

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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SOMALIA: RAMPING UP ACTION ON AL-SHABAAB

Alexander Sehmer

Somalia’s recently elected president has declared “war” on al-Shabaab and offered an amnesty to militants who lay down their weapons, backing his rhetoric with an overhaul of the country’s security establishment aimed at strengthening efforts to defeat the group.

President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo made his declaration dressed in military fatigues at a news conference on April 6 (Horseed Media, April 6). Part of his efforts involve a 60-day amnesty for militants willing to surrender — promising training and jobs to those willing to desert the group — but he has also replaced the leaders of the army, police and national intelligence service (Garowe, April 6).

The new military chief is General Ahmed Mohamed Jimale Irfid, who survived an assassination attempt just three days after his appointment — an al-Shabaab suicide car bomb struck his convoy as it was leaving the defense ministry, killing at least 15 people (Hiiraan, April 9). The militants claimed military officials were among the dead, though that has not been borne out by media

reports, which say the fatalities were mainly civilians in a passing minibus that was caught in the blast.

Taking over the intelligence services is Mohamed Ali Sanbaloolshe, a former ambassador to the United Kingdom. Sanbaloolshe has held the position before — in 2014, he was head of Somalia’s national intelligence and security agency for a matter of months before being sacked as a result of a political dispute (Garowe, September 7, 2014).

Sanbaloolshe is thought to be an able pick for the job, but he faces a daunting task and will need to re-build many burnt bridges. Moves to overhaul Somalia’s security structures and improve coordination and intelligence sharing between the central authorities and state-level actors have been a long time coming but do finally appear to be making some progress (Goobjoog, April 17). There is still a ways to go, however. A lack of a properly integrated national intelligence framework is considered to be a major hindrance in the fight against al-Shabaab, especially when faced with al-Shabaab’s own fearsome and effective Amniyat intelligence wing.

The changes to the security services come amid a marked increase in militant activity in Mogadishu. Car

bombs and mortar attacks are becoming more frequent. On April 16, militants attacked the airport, killing two people (Garowe, April 16). On April 18, at least five people were killed and several others injured when mortar shells struck a primary school (Garowe, April 19).

President Farmajo hopes his new appointments will be able to deliver a tougher response. No doubt he has also been influenced by the hardening U.S. stance toward al-Shabaab (Horseed Media, March 30). That has included the deployment of dozens of troops to Somalia, the largest such effort since the ill-fated mission to Mogadishu in 1993.

PAKISTAN: TERROR ARREST PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON UNIVERSITIES

Alexander Sehmer

Pakistani security forces in Lahore have foiled an alleged plot to bomb a church over Easter, capturing a suspected female militant in the process whose subsequent confession has provoked much media interest and raised concerns about the extent of radicalization in Pakistan's universities.

Noreen Leghari, a second year medical student at Liaquat University in Sindh province, was arrested after an army raid foiled the planned Easter Sunday attack. Her husband, who appears to have masterminded the plot, was killed in the ensuing shootout, and security forces recovered explosives and suicide jackets at the scene (Dawn, April 16). In a videotaped confession, Leghari told the authorities she had travelled to Lahore of her own free will and was to be a suicide bomber in the operation (Samaa, April 17; The News, April 18).

Leghari had been missing from her family home in Hyderabad since February. Police appear to have been aware that she had circulated extremist material online before going missing, and they suspected that she had joined Islamic State (IS) and travelled to Syria for training (Dawn, April 17). Her family, meanwhile, insists she was kidnapped and says she has no connection with the group (Punjab News Express, April 17).

Wading into the media coverage, Liaquat University, where Leghari was studying, has been keen to distance itself from events. Vice Chancellor Naushad Sheikh characterized Leghari to journalists as an introvert and suggested she was radicalized online and recruited through social media, rather than as a result of anyone she encountered on the campus (Geo News, April 17). The university's concerns are understandable. Pakistani institutions feel unfairly characterized as places of radicalization, but they battle against bad publicity and claim their administrations do too little to tackle the issue.

This month a journalism student at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan was killed by a lynch mob of fellow students, apparently for posting "blasphemous" material online (Dawn, April 15). So far 24 people have been arrested, and the university has suspended seven of its employees (Geo News, April 18). Last year, counter-ter-

rorism forces rounded up lecturers at institutions across Punjab province accused of having connections to the banned Islamist group Hizbut Tahrir (The News, June 13, 2016). Meanwhile, in Sindh, one report suggested about a dozen female students have gone missing from institutions across the province, ostensibly to join IS (The News, March 18).

