

The Impacts of Organizational Structure on Salafi-Jihadist Terrorist Groups in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Africa has become a haven for jihadist terrorist organizations that run the gamut from local groups fighting to avenge political and economic grievances to splinter groups affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or al-Qaeda. Jihadist groups that left Syria and moved into the Sahel region of Africa after ISIS was defeated have only increased the threat of terrorism in the region. The organizational structure of these groups has made efforts to counter their operational capacity extremely difficult. While some of these groups, such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, are organizationally independent, others, such as ISIS and Qaeda affiliates, are organizationally dependent and rely on either a hub-spoke or an all-channel group structure. The leaders of these dependent groups seek the endorsement of or assignments from the group to which they are affiliated. The results of this study show that organizationally dependent groups target military and state institutions exclusively and perpetrate fewer terrorist incidents than other jihadist organizations in the region.

Keywords: al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Africa, organization structure, organizational models, al Qaeda, ISIS franchises, JNIM

Los impactos de la estructura organizativa en los grupos terroristas salafistas yihadistas en África

RESUMEN

África se ha convertido en un refugio para las organizaciones terroristas yihadistas que van desde grupos locales que luchan para vengar agravios políticos y económicos hasta grupos disidentes afiliados al Estado Islámico en Irak y Siria (ISIS) o al-Qaeda. Los grupos yihadistas que abandonaron Siria y se mudaron a la región africana del Sahel después de que ISIS fuera derrotado solo han aumentado la amenaza del terrorismo en la región. La estructura

organizativa de estos grupos ha hecho extremadamente difíciles los esfuerzos para contrarrestar su capacidad operativa. Si bien algunos de estos grupos, como Boko Haram y Al-Shabaab, son independientes desde el punto de vista organizativo, otros, como los afiliados de ISIS y Qaeda, son dependientes desde el punto de vista organizativo y se basan en una estructura de grupo central o de todos los canales. Los líderes de estos grupos dependientes buscan el respaldo o las asignaciones del grupo al que están afiliados. Los resultados de este estudio muestran que los grupos organizativamente dependientes se dirigen exclusivamente a las instituciones militares y estatales y perpetran menos incidentes terroristas que otras organizaciones yihadistas de la región.

Palabras clave: al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, África, estructura organizativa, modelos organizativos, al Qaeda, franquicias ISIS, JNIM

组织架构对非洲萨拉菲-圣战主义恐怖集团产生的影响

摘要

非洲已成为圣战主义恐怖组织的避风港，这些组织的规模范围包括从“为报复政治不满和经济不满而战”的地方集团，到与伊斯兰国（ISIS）或基地组织有关联的小集团。离开叙利亚，并在伊斯兰国被击败后进入非洲撒哈拉区域的圣战分子集团仅仅增加了该地区的恐怖主义威胁。这些集团的组织架构让那些对抗其操作能力的举措变得极为困难。尽管例如博科圣地和索马里青年党等集团在组织上是独立的，然而，伊斯兰国和基地组织分支等却在组织上具有依赖性并且需要轴辐式或全方位的集团架构。这些非独立集团的领导试图获取其所属集团的支持或任务。本研究得出的结果表明，依靠组织的集团专门以军事组织和国家组织为目标，并且比该区域其他圣战组织参与更少的恐怖主义事件。

关键词：索马里青年党，博科圣地，非洲，组织架构，组织模型，基地组织，伊斯兰国分支，“支持伊斯兰与穆斯林”组织（JNIM）

Introduction

Counterterrorism efforts in the world have failed to stem the tide of bombings and killings that contribute to the roughly 8,000 terrorist incidents each year that various databases have documented.¹ Efforts to transform terrorist breeding grounds by crushing and containing the groups' operatives and leaders, destroying their defenses, delegitimizing their standing among members and sympathizers, and implementing diversion tactics² have been to no avail, as many terrorist groups bounce back from disruptive events, survive intact, and increase their attacks. Recent discussions on terrorist organizations have focused on the longevity and resilience of these groups and what is contributing to their increasing capacity to cause devastating harm and destruction.

Africa is one of the major hot spots for terrorist organizations. National and multinational military efforts have been no match for the resilience of Al-Qaeda and ISIS-affiliated groups on the continent. In 2019, for example, countries in Africa endured roughly 3,500 terrorist attacks—double the number of militant jihadist-group attacks—in 2013.³ The attacks were perpetrated by dozens of groups operating in 14 countries⁴ and resulted in the death of 10,000 people. Terrorism trends in Africa indicate that salafi-jihadist⁵ groups that left Syria have sought refuge in African countries, mostly in the Sahel region.

Al-Qaeda's focus on *localization* and ISIS's focus on *expansion through loose ties* with clusters of like-minded individuals gave birth to multiple affiliated groups whose members made their way to and reconstituted their intergroup structure in Africa. Some of these groups—such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab—have declared loyalty to and are ideologically affiliated with either al-Qaeda or ISIS, but have not forsaken their independence. Other groups pledge their allegiance to and are organizationally dependent on and under the command of either ISIS (e.g., ISIS-West Africa Province and ISIS-Greater Sahara Province) or Al-Qaeda (e.g., Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wal-Muslimin). This study compares two groups of dependent terrorist organizations (i.e., one ISIS and one al-Qaeda-affiliate groups) and one group of independent terrorist organizations

1 According to the Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center (GTTAC) database, the number of terrorist incidents was 8,093 in 2018 (Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, p. 5); Global Terrorism Database (GTD, 2019) reported it as 7,553.

2 Gaines and Kremling, *Homeland Security and Terrorism*, 136.

3 *African Center for Strategic Studies*, "Threat from African Militant Islamist Groups Expanding, Diversifying."

