE KENYAN SIDE OF THE BORDER, THE KENYAN STATE NEEDS TO BE VIGILANT WHILE AVOIDING ALIENATION, WHICH WOULD ADD ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AL SHABAAB.

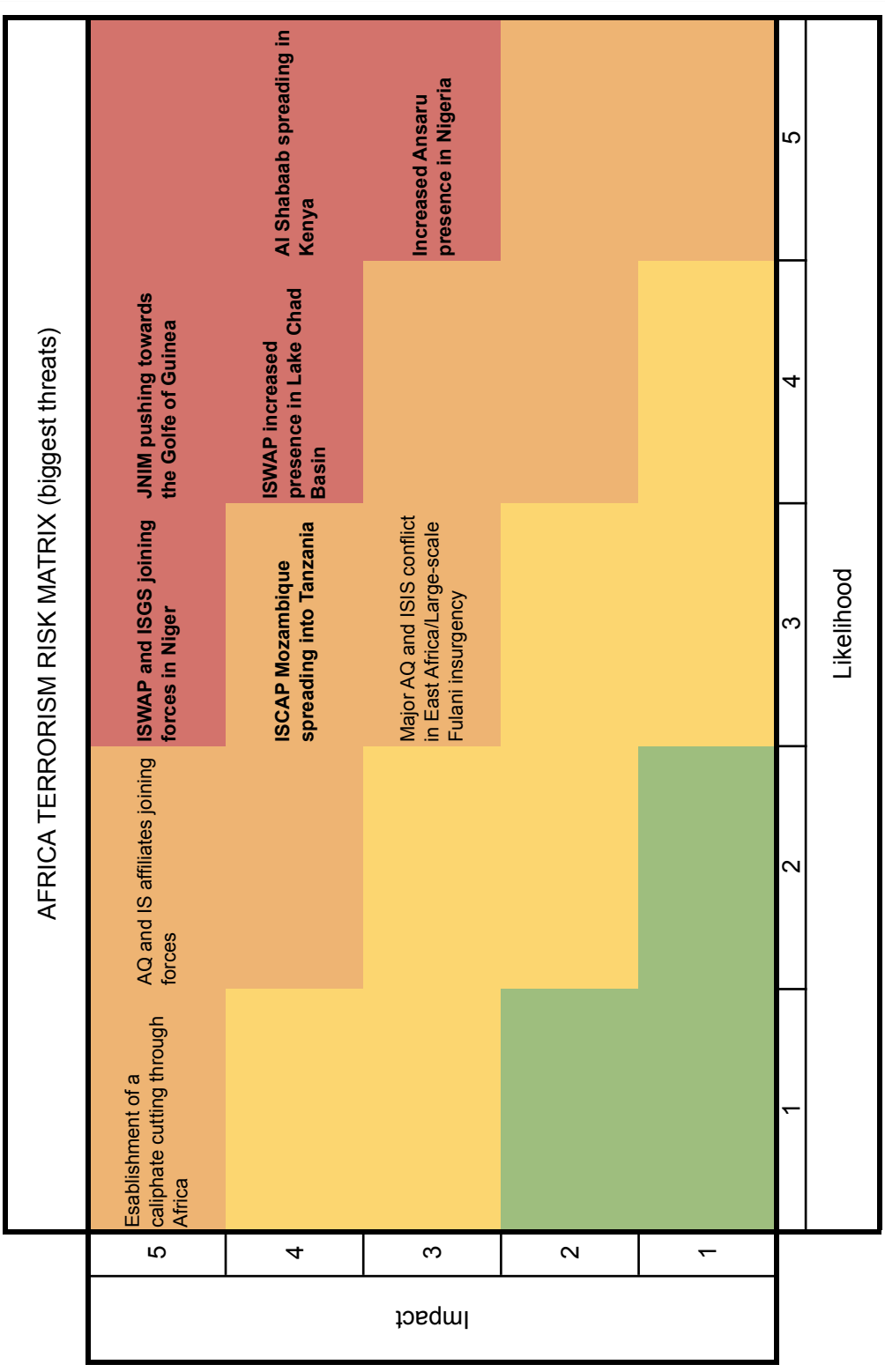
West Africa

• **JNIM AND ASSOCIATED CELLS***(INCLUDING KATIBA MACINA)*: THERE IS A THREAT MOVING TOWARDS THE GULF OF GUINEA LED BY JNIM AND ITS ASSOCIATE AQ-AFFILIATE FACTIONS, WITH INCREASED ACTIVITY DIRECTED TOWARDS THE IVORY COAST IN PARTICULAR FACILITATED BY POROUS, FORESTED BORDERS BETWEEN THE COASTAL STATES AND BURKINA FASO, WHERE FORECASTED RISK REMAINS HIGH .

ISGS: FIGHTING WITH AQ-AFFILIATED GROUPS IN THE SAHEL COULD PUSH IT FURTHER TOWARDS NIGER AND TO SEEK RAPPROCHEMENT WITH ITS WESTERN AFRICAN FACTION, ISWAP.

• **ISWAP:** THE GROUP INCREASINGLY ATTACKS THE GENERALLY NEGLECTED AND UNGOVERNED LAKE CHAD BASIN REGION , POSSIBLY AS A LAUNCHPAD TO FURTHER SPREAD INTO THESE STATES.

• **ANSARU:** THIS AQ AFFILIATE HAS BEEN INCREASING ITS PRESENCE IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA, SIGNALING A RETURN TO FORCE BY AQ IN THE AREA WHICH COULD LEAD TO MUCH MORE INSTABILITY AND FIGHTING WITH IS AFFILIATES.