Such incidents suggest fears about Pakistani universities cannot be entirely dismissed. While young Pakistanis — in keeping with their tech-savvy counterparts elsewhere in the world — doubtless face dangers online, recent events suggest the country's universities need to do more to combat radicalization on their campuses.

Why Egypt's Nationalist Hasm Movement Could Gain Greater Traction

Michael Horton

Egypt's government, led by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, is battling multiple insurgent groups, and while the Islamic State (IS) affiliate Wilayat Sinai is by far the most formidable, it is the nationalist Hasm Movement that may pose the more durable threat to the country.

The Egyptian government has waged an intense and well-resourced war against IS in the Sinai but has failed to defeat or even significantly impede the group's ability to launch attacks in and outside of that region. This was evidenced by IS' April 9 bombing of Coptic churches in Tanta and Alexandria, attacks which combined killed 45 people (al-Ahram, April 9). The attacks on Coptic churches, not the first by IS, are part of the group's strategy of heightening sectarian tensions among Egypt's estimated 10 million Coptic Christians and its majority Muslim population. While stoking sectarian tensions has worked well for IS in Syria and Iraq, such a strategy is likely to fail in Egypt where there is a strong Egyptian identity that transcends religious affiliation.

IS' extreme views and its callous disregard for civilian life limit its appeal among the vast majority of Egyptians. IS will not be able to build the broad base of support that would allow it to expand in mainland Egypt. In Sinai, IS has benefited from what are, so far, conditions unique to the Sinai — it draws on a deeply alienated indigenous population and benefits from the government's scorched earth approach to counter-insurgency.

In contrast with IS, Egypt's Hasm Movement has the potential to gain traction in mainland Egypt, most particularly in its dense urban environments. The Hasm Movement (Hasm can be translated as the settling of an argument, termination or decisiveness) announced itself in July 2016 when it claimed credit for an attack on a police officer in Fayoum (Daily News Egypt, July 18, 2016). Since then, Hasm has targeted a number of high profile government officials, including a failed attempt in August 2016 to assassinate the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, Ali Gomaa (Aswat Masriya, August 5, 2016).

In September 2016, Hasm attempted to assassinate Assistant Attorney General Zakaria Abdel Aziz (Egypt Independent, November 6, 2016). On November 2, 2016, Hasm targeted Judge Ahmed Aboul Fotouh, one of three judges involved in the trial of former Egyptian President Mohammad Morsi (The New Arab, November 4, 2016). The group has also claimed responsibility for a number of attacks on low-ranking police officers, including a December 2016 attack on a checkpoint in which six officers were killed (al-Jazeera, December 9, 2016).

Thus far Hasm's attacks have been narrowly focused on members and representatives of the Egyptian government, its police and security services. In its "military communiqués," Hasm presents itself as a group aiming to install social justice and fighting to overthrow what it describes as a "military occupation" by the Sisi government. Several of the communiqués make reference to "defending the defenseless" and seeking to right the wrongs of the regime.

Tapping into Discontent

The Hasm Movement's use of rhetoric aimed at pointing out what it sees as abuses by a government that it views as illegitimate is an important indicator of how the group wants to position itself. This and its efforts to target only government officials may indicate that the Hasm Movement is trying to set itself up as being opposed to the current regime but with no ambitions outside of Egypt. The group has also emphasized that it will not target or endanger civilians. The Hasm Movement claimed that they called off the failed attack on the former Grand Mufti due to the risks posed to civilians. This may or may not be true, but it does, along with the other attacks, point to a conscious effort to avoid killing civilians. The Hasm Movement has also condemned a December 2016 IS-led attack on a Coptic church and has distanced itself from the most recent church bombings. [1]

The leadership of what is, for now, undoubtedly a small organization clearly recognizes that the kind of mass casualty attacks perpetrated by IS will undercut its ability to broaden a base of support within Egypt. By positioning itself as a nationalist organization dedicated to combating what it views as an abusive regime and "defending the defenseless," the Hasm Movement may well be able to tap into significant levels of popular dissatisfaction with the Sisi government.

It is notable that many of Hasm's attacks are on the Egyptian police, who have been the subject of popular scorn since before the 2011 revolution that overthrew former President Hosni Mubarak.