4 *Ibid.*

5 Salafi jihadism reflects the strict interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadiths and seeks to advocate for Islamic ideological goals by violent means. According to Maher, "there are five essential and irreducible features of the Salafi Jihadi movement: tawhid [the unity of God], hakimiyya [sovereignty], al-wala' wa-l-bara' [loyalty and disavowal], jihad and takfir [excommunication, declaring someone an unbeliever]." Maher, *A History of Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, 13-14.

(i.e., Boko Haram and al-Shabaab) in terms of number of attacks, fatality rate, target type, group-leader ascension, and intergroup structures.

Organizational Structure in Terrorist Groups

Terrorist groups simultaneously operate under two basic organizational structures: intragroup and intergroup. The intragroup structure represents how group members are connected to each other inside the group, while the intergroup structure reflects how different groups are networked to each other. The models used within those structures vary from one terrorist group to another. For example, some terrorist groups refine the basic structure with what one researcher calls *chain networks*; *all-channel networks*; and *star, hub, or wheel networks*.⁶ Williams and Godson describes the refinement in terms of five models: *market*, *enterprise*, *cultural*, *ethnic network*, and *social network*,⁷ whereas Taylor and Swanson identify six organizational models: lone wolf, cell, network, hierarchical, umbrella, virtual model.⁸

Other researchers prefer the terms *bureaucracy*, *hub-spoke*, *all-channel*, and *market* to describe the organizational structure of terrorist groups. Groups with a *bureaucratic structure* have “clear departmental boundaries, clear lines of authority, and detailed reporting mechanisms.”⁹ Hezbollah is an example of a *bureaucratic structure* because each department in the group has its own specialization.¹⁰

Groups with a *hub-spoke structure* have a central actor to whom members must go before communicating with others in the group.¹¹ This type of group structure includes franchises.¹² Groups affiliated with ISIS are examples of the hub-spoke group structure. According to the U.S. State Department’s 2018 Annex of Statistical Information, ISIS has affiliates¹³ in 26 countries, including groups such as ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah in Indonesia, and ISIS-West Africa in Nigeria, Niger, and Chad.¹⁴ The group leader in these and other hub-spoke terrorist organizations do not have central command and control.

6 Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*, 264.

7 Williams and Godson, *Anticipating Organized and Transnational Crime*, 2002.

8 Taylor and Swanson, *Terrorism, Intelligence & Homeland Security*, 143.

9 Joshua, “A Basic Model Explaining Terrorist Group Organizational Structure.”

10 Ranstorp, “Hizbollah’s Command Leadership: Its Structure, Decision-Making and Relationship with Iranian Clergy and Institution.”

11 Arquilla and Ronfeldt *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*.

12 Joshua, “A Basic Model Explaining Terrorist Group Organizational Structure,” 813.

13 The U.S. State Department’s Annex of Statistical Information defines affiliated group as “pledging allegiance, declaring loyalty, breaking away from the group but still linked by finance, communications, technical, HR, or being a splinter/offshoot organization” (Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism, 2018, 5).

14 Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 5 & 6.

Groups with an *all-channel structure* are loosely organized around a leader with no central control and no functional differentiation among the group's members. Tupamaros¹⁵ and Irish Republican Army are examples of the all-channel group structure because members of the group operate as cells of an umbrella organization. The all-channel model also is applicable to umbrella terrorist groups, where several terrorist groups convene and form a big incorporating group. Terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda¹⁶ also operate under an all-channel structure. These groups are aligned with the larger Al-Qaeda organization.

Groups that use a *market structure* have no distinct leadership or functional differentiation.¹⁷ They are decentralized and symbolize classic leaderless resistance.¹⁸ American militia groups, such as Sovereign Citizens, and violent American domestic groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, are examples of market group structure.

At least one study has found that the organizational structure a terrorist organization chooses to adopt depends on both external variables (e.g., per-capita gross domestic product, freedom house, and polity durability) and internal variables (e.g., hard-target selection, group goals, and type of terrorist group).¹⁹ The study finds that, while wealthy and democratic states host terrorist groups with a decentralized structure, poor and autocratic states host terrorist groups with a centralized structure.²⁰ The study also finds that religious groups are more likely to be decentralized and have an all-channel or hub-spoke group structure.²¹ Religious groups that adopt instead a bureaucratic structure have one or more of the following features: a nationalist element, participation in state politics, and operations in a weak or failed state.²²

Jihadist groups primarily adopt bureaucratic structures for their intragroup administration, a preference that arises from their Islamic ideology. It is an ideology that requires subordinates to obey their leader. The result is a leader-oriented and top-down hierarchical group structure. The leaders of such groups, therefore, frequently stress the importance of obeying the caliph and caliphate in their public and private rhetoric.

15 White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security*, 231.

16 According to the U.S. State Department's *Annex of Statistical Information* (p. 5), Al-Qaeda had affiliated groups in 15 countries. These groups include, for example, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria and Laskhar-e Tayyiba in India and Pakistan.

17 Powel, "Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization," *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 297.

18 Beam, "Leaderless Resistance."

19 Joshua, K., "A Basic Model Explaining Terrorist Group Organizational Structure," 814-817.

20 *Ibid.*, 823.

21 *Ibid.*, 824.

22 *Ibid.*, 824.

When it comes to intergroup relations, jihadist groups' loyalty is less uniform. Some jihadist groups pledge allegiance to groups that are more powerful and more popular than their own, while some are linked ideologically only to popular groups. In either case, the jihadist groups do not change their group structure, and the leader of each group operates independently. Other jihadist groups, however, not only pledge allegiance ideologically but also link themselves organizationally to the more popular group. The result is a dependent intergroup structure where the leader of the smaller group is under the command of the larger group to which the smaller group chose to affiliate.