AFRICA TERRORISM RISK MATRIX (biggest threats)
Impact
5
4
3
2
1
Likelihood
1
2
3
4
5
Esablishment of a caliphate cutting through Africa
AQ and IS affiliates joining forces
ISWAP and ISGS joining forces in Niger
JNIM pushing towards the Golfe of Guinea
ISCAP Mozambique spreading into Tanzania
ISWAP increased presence in Lake Chad Basin
Major AQ and ISIS conflict in East Africa/Large-scale Fulani insurgency
Al Shabaab spreading in Kenya
Increased Ansaru presence in Nigeria

2. 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 addressed together under an organized approach 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 coordination and complexity that is often beyond most ongoing efforts that are largely kinetic and localized. Such linkages across threats may mean regional and even international efforts may be required for effectiveness.

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 provide 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 violence, only to be rediscovered as terrorist when 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 the clandestine network emphasis of their parent organization more closely than IS groups, which seem more independently franchised and still have shared branding, which will include interests, beliefs, and objectives.

There are exceptions that highlight the main pattern by contrast. 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 – possible through Niger – offer symbolic links more than anything else.

The Western and Eastern IS "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).

3. REASONING FOR AFFILIATION

There are further distinctions to make between IS and AQ factions. Generalizations are not always helpful. The AQ approach favors clandestine networks and disruptive signature terrorist events. African factions are relatively close to AQ central. IS factions tend to operate as brand promoters, 'franchises' rather than branches of a central organization, more insurgent in their focus and formation and much less led by international priorities.

AQ command structures tend to be small and more compartmented, resembling a covert action cell. Statistics indicate that roughly 70% of AQ operators are recruited for specific attacks and that those recruits can even include members of IS factions.

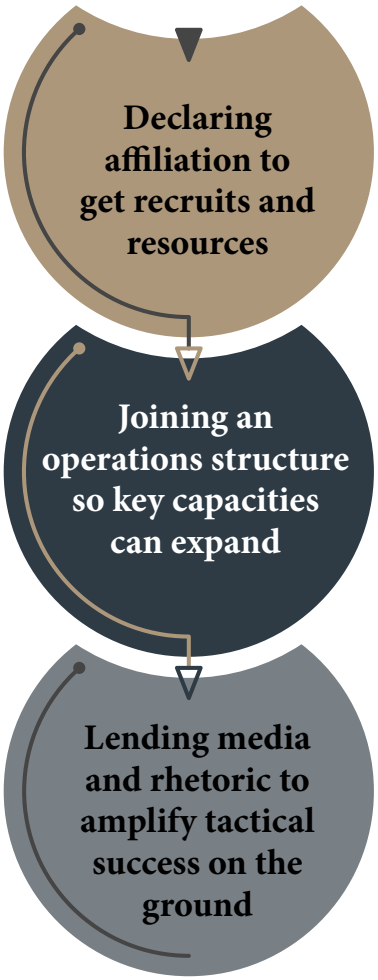
Could flying the black flags of insurgents and terrorists alike in sub-Saharan Africa represent something more involved than brand 'affiliation'? Furthermore, to what extent are they directed by international organizations, as putative global command structures?

Operators in IS factions in Africa seem more incentivized by needing to make a living, rather than to bring about an instance of a global IS Caliphate.

As such, it seems more fitting to question the substantive basis for the affiliation of an IS-branded group, particularly in light of much debate on their relations, as is the case between the Mozambican Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jammaa and an Islamic State Central African Province, which has no freestanding social or political status of its own.

Conversely, groups like Al Shabaab from Somalia or JNIM in the Sahel are already 'semi-territorial' and show sustained operating capabilities, while being AQ-affiliated and entrenched in communities providing sources of funding and recruitment; breadth and longevity that is much less common in IS affiliates. Insurgencies have been announcing allegiance to IS at a much faster pace than to AQ. To see why, one may need 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 so key 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.

Lending media and rhetoric to amplify 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.

4. 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 from rival IS ones, no matter the importance of local dynamics.

Ethnicity:

In terms of factors that might bring them closer operationally, 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, despite its name and short-term objective of recreating the Macina, a Fulani-led Islamic state. The objectives of the Macina Liberation Front have brought it many followers from marginalized populations throughout West Africa. Its willingness to compromise with authorities and move 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 Kimwani speakers for ISCAP, and the spread to other states such as the targeting of ethnic Somalis by Kenyan authorities to suppress clandestine activity conducted and concealed within the population.

Coordination:

Collaboration has taken place between JNIM and ISGS. Some have noted this occurred only a few months before JNIM and ISGS were back to fighting each other. Indeed, JNIM has been regaining control over the majority of the Malian Gourma area, and even chasing IS from some of its traditional strongholds in Burkina Faso's northern Soum province .

Competition is likely due to the continued spread of these groups and their continual need for supporters and recruits. They venture into each other's territories and they fight. These conflicts could lead to regional spread into new territories, leaving open the prospect of renewed coordination if there is no need to infringe on rival areas of control.

Cooperation seems episodic, and sustained coordination quite unlikely. This may be due to the very different profiles of IS and AQ affiliates, or the different needs of their operating circumstances, but instances of such groups finding common ground on more than a passing tactical basis seems unsupported by the record so far.

Leadership:

In a region where 70% of fighters are employed only 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 IS 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.

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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 a pan-Islamic Caliphate cutting through a central sub-Saharan axis in Africa, the occurrence of such an endeavor seems quite unlikely. This is at the very least not until there is further local and regional power consolidation as well as for 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'.

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 co-opted 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 operation 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.

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