Following Morsi's ouster by General Sisi, the police and security services were emboldened and launched a crackdown not only on Muslim Brotherhood members, but on anyone who opposed the Sisi-led government (al-Jazeera, March 28, 2016). This heavy-handed approach continues, with many of Egypt's police stations commonly referred to as "homes for the living dead."

Abuses by the police and security services combined with Sisi's failure to deliver on economic reforms is fueling discontent in Egypt. The country's moribund economy and startlingly high youth unemployment mean that insurgent groups, particularly those with less extreme views, will have little trouble recruiting young people to their cause.

Ties with the Muslim Brotherhood?

The Sisi government's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in the wake of its ouster of former President Morsi has undoubtedly radicalized some members of the Brotherhood. So far, the older generation of the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership in prison and in exile has eschewed calls for violence. However, that does not mean that some members and former members have not taken up arms.

The Hasm Movement's relatively moderate religious views, national focus, and its attacks on individuals that are emblematic of the state, may well indicate that its membership includes former members of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, there is no proof of this and as yet. Neither the Hasm Movement nor any other insurgent group has openly identified with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Regardless of whether the Hasm Movement has ties with the Muslim Brotherhood or not, the group's leadership seems intent on positioning it as a moderate Islamist organization that will fight to "defend" those who it deems cannot defend themselves against the government. The space that the Hasm Movement is trying to occupy offers an abundance of opportunities in terms of

securing the support of those who have been oppressed by the government security services and police.

Increasing Capabilities

The Hasm Movement's targeting of individual officials indicates a degree of sophistication. Relatively high-profile officials, such as the assistant attorney general, enjoy well-trained security details and are subject to independent monitoring by Egypt's security services. While Egypt's approach to physical security for soft and hard targets is often lacking, its human intelligence network is deep, multi-layered, low-tech and highly effective. Evading this formidable human intelligence network requires a high-level of expertise.

Surveillance images of future targets released by the Hasm Movement show that its operatives are able to get and remain close to its targets. [2] The group has also released an exceedingly well-produced video that shows its operatives undergoing firearms and explosives training, as well as the targeting and assassination of government officials and police officers. [3]

While the Hasm Movement's operations are incomparable with those of Wilayat Sinai, they do demonstrate a clear ability to carry out surveillance and to plan and execute attacks in a challenging environment. If the group continues to grow, it will undoubtedly be able to attract recruits with the expertise to carry out ever more sophisticated attacks. Many of these recruits with specialized training could be drawn from the hundreds (likely thousands) of members of the Egyptian army and security services that were purged for suspected ties to the Muslim Brotherhood following the overthrow of President Morsi. [4]

Outlook

Egypt's security services may well successfully disrupt and destroy the Hasm Movement. The group is small, has few resources and has had insufficient time to become "self-healing" in the manner of Wilayat Sinai. However, the Hasm Movement's rhetoric and tactics make it worthy of particular attention. The leadership has identified, and is trying to exploit, a rising tide of dissatisfaction with a government that is viewed by many as ineffective, corrupt and increasingly dependent on violence to enforce its will.

The Hasm Movement — or a group like it that is moderate in its religious views and disciplined and discriminate in its use of violence — may well have the ability to become a formidable foe for Sisi's government. In contrast with IS, such a group will likely find it can recruit from a much broader pool and build a genuine (albeit limited) support-base in Egypt's urban areas.

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NOTES

[1] Read the group's condemnation of the church attack [here](#).

[2] The images, released on the group's website, have since been removed.

[3] See the video [here](#).

[4] See the Militant Leadership Monitor profile of Mohamed Ashour Dashisha [here](#).

Iraq's Shia Militias: Helping or Hindering the Fight Against Islamic State?

Hajnalka Vincze

NATO's counter-terrorism efforts have been the focus of much attention in recent months. Faced with a U.S. ultimatum that Washington might "moderate its commitment" to the Alliance, member states have sought ways to demonstrate that the organization plays a significant part in global counter-terrorism efforts and that it could do even more (al-Jazeera, February 15; New Europe, February 16).

However, although the Alliance has a role — one recognized, to the relief of Europeans, by President Donald Trump when he declared NATO "no longer obsolete" — it is one constrained by political boundaries and limitations that are unlikely to fall away anytime soon.