Independent Organizational Models: Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram

The groups in this category are not organizationally under the command of any other large group, although they may declare loyalty to the larger. For example, Al-Shabaab has pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, while Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIS.

al-Shabaab

Terrorist groups flourish in areas where the state lacks the means to oust the groups, and counterterrorism efforts have been ineffective.²³ Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen or, simply Al-Shabaab (i.e., "The Youth"), is a salafi-jihadist group that arose from the remnants of a failed state and now operates in the Horn of Africa.²⁴ With aspirations of becoming a regional and global leader, the organization's head, Ahmed Abdi Godane, opened the doors to international jihadists in 2009, causing internal strife within the group. To quell the uproar, Godane declared loyalty to al-Qaeda and killed his rivals.²⁵

al-Shabaab has an independent intergroup structure and a bureaucratic and hierarchical intragroup structure comprised of several units under a central leader. A 10-member cabinet provides guidance and council to the leader. A shura majlis, or consultative council, comprised of junior amirs, serves under the group's leader. Al-Shabaab also has regional political and military representatives (such as those for Bay and Bokool and for South-Central Somalia and Mogadishu) who are free to engage in independent actions without the approval of the shura. Three sub-amir from the shura majlis oversee the Politics Division, the Media Division, and Military Operations.²⁶

23 Piazza, "Do Democracy and Free Markets Protect Us from Terrorism?"

24 White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security*, 168 & 169.

25 Ibid., 170.

26 Shuriye, "Al-Shabaab's Leadership Hierarchy and Its Ideology."

In Somalia, al-Shabaab has pioneered a subject network model that uses ethnic, historical, and religious dynamics to create an elastic network. Thanks to this model, the organization benefits from the weaknesses of the failed Somali government and the elusive counterterrorism efforts of United States and the Western world.²⁷

al-Shabaab is the most active terrorist group in Africa, being the perpetrator of 535 attacks and killing 3,585 people in 2018.²⁸ The group mostly targets Somali military, police, and the African Union Mission in Somalia (a regional peace-keeping mission operated by the African Union with the approval of the United Nations) as well as government buildings, government officials, and civilians. It operates in south and central Somalia. A small group of al-Shabaab members operates in the Bari region of Puntland state. In 2018, al-Shabaab used weapons that ranged from firearms and explosives to melees and incendiary devices.²⁹ Armed assault is the primary mode of the attack and includes bombings, assassinations, and suicide attacks. For example, al-Shabaab was involved in 51 assassinations and conducted 33 terrorist attacks in 2018.³⁰ That same year, the group also targeted foreigners in the country, killing a U.S. service member and wounding others in an attack in Lower Jubba.³¹ In another attack, al-Shabaab fired mortars at a Turkish military base in the Somali capital, Mogadishu.³²

al-Shabaab has numerous leaders who are tasked by the organization to attack Western targets.³³ The group also has targeted Kenya after the Kenyan government joined international forces seeking to counter al-Shabaab. Until then, al-Shabaab had maintained a close relationship with Kenyan Muslims who had provided logistical support to the organization.³⁴ The al-Shabaab group based in Kenya increased its attacks there in late 2019, killing three Americans at an airbase, striking schools, and killing civilians.³⁵

The organization's independent bureaucratic structure has made al-Shabaab the most effective terrorist organization in the region—especially when the effectiveness of a terrorist organization is measured in terms of media and political attention, impact on the media audience, the ability to force concessions, the disruption of normal routines, and the ability to provoke the host state to overreact.³⁶

27 Allen, "Al-Shabaab and the Exploitation of the Subject Network Model."

28 Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism, 2018, 9.

29 Ibid., 15

30 Ibid., 12.

31 UPI, "U.S. Service Member Killed in Al-Shabaab Attack in Somalia."

32 Grada World, "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Fires Mortars at Turkish Military Base in Mogadishu."

33 Allen, "Al-Shabaab and the Exploitation of the Subject Network Model."

34 White, J., *Terrorism and Homeland Security*, 170.

35 National Public Radio, "In Kenya, A Rise in Attacks by Islamist Al-Shabaab Insurgents."

36 Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*, 281 & 282.

Indeed, al-Shabaab was the terrorist group that the U.S. media covered the most in 2018.³⁷

Boko Haram

The group Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, also known as Boko Haram, is a salafi-jihadist group that operates in northern Nigeria. The organization believes that politics have been seized by corrupt Muslims and therefore it must create a pure Islamic state ruled by sharia law.³⁸ Among terrorist groups worldwide in 2018, Boko Haram ranked fourth for the number of terrorist incidents committed that year. It also was the second most violent group in 2018 with a worldwide fatality rate of 5.96³⁹ and, at 17% was ranked first in terms of the percentage of attacks that involved bombers.⁴⁰ The group was the perpetrator of many notable attacks. In March 2012, for example, Boko Haram burnt down 12 schools in one night and forced 10,000 pupils out of education.⁴¹ In 2014, the group kidnapped more than 250 schoolgirls⁴² and, in 2018, kidnapped 104 schoolgirls.⁴³ Unlike Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (in northwestern part of Africa and in West Africa) and Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram is not bent on targeting Western interests.⁴⁴ Its victims in 2018, for example, were predominantly civilians and military personnel.⁴⁵

In its early years, Boko Haram maintained a decentralized and fluid leadership structure under its founder and leader, Salafist-trained Muhammad Yusuf. Intermediaries in the group, however, shared a common ideology and a transnational agenda.⁴⁶ After Yusuf was executed, Abubakar Shekau took the leadership reins and radicalized the organization. The group had two other significant and authoritative leaders: Maman Nur (ideological leader) and Khalid al-Barnawi (operational leader).⁴⁷ Nur, a Cameroonian, introduced Shekau to Yusuf and was third in command under Yusuf's leadership. Nur led Boko Haram temporarily in 2009 when Yusuf was killed and Shekau was imprisoned.⁴⁸ The inhumane killing of Muslims by some members of Boko Haram incensed Nur and others in the group.