Policies and Principles

According to policy guidelines from 2012, NATO's counter-terrorism efforts are focused on three main "pillars": increasing "shared awareness" of terrorist threats; developing adequate capabilities to counter these threats; and engagement with partner countries to enhance their ability to combat terrorism at a local level. [1]

In the area of intelligence sharing, NATO expects significant improvements from the establishment of a new "joint intelligence and security division" led by an assistant secretary general for intelligence and security. Although the division is not restricted to counter-terrorism, it is intended to make the most of intelligence provided by NATO members. In addition, at a February 2017 meeting NATO defense ministers announced the creation of a "Hub for the South," based at NATO Joint Force Command in Naples (NATO, February 15).

The Hub will be a 100-person strong focal point aimed at both understanding the challenges stemming from the region — collecting, assessing and analyzing information — and at responding to those challenges through engagement with partner nations. Assessment and analysis also falls into the remit of NATO's Centre of

Excellence for Defense Against Terrorism, an institution located in Turkey's capital Ankara and designed to provide a forum for exchange and a source of additional expertise.

At the heart of the second pillar, the development of capabilities, is NATO's "defense against terrorism program of work" (NATO, April 9, 2015). Its aim is to develop innovative technologies to help prevent attacks and better protect troops and civilian infrastructure. Under three umbrellas — incident management, force protection and survivability, and network engagement — the program covers a wide variety of areas such as: protecting against man-portable air defense systems (MANPADs) or CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) attacks; countering improvised explosive devices (IED); biometric identification; protection of ports and harbors; and experimenting with non-lethal weapons. The program is run on the basis of common funding by all allies, and projects are led by individual NATO countries, with support and contributions from other member states.

The third pillar of NATO's counter-terrorism activities is intended to contribute to regional stability through capacity building in partner countries. As Secretary General Stoltenberg put it at the latest foreign ministerial meeting, "in the long run, it is much better to fight terrorism and project stability by training local forces, building local security institutions, instead of NATO deploying large numbers of our own combat troops in combat operations." [2]

It was in this spirit that in February 2017 the Alliance launched an in-country training program teaching Iraqi security forces to counter IEDs, while also continuing to train hundreds of Iraqi officers in Jordan (al-Arabiya, January 24). Furthermore, in 2016 mobile counter-terrorism training courses were provided to Egypt, and training in counter-insurgency was provided to Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. According to Secretary General Stoltenberg, "the possible use of NATO's mobile training teams and special operation forces headquarters is one of the different options [NATO is] looking into [when it comes to deciding] what more we can do in general to fight terrorism" (NATO, March 31).

Beyond the three main areas identified by the 2012 Policy Guidelines, NATO's involvement in the fight against terrorism sometimes occurs in a more directly opera-

tional context. In fact, following the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the Alliance invoked Article 5 — NATO's collective defense clause — for the first time in its history.

In October 2001, the Alliance launched Operation Eagle Assist, which deployed NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) radar aircraft to help patrol U.S. airspace until mid-2002, and Operation Active Endeavour, which saw NATO naval forces assigned to patrol the Mediterranean. These missions were succeeded in October 2016 by Operation Sea Guardian, which took on an extended range of maritime security tasks (al-Jazeera, July 9, 2016).

NATO also commanded the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan from August 2003 to December 2014. Most recently, since October 2016 at the request of the United States, NATO's AWACS surveillance aircrafts provide support to the Global Coalition to Counter Islamic State (IS) (EFE, October 25, 2016).

The Alliance's AWACS capability was also called upon to help secure several high-visibility events, such as the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Greece, the 2006 World Cup in Germany and the 2012 European soccer championship in Poland.

Political Difficulties Persist

While NATO's counter-terrorism activity is varied, it is nevertheless confined to discrete tasks and specified areas as a result of the multiple disagreements between NATO allies both on the analysis of threats and on how to respond to them. Within the Alliance, views differ markedly on the respective roles of the police versus the military, the application of certain counter-terrorism measures, data protection and the use of force, to name just a few.