37 Timmons and O'shea, "What Makes a Terrorist Attack Notable? Determinants of U.S. Media Coverage"

38 Walker, "What Is Boko Haram."

39 Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 9.

40 Ibid., 13.

41 Walker, "What Is Boko Haram," 6.

42 Zenn, "Boko Haram and Kidnapping of Chibok Schoolgirls."

43 Abubakar, "Boko Haram 104 of 110 Kidnapped Schoolgirls."

44 Walker, "What Is Boko Haram," 9.

45 Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 18.

46 Zenn, "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria."

47 Zenn, "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria."

48 Counterextremism Project, "Mamman Nur."

Some of the opponents defected and formed Ansaru, which operated mostly in Chad and Cameroon.⁴⁹

Boko Haram relies on a bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational structure.⁵⁰ The leader, at the top of the organizational pyramid, sets goals and has final authority over all decisions and actions. Under the leader are well-organized layers and cells that support the organizational structure: two deputies; a 30-member Shura council (which supervises state and local operational commanders and strategists and variety of operational cells). Other responsibilities of the council include overseeing the group's internal support and external publicity, terrorist missions, and financial acquisitions. All of the operational commanders and strategists operate independently to maintain the confidentiality of the group's activities. Courier messengers are used for direct and confidential communication.⁵¹

Boko Haram also has a permeable group structure akin to that of two other jihadist groups: Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Ansaru (in Nigeria). Boko Haram and Ansaru eschewed rivalries between their two groups because they wanted to avoid unnecessary strife and because some militants have undertaken operations for both groups.⁵² Likewise, Boko Haram and ISWAP do not target each other.

Dependent Group Models

Unlike jihadist groups that pledge ideological allegiance but retain their organizational structure, some terrorist groups change their organizational structure after declaring loyalty to a larger group. These smaller groups then become dependent on the larger group and lose the ability to choose their leader. Instead, the leader of the larger group assigns a leader to the affiliated groups. Jihadist groups in this category adopt either a hub-spoke or an all-channel organizational structure.

Hub-Spoke Groups in Africa: ISIS and Its Franchises

Western leaders say that ISIS has been defeated in Iraq and Syria because the terrorist group has lost its territories; however, it is too early to speak about victory over ISIS. According to the *United States 2018 Annex of Statistical Information* report, ISIS is second only to the Taliban in terms of the number of terrorist incidents committed.⁵³ The ISIS franchise in Afghanistan, ISIS-Khorasan, is the 10th

49 White, 166 & 167.

50 Stratfor Global Intelligence "Nigeria: Examining Boko Haram."

51 Ibid.

52 Zenn, "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria."

53 ISIS perpetrated 647 terrorist incidents, resulting in the death of 3,585 people and the wounding 1,791 others (Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 9).

most active terrorist group and the most lethal group with a fatality rate of 12.65.⁵⁴ The report also emphasizes that ISIS is the most prevalent terrorist group in the world with franchises in 26 countries.⁵⁵ These franchises operate on provincial basis and they are loyal to the organization's "core," and its Caliph.⁵⁶

ISIS had become a popular organizational model for other jihadist groups for three main reasons: First, the group was able to control territory in Iraq and Syria. Second, the group had the capacity to direct terrorist attacks in the Middle East and inspire self-radicalized individuals to carry out attacks in their home countries. Third, ISIS won groups in many regions of the world through being pledged allegiance or declared loyalty to itself, which ISIS treated them as the group's provinces.⁵⁷ These franchises have presented credibility and created perception on how ISIS is a globalized organization, after the organization lost its power in the territories in Iraq and Syria.⁵⁸

Groups that want to join ISIS or become an ISIS franchise must have territorial authority in a specific country or region and be willing to alter their internal organizational structure and strategic decision-making processes to meet the demands of ISIS.⁵⁹ In return, ISIS provides tactical support to its provincial affiliates. For example, ISWAP received media equipment and tactical support for up-armored suicide vehicles used to transport improvised explosives devices.⁶⁰

ISIS has an impact on the organizational structure on its provincial franchises in a number of ways. For example, the group assigns leaders to its affiliates, orders the foot soldiers of those affiliates to join the organization (as it did with ISWAP), and requires its provincial leaders to support a more moderate theological leadership approach.⁶¹ ISIS also uses its influence and authority to give orders to its provincial leaders. For example, ISIS ordered the execution of two female workers for a Muslim nongovernmental organization in 2018.⁶² As of March 2020, ISIS recognized eight provinces in Africa, taking advantage of ongoing conflicts and exploiting economic and political grievances of the people in those areas, as shown in Figure 1.

54 ISIS-Khorasan killed 1,278 people in 101 incidents (Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 9).

55 Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 9.

56 Zenn, "The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries Juxtaposing the Pledges from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group in the Philippines."

57 Ibid., 87.

58 Ibid., 87.

59 Ibid., 88.

60 Ibid., 92.

61 Ibid., 93.

62 Ibid., 93.

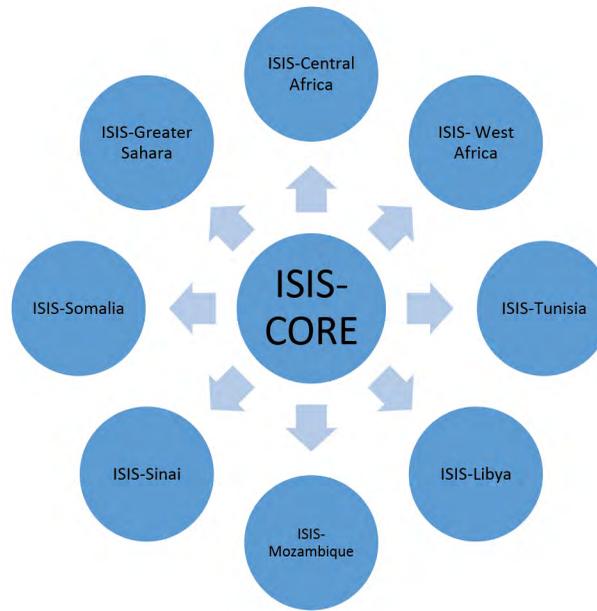


Figure 1: ISIS and Its Franchises in Africa

ISIS Provinces in Sahel

Extremist groups are gaining strength in the Sahel region of Africa, an area in Africa between the Sahara to the north and the Sudanian Savanna to the south, despite U.S.-led military operations, drone strikes, and efforts by the governments in the region. Since 2015, the extremist groups have doubled and perpetrated more than 700 violent episodes in 2019 alone.⁶³ ISIS-West Africa and ISIS-Greater Sahara are two ISIS provinces operating in the Sahel region of Africa.

ISIS West Africa was formed in 2016 by defectors of Boko Haram and operates primarily in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region with 5,000 fighters.⁶⁴ Boko Haram leader Sheaku pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015, but Sheaku's indiscriminate violence targeting Muslims (and anyone outside of the group⁶⁵) prompted the ISIS leadership to replace Sheakau with Mus'ab al Barnawi in 2016.⁶⁶ Like ISIS-core, Barnawi favored a more "hearts and minds" approach that called for targeting collaborators and military forces.⁶⁷ ISIS-West Africa perpetrated 22 terrorist incidents in 2018, resulting in the death of 160 individuals.⁶⁸ Boko Haram, meanwhile,

63 Gramer, "U.S. to Ramp Up Counterterrorism Efforts in Sahel Region."

64 State of New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, "ISIS West Africa Posturing for Prolonged Insurgency."

65 *Reuters*, "Islamic State Ally Stakes Out Territory around Lake Chad."

66 Iaccino, "ISIS Replaces Abubakar Shekau with New Boko Haram Leader Abu Musab al-Barnawi."

67 *Sundiatapost*, "Al-Barnawi Faction and Nigeria's Timeless Boko Haram War?"

68 Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 5.

continued to target civilians indiscriminately. Those attacks helped to make Boko Haram one of top five terrorist groups in terms of the number of civilian victims in 2018.⁶⁹ ISIS-West Africa, on the other hand, was more discriminating, targeting Christian civilians and bypassing Muslim civilians.

ISIS-Greater Sahara came to prominence in 2015 when al-Mourabitoun, a group affiliated with al-Qaeda, pledged allegiance to ISIS.⁷⁰ The group operates primarily in Mali and has claimed responsibility for attacks such as the killing of four U.S. soldiers and five Nigerian soldiers in Tongo region. The U.S. State Department subsequently designated al-Mourabitoun as a terrorist organization.⁷¹ The size of the group fluctuates between 200 and 300 militants.⁷²

ISIS Provinces in the Northern Theater

ISIS's provincial franchises in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt perpetrated 347 terrorist incidents in 2019, up slightly from 345 incidents in 2018.⁷³ Libya is a failed state where conflicts are occurring at the local, regional, and national levels.⁷⁴ The country has teetered on the brink of collapse amid deteriorating security and increased lawlessness since Muammar Qadhafi was ousted in October 2011.⁷⁵ Qaddafi's strongholds were transformed into bases for ISIS and, of the foreign jihadists Libya hosted, most of them joined ISIS groups that had come into the country from Tunisia in Libya.⁷⁶ *ISIS-Libya* emerged in Derna, a port city in eastern Libya, in 2014 when a group of 300 former Libyan members of the Battar Brigade returned to their country after fighting in Syria and allied with the Ansar al-Sharia terrorist group. Immediately after Ansar al-Sharia pledged its allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS recognized and announced the formation of three branches of the Islamic State in Libya.⁷⁷ While the number of ISIS attacks in Libya has decreased since 2014, the terrorist organization still holds a presence in the country, targeting checkpoints and urban police stations and kidnapping local notables for potential prisoner exchanges or ransom.⁷⁸

Unlike Libya, Tunisia successfully transitioned to democracy after the Arab Spring in the early 2010s. Tunisia, however, has the largest contingent of foreign

69 Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, 18.