Against this backdrop, the official NATO policy guidelines make clear: "Allies recognize that most counter-terrorism tools remain primarily with national civilian and judicial authorities." [3]

Where tackling terrorism is concerned, the Alliance is intended to complement rather than coordinate efforts at the national level. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson acknowledged this in his first NATO foreign ministerial

remarks, saying: "We do not believe NATO has to lead everywhere in the fight on terrorism. Others will often have that role, including national governments, the Coalition to Defeat ISIS, or the European Union. But NATO must add value where it can and provide greater support." [4]

In fact, political differences can be a hindrance even at the most fundamental of levels. In the field of intelligence sharing, concerns among the 28 members over source protection, bias and potential leaks hold back cooperation. Despite some organizational progress made at the 2016 summit in Warsaw, a NATO report noted: "Increased intelligence sharing, including as part of Allied ISR, has long been an elusive goal for NATO" (NATO, November 20, 2016). Or as Michael Fallon, the UK defense secretary, described intelligence sharing within NATO to the UK's parliamentary defense committee, "there is quite a way to go on that." [5]

Counter-terrorism capability development has so far been primarily focused on protecting NATO's own assets (making sure the Alliance remains operational in the face of a terrorist threat), albeit not without some beneficial spillover effects. The approach is similar to NATO's role in cyber defense, where the Alliance's main role is defined as the protection of its own networks. In both cases, those member states adamant about increasing NATO's role see this as a starting point rather than a restriction.

As for the third pillar, it was decided at a NATO summit in the United Kingdom in 2014 — and subsequently reaffirmed at a summit in Warsaw in 2016 — that NATO does have a role to play in the global South, especially through capacity-building activities with local partners. That role, however, is not without its own constraints. There are allies who would prefer to limit the Alliance's involvement in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region for fear that a NATO presence might be seen as provocative. Unease over encroaching on certain member states' traditional spheres of influence — or simply a belief that a Southern-focus distracts NATO from its principal aim of protecting against Russia on the eastern flank — also plays a role.

Finally, on a more operational level, serious political reservations remain apparent. In the wake of the Paris terror attacks of November 2015, France preferred to invoke the EU's collective security clause than resort to

NATO. In an earlier display of divergence within the Alliance, during combat operations in Afghanistan, national caveats — the restrictions members place on the use of their forces — became such a source of friction that it was a running joke among U.S. troops that the acronym ISAF in fact stood for “I Saw Americans Fight.”

These difficulties continue to be reflected in the NATO AWACS’ contribution to military operations against IS, with the secretary general’s annual report for 2016 making a point to specify: “The planes operate over Turkey or international airspace and are not involved in coordinating Coalition airstrikes or providing command and control for fighter aircraft.” [5]

President Trump’s comments on April 13 that NATO is “no longer obsolete” are a relief for Alliance members. Nevertheless, as Stoltenberg, standing next to him, noted, the Alliance “can, and must, do more in the global fight against terrorism.”

It is a topic that will likely be high on the agenda at next month’s NATO summit in Brussels.

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NOTES

[1] See here for NATO’s policy guidelines on counter-terrorism.

[2] The full text of Secretary General Stoltenberg’s speech is available here.

[3] The full text of NATO’s Policy Guidelines on Counter-Terrorism is available here.

[3] The full text of Secretary of State Tillerson’s speech is available here.

[5] Defense Secretary Fallon’s testimony is available here.

[4] See NATO’s annual report (2016), available here.

AQIM’s Alliance in Mali: Prospects for Jihadist Preeminence in West Africa

Jacob Zenn

Trends in the two main theatres of jihadist activity in West Africa have moved in al-Qaeda’s favor in recent months. In the Mali/Sahel region, the formation of a new alliance has consolidated al-Qaeda’s position as the preeminent jihadist force in the region, while in Nigeria/Lake Chad, the faction of Boko Haram loyal to Islamic State (IS) — known formally as West Africa Province — has stayed relatively quiet and even shown continued signs of an ideological and logistical disconnect from its parent organization.

With the IS leadership currently in too much disarray in Libya and too distracted in Syria to consistently focus on West Africa, it is unlikely IS will be able to compete in the long-term with al-Qaeda for supremacy over jihadist groups in West Africa. Instead, al-Qaeda’s strategy of “localization” — which it has employed to a greater or lesser extent successfully in theaters such as Syria and Yemen — is likely to see al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) gaining increasing prominence as jihadism in West Africa becomes both more local and more diffuse.

The establishment of the new alliance, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM, Group of Supporters of Islam and Muslims), in Mali in March 2017 sees al-Qaeda’s “localization” strategy at its most effective. It also demonstrates how adaptable al-Qaeda can be. The group can continue to exist in the region as an umbrella organization, accepting new members and groups tied to it by interpersonal and strategic bonds, while making open affiliation with IS and the massacre of civilians red-lines for membership.