70 Warner, "The Islamic State's Three New African Affiliates."

71 Department of State, "State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS in the Greater Sahara."

72 Warner and Hulme, "The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells Across the Continent."

73 African Center for Strategic Studies, "Threat from African Militant Islamist Groups Expanding, Diversifying."

74 Engel, "The Islamic State's Expansion in Libya."

75 Engel, "Libya as a Failed State: Causes, Consequences, and Options."

76 Kahlaoui, "What Is Behind the Rise of ISIS in Libya?"

77 Engel, "The Islamic State's Expansion in Libya."

78 Inga, "Islamic State in Libya: From Force to Farce," 25.

fighters in Iraq and Syria.⁷⁹ According to the Tunisian government, around 3,000 Tunisians⁸⁰ have fought in Iraq and Syria for ideological and economic reasons and to support the expansion of the Salafist movement in both countries.⁸¹ *The ISIS-Tunisia* branch emerged in 2015 when the group was involved in attacks in Sousse, Tunisia, including the targeting of the Bardo Museum.⁸² ISIS-Tunisia has maintained its capacity to carry out attacks in the country, where the group executed two suicide attacks in 2019.⁸³

In Egypt, which also hosts many jihadist terrorist groups, most of the attacks by these groups have occurred in the northern Sinai area. *ISIS-Sinai* was to blame for 320 terrorist attacks between 2013 and 2017.⁸⁴ This ISIS franchise originated from the Sunni Salafist Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) terrorist group that declared war against the Egyptian government immediately after the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in a July 2013 military coup.⁸⁵ ABM emerged in 2011 when the government collapse created power vacuums in northern regions of the country. ABM had a loose affiliation with al-Qaeda in its early years and was designated as a terrorist group by United States in 2014.⁸⁶ In 2014, ABM pledged allegiance to ISIS and began using the name of ISIS-Sinai. Since then, ISIS-Sinai has grown into the most coordinated and most operationally effective terrorist group in Egypt.⁸⁷ Many of the group's attacks in Egypt have been quite notable. For example, ISIS-Sinai has claimed responsibility for the bombing of a Russian Metrojet flying out of Sharm El-Sheikh, an Egyptian resort town between the desert of the Sinai Peninsula and the Red Sea.⁸⁸ ISIS-Sinai has been referred to as one of the most resilient ISIS franchises because the group has survived intact despite many years heavy fighting with the Egyptian military.⁸⁹ That resiliency can be attributed at least in part to its weaponry, which the group receives through illegal weapons transfers from Libya.⁹⁰

ISIS-Somalia

The origin of the ISIS's Somalian franchise dates to 2012 when Al-Shabaab assigned

79 Lounnas, "The Tunisian Jihad: Between Al-Qaeda and ISIS."

80 Raghavan, "No Nationality Heeded the Call to Come Fight for ISIS Like Tunisians Did. Now They're Stuck."

81 Counter Extremism Project, "Tunisia: Extremism & Counterextremism."

82 Jane's Defense Weekly, "Islamic State Attack on Ben Guerdane Indicates Shift in Group's Tunisia Strategy, to Trigger Insurgency."

83 Counter Extremism Project, "Tunisia: Extremism & Counterextremism."

84 World Data, "Terrorism in Egypt."

85 AIPAC, "ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula."

86 Gomez, "Islamic State-Sinai Province: What Is the ISIS-Linked Terrorist Group?"

87 Gomez, A., "Islamic State-Sinai Province: What Is the ISIS-Linked Terrorist Group?"

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Mazel, "ISIS in Sinai: The Libyan Connection."

Abdul Qadir Mumin to operate in its remote outpost in Puntland in northeastern Somalia. Mumin took control of the Puntland group in 2014 immediately after the Al-Shabaab regional group leader defected to the government. Mumin left al-Shabaab and began to consider himself an independent terrorist. He pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015.⁹¹ ISIS-Somalia has around 150 members.⁹² Similar to other ISIS franchises, ISIS-Somalia primarily targets military troops and Al-Shabaab fighters. In 2018 and 2019, Several clashes between Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia occurred in 2018 and 2019.⁹³

ISIS-Central Africa

ISIS-Central Africa emerged in 2017 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) when militants from a new brand of the rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) known as the City of Monotheism and Monotheists leaned towards ISIS. The ADF is an Islamist group that has fought against the governments of the DRC and Uganda for several years.⁹⁴ The group recently adopted symbols similar to those of global jihadists groups.⁹⁵ Given the poorly equipped and formless structure of ADF, some scholars believe that it is not realistic to believe that an ISIS province exists in the Central African region.⁹⁶ Other scholars point out that the leader of ISIS announced in 2018 that it did have a provincial group in the region⁹⁷ and that ISIS claimed responsibility for several attacks in the DRC in 2019. In one of those attacks, eight soldiers were killed.⁹⁸

ISIS-Mozambique

Mozambique's experience with violence by Islamic extremists began when Al Sunna wa Jama'ah (ASWJ)⁹⁹ popped up in the eastern part of the country in 2017. Referred to by locals as al-Shabaab, the group's grievances included dissatisfaction with widespread poverty and inequality, frustration over the government's ineffective policies for addressing those issues, and the expansion of Salafist ideology with support from the Gulf States in the form of funding for mosques, social programs, and young students who wanted to study abroad and propagate Wahhabi Islam. The rising influence of Wahhabism led to conflict with Sufi Muslims in the country, resulting in the death of 300 people and the displacement of thousands

91 Warner, "Sub-Saharan Africa's Three 'New' Islamic State Affiliates."

92 Browne, "U.S. Airstrikes Kills ISIS-Somalia's Second in Command."

93 Weiss, "Islamic State Claims Clashes with Shabab in Somalia."

94 West, "Has Islamic State Really Entered the Congo and Is an IS Province There a Gamble?"

95 Congo Research Group, "Inside the ADF Group."

96 West, "Has Islamic State Really Entered the Congo and Is an IS Province There a Gamble?" 9.

97 Weiss, "Islamic State-Loyal Group Calls for People to Join the Jihad in the Congo."

98 Wembi and Goldstein, "ISIS Claims First Attack in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

99 Postings, "Islamic State in Mozambique Further Complicates Cabo Delgado Violence."

of others. By 2019, the terrorist group Al Sunna emerged and was acknowledged by ISIS as one of its affiliates. Similar to other ISIS provincial franchises, Al Sunna selectively targeted military troops.¹⁰⁰

All-Channel: Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM)

Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) is an example of an all-channel network operating in the Maghreb (in the northwestern part of Africa) and West Africa. JNIM was formed by the merger of four Al-Qaeda organizations: *Ansar Dine*, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun, and the Saharan branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), as shown in Figure 2.¹⁰¹ The group has between 1,000 and 2,000 members and is active in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.¹⁰²

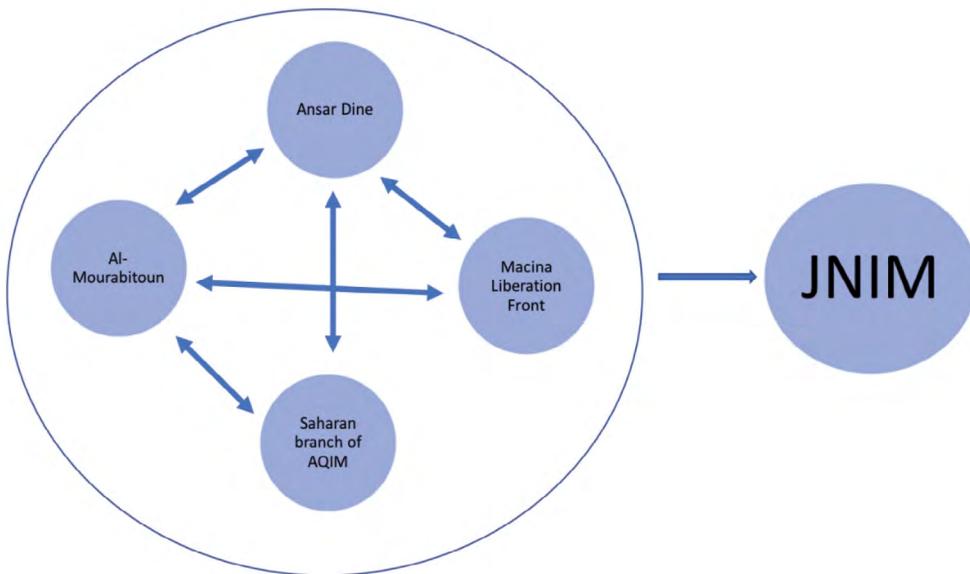


Figure 2: The Formation of Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)

JNIM became an official branch of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and West Africa after four of the group's leaders declared loyalty to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri in 2017.¹⁰³ Zawahiri welcomed the affiliation as it helped to fulfill his organization's localization policies. Inspired by the formation of Hay'at tahrir al Sham, which was created from the merger of Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in Syria, Zawahiri sought to expand Al-Qaeda's influence with a network of allied terrorist groups. Unlike ISIS, which continued to create loose ties with its franchises,

100 Chua, "Challenges within Mozambique."

101 Buchanan, "Mali: Terror Threat Spreads after Sahel Groups Join Forces."

102 Center for Strategic & International Studies, "Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin."

103 Gaffey, "African Jihadi Groups Unite and Pledge Allegiance to Al-Qaeda."

Al-Qaeda focused on shoring up its roots in the locations where the group historically has been active.¹⁰⁴

Iyad Ag Ghaly, the leader of Ansar Dine, became the leader of the merged terrorist organization. Ghaly believed that group unity serves multiple purposes, such as strengthening the jihadist cause, expanding the influence of Al-Qaeda, making the group insurmountable by Western forces, and preventing ISIS's attempts to attract potential defectors.¹⁰⁵ The structural reorganization of JNIM was influenced by three Al-Qaeda's policies in Sahel. First, Al-Qaeda policy prohibits members of merger groups from leaving the Al-Qaeda network to join a rival group. The policy was necessary because when members left, they tended to join ISIS. Second, Al-Qaeda policy requires that all members maintain the organization's ethno-political dynamics espoused by Ghaly, who had become the symbol for the nomadic Tuareg people. The Tuareg people make their home across the Sahara Desert, including in the North African countries of Mali, Niger, Libya, Algeria, and Chad. Third, Al-Qaeda policy calls for seizing opportunities to invigorate insurgency in the region.¹⁰⁶

Similar to ISIS franchises in Africa, JNIM acts like a state and primarily targets national and multinational posts and soldiers.¹⁰⁷ In a video released by JNIM in 2018, al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri gave a speech about how he targeted multinational forces in Mali. Zawahiri explained that JNIM targeted the airport in Timbuktu, Mali, wounding United Nations peacekeepers and French soldiers.¹⁰⁸ The group, however, tries to avoid the targeting of civilians. When a landmine accidentally killed civilians in central Mali in September 2019, JNIM expressed its condolences and apologies and promised to compensate the victims' families.¹⁰⁹

Discussion

Table 1 shows how affiliation with either ISIS or Al-Qaeda affects the organizational structure of terrorist groups in Africa. Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram are examples of groups that are organizationally independent. Their leaders are not assigned by the groups to which they declare their loyalty. All of the other groups listed in the table are examples of groups that are organizationally dependent. For its organizationally dependent structure, Al-Qaeda uses an all-channel arrangement because its policies focus on the localization operations. ISIS, on

104 Perkins, "Local vs. Global – Al-Qaeda's Strategy for Survival."

105 Joscelyn, "Analysis: Al-Qaeda Groups Reorganize in West Africa."

106 Zelin, "Jihadist Groups in the Sahel Region Formalize Merger." *Jihadology*.

107 Wikipedia listed the incidents that were perpetrated by JNIM between 2017 and 2019. Wikipedia Database, "Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin."

108 The Defense Post, "Mali Militants Disguised as Peacekeepers Attack French and U.N. Bases Killing One, Injuring Dozens."