Al-Qaeda Alliance in Mali: JNIM

When the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra merged with Syrian rebel groups to become (or at least appear to become) a more locally rooted organization and reduce its al-Qaeda “branding,” it did so with the approval of a Syria-based deputy of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The al-Qaeda leader himself would

have rejected such a merger because many of the groups with which Jabhat al-Nusra merged were too secular or outwardly nationalist for al-Zawahiri's liking. An al-Qaeda insider has revealed that Jabhat al-Nusra's localization in Syria was nonetheless consistent with al-Qaeda's overall philosophy, but this specific merger represented an "organizational dispute" with al-Qaeda leadership that, once undertaken, could not be reversed. As a consequence, al-Qaeda's leadership has subsequently accepted it (s04.justpaste.it, April 4).

In direct contrast, the formation of JNIM in Mali was welcomed wholeheartedly by AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and al-Qaeda's General Command, including al-Zawahiri (justpaste.it/14k9a, March 17).

The new alliance brings together leaders of multiple ethnic groups, including: Ag Ghaly, the ethnically Tuareg leader of Ansar Dine who is the overall leader of JNIM; Muhammed Kufa, the ethnically Fulani leader of Ansar Dine sub-affiliate Katiba Macina; Yahia Abu al-Hamam, the ethnically Algerian Arab leader of AQIM's Sahara Region; the AQIM Islamic law judge Abou Abderrahman al-Senhadji, who is ethnically Berber; and al-Hasan al-Ansari, a Malian Tangara Arab (referring to his clan's Mauritanian ancestry) who is the deputy leader of al-Mourabitun (al-Masra #42, March 6).

This allows al-Qaeda to portray itself as a pan-Islamic movement unconstrained by tribalism, something particularly important in the context of AQIM's earlier bias in favor Algerian Arabs.

The inclusion of Kufa's Katiba Macina group — the name Macina is a reference to a historic Fulani Islamic emirate of central Mali — is a particular boon. Kufa was a leader of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) in 2013 when the group controlled parts of northern Mali and began shifting toward central Mali. By bringing him into the JNIM alliance, AQIM can consolidate its presence among Fulanis in central Mali where in previous years it has had limited operations.

The group has so far seen one setback — a key "sub-faction" that had been expected to join JNIM's orbit, the relatively new Burkina Faso-based Ansaroul Islam, has openly criticized it. Ansaroul Islam's leader, Mallam Dicko, may suspect JNIM chief Ag Ghaly is an Algerian agent, or be unimpressed by his Salafist credentials, especially considering Dicko appears to be an even more

radical Salafi-jihadist than AQIM members (Alakhbar.info, April 16).

Given Ansaroul Islam's increasingly high level of operations and impact in a part of the Sahel that formerly experienced almost no jihadist activity, it is likely the group has backing from a larger entity (Lemonde.fr, April 9). Burkina Faso says the group's supporters are members of the former government deposed in a coup in 2016, but it is also possible that the IS faction in northern Burkina Faso under Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, who was also a MUJWA leader, is working with it (Aib.bf, March 24). Indeed, pro-IS channels on social media have announced that a new pledge of allegiance to IS "from the Sahel" will be forthcoming, although they have not identified Ansaroul Islam by name. Al-Qaeda supporters dismiss the reports as a "myth" intended to embellish IS' strength in the Sahel.

Strengthened Position in Northern Mali

The emergence of JNIM comes as Mali is attempting to implement the Algiers Accord of 2015, a peace deal agreed between the government and armed groups in northern Mali. AQIM's sustained attacks — or, since March 2017, JNIM's attacks — undermine the Malian people's confidence in the agreement. Moreover, JNIM can portray itself as an indigenously rooted alternative if the new regional government's attempts at bringing together various former rebels fails (Liberation.fr, March 3). Ag Ghaly, familiar with Mali's political terrain from his former life as a Malian diplomat in Saudi Arabia, which is where he developed his Salafist worldview, can be expected to exploit any failure in the Algiers Accord's implementation.

The JNIM alliance represents the most effective employment of al-Qaeda's localization strategy and puts a nail in the coffin of IS' hopes to grow its own network in West Africa, even if Ansaroul Islam announces a pledge to IS caliph Abubakr al-Baghdadi.

IS can still count as loyal the faction of Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, whose pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi was aired by IS in October 2016, as well as that of another former MUJWA commander, Hamadou Kheiry. But al-Sahrawi has been quiet for several months, and Kheiry has done little since announcing his loyalty to IS in 2015.