109 Long War Journal, "JNIM Apologizes for Killing Civilians in Central Mali."

the other hand, prefers a hub-spoke organizational structure because it allows for the creation of provincial groups that remain connected to the larger organization. The hub-spoke and the all-channel organizational structures have been beneficial to not only the larger organizations but also their affiliates. For example, the leaders of some of the affiliates are endorsed by and allowed to continue in that role (i.e., beneficial to the affiliate), while the leaders of other affiliates are appointed by the larger organization (i.e., beneficial to the larger organization). More importantly, though, affiliate groups that are part of a hub-spoke or an all-channel network work to implement the strategies of the larger organization (i.e., beneficial to the larger organization).

Table 1: Description of the Organizational Structure of Salafi-Jihadist Terrorist Groups in Africa

Group	Organization to Which the Group Is Affiliated	Country of Operation	Organizationally Inter-Group Structure	Leader Assigned by the Group Affiliated to?
Al-Shabaab	Al-Qaeda	Somalia	Independent	No
Boko Haram	ISIS	Nigeria	Independent	No
JNIM	Al-Qaeda	Mali and Burkina Faso	Dependent-All-Channel	Yes
ISIS-Sinai	ISIS	Egypt	Dependent-Hub-spoke	Yes
ISIS-Greater Sahara	ISIS	Mali and Burkina Faso	Dependent-Hub-spoke	Yes
ISIS-West Africa	ISIS	Sahel	Dependent-Hub-spoke	Yes
ISIS-Somalia	ISIS	Somalia	Dependent-Hub-spoke	Yes

Table 2 uses data from the U.S. State Department’s 2019 Annex of Statistical Information¹¹⁰ to show how an affiliated terrorist group’s organizational dependence on Al-Qaeda or ISIS affects the operational capacity of the affiliated group. The number of terrorist attacks made by organizationally independent groups are incomparably higher than the number of attacks made by organizationally dependent groups. The large gap stems from who and what the groups target. Organizationally *independent* groups (e.g., Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram) are *indiscriminate* in their choice of targets, while organizationally *dependent* groups (e.g., ISIS-Sinai, ISIS-Greater Sahara) are *discriminate* (i.e., selective) in their choice of targets. For example, organizationally *dependent* groups may choose to target only national or multinational military forces, collaborators, or Christian civilians, while organiza-

¹¹⁰ Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2018.

tionally *independent* groups will target anything or anyone. Because dependent affiliates such as ISIS-Greater Sahara and ISIS-West Africa, are under the command of ISIS (with its dependent structure), they act if they are part of a state and adhere to a “hearts and minds” policy that prohibits the targeting of Muslim civilians. Examples include the ISIS-Greater Sahara and JNIM, which targets only national and French military forces in Mali. Discriminate targeting results in fewer attacks. In 2018, for example, JNIM made only a handful of terrorist attacks. Terrorist groups that operate under a hub-spoke or all-channel organizational structure, therefore, typically perpetrate fewer terrorist attacks than terrorist groups operate under an independent organizational structure.

Table 2: The impacts of organizational structure on the operational capacity of jihadist groups

Group	Organization to Which the Group Is Affiliated	Number of Incidents Perpetrated	Target Type	Total Number of Deaths	Fatality Rate
Al-Shabaab	Al-Qaeda	535	Indiscriminate	2,062	3.85
Boko Haram	Al-Qaeda	220	Indiscriminate	1,311	5.96
JNIM	Al-Qaeda	26	Discriminate	121	4.65
ISIS-Sinai	ISIS	56	Discriminate	485	8.66
ISIS-Greater Sahara	ISIS	18	Discriminate	79	4.39
ISIS-West Africa	ISIS	22	Discriminate	160	7.27
ISIS-Somalia	ISIS	17	Discriminate	27	1.70

When it comes to the number of casualties at the hands of dependent and independent groups, no distinctive pattern emerges. Given that it may be riskier and more difficult to target national and multinational military forces, the high fatality rates from attacks by ISIS and Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups indicate that members of both terrorist organizations are well-trained and capable of inflicting heavy losses among their targets. ISIS-affiliated groups, however, have higher fatality rates than Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups.

Conclusion

Salafi-jihadist groups continue to pose a grave threat to countries in all parts of the world either from the formation of new jihadist groups or the evolution of local Muslim groups into jihadist groups. Africa has been exposed to these trends more than any other region. A number of groups affiliated with al-Qaeda or ISIS have operated in Africa today. The debate continues over what has created a favorable environment for these jihadist groups to flourish in Africa and how these groups have been able to increase their resilience, longevity, and operational

capacity. Organizational structure plays a key role in the groups' rise and impenetrability to government efforts to defeat them; therefore, it is essential that government officials understand how terrorist groups structure their organizations and how those structures can inform effective counterterrorism strategies.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS have changed their strategies since they first appeared on the world stage. Al-Qaeda, for example, switched to an all-channel structure that involves the use of affiliated terrorist groups in keeping with its policy of localization. These affiliated groups, however, are allowed to remain organizationally dependent. ISIS, on the other hand, switched to a hub-spoke structure to expand its reach through loose ties with affiliate terrorist groups that become organizationally dependent on the terrorist organization to which they have pledged their allegiance. This study concludes that terrorist organizations that use a hub-spoke or an all-channel structure commit fewer terrorist attacks compared with terrorist organizations who remain organizationally independent (al-Shaabab and Boko Haram). This conclusion also is based on the observation that ISIS adheres to a "hearts and minds policy" that requires the organization to target only national and multinational military forces—unlike al-Shaabab and Boko Haram, which chooses its targets indiscriminately. Further research is needed to analyze the effects of group structure in a global context.

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