Both factions would seem to benefit from Ansaroul Islam joining IS, although it is unclear what financial or other benefits they could offer Dicko's group. It may therefore be the case that a link with Ansaroul Islam is mostly ideological, albeit IS propaganda support could significantly upgrade Ansaroul Islam from the platform it currently uses — Facebook. There could also be a latent MUJWA connection, given that Dicko too is a former member.

Islamic State's Faltering West Africa Network

Further south in the Nigeria/Lake Chad region, IS has a more effective operational presence, but has seen limited success on the propaganda and ideological end. Its West Africa Province — the Abu Musab al-Barnawi-led faction of Boko Haram — is still loyal to al-Baghdadi, but has issued only a single video since Abu Musab al-Barnawi deposed Abubakr Shekau as leader in August 2016. Even then, that video's narrative was tailored more toward contextualizing events in Nigeria in order to encourage IS sectarian narratives in Syria and Iraq, rather than inspire jihadists in Nigeria or the Lake Chad region (the video portrayed Iranian and Shia influence in Nigeria, for example) (archive.org, February 13).

While some West Africa Province propaganda photos released by IS have shown its *hisba* (sharia enforcement) patrols in villages around Lake Chad, West Africa Province's de-facto reign over territories it has held in northern Borno State since 2014 has otherwise rarely been featured in IS propaganda. Indeed, this may be because West Africa Province is barely governing its territory. Unlike IS, which enforces its social provisions, West Africa Province allows the population in areas it controls to live with little interference, as long as they avoid collaborating with the Nigerian government (Naji.com, March 28).

In addition to the apparent disconnect between West Africa Province and the IS media apparatus, which likely reflects a broader disconnect to IS leadership, the group also appears to be coordinating with various cells in Nigeria that are or were part of Ansaru, the now operationally dormant al-Qaeda sub-group in Nigeria.

Such coordination would be unlikely if these Ansaru members believed West Africa Province was behaving toward the population in the same way IS does in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, evidence from conversations between West Africa Province leaders suggests the main area

where West Africa Province does respect IS orders is the kidnapping of women, including the Chibok schoolgirls (Sahara Reporters, August 5, 2016).

West Africa Province leaders claim al-Baghdadi has permitted them to take captive only Christian women, not Muslims, even if the Muslim women are "apostates" who participate in democracy. Shekau, by contrast, considers any apostate — whether Muslim or Christian — to be deserving of enslavement and does not trust the West Africa Province leaders' claims about relaying al-Baghdadi's orders on the issue of slavery. In all other respects, West Africa Province appears not to take orders from IS on day-to-day affairs.

Developments in Kogi State

The West Africa Province-Ansaru relationship can be seen most prominently in developments in Nigeria's Kogi State, which, like virtually all states south of Abuja, has been largely free from attacks since the start of the insurgency in 2009. There have, however, been a small number of notable incidents that show Ansaru is the main group to have a presence there, including:

- an ambush by Ansaru in late 2012 on Mali-bound Nigerian troops before the French-led intervention that ousted AQIM, MUJWA and Ansar Dine from northern Mali commenced in 2013 (Vanguard, January 20, 2013);
- the arrest of Ansaru leader Khalid al-Barnawi in April 2016 (Vanguard, December 28, 2016); and
- a series of raids on bomb-making factories and prison breaks in 2012-2013, although these were not claimed by Ansaru or any other faction (Leadership, April 6, 2012).

Kogi State came back into the spotlight in February 2017 when the Nigerian government reported that a Kogi-based group called the Muslim Brotherhood — with no apparent relation to the Egypt-founded global Islamist group of the same name — had sent fighters for training with IS in Libya.

Some of these fighters are now returning to Nigeria. In February, members of the new group attacked police stations in Okehi, Kogi State, killing two people (thecable.ng, February 10; Premium Times, February 10).

A possible explanation for this Kogi State-Libya nexus is that the Salafist extremist cells that have reportedly

been brewing in Kogi for years have finally connected with a broader umbrella jihadist movement, such as IS (Newsrescue.com, October 28, 2015).

It may also be the case that Ansaru cells in Kogi have grown impatient with the operational dormancy of Ansaru, left the group to form the Muslim Brotherhood and then traveled to Libya with West Africa Province's support (al-Risalah, January 10). The overlap between the Muslim Brotherhood sending fighters to Libya and Ansaru can be seen in reports from the Nigerian security forces in northwestern Nigeria, where Ansaru was formed in 2011, that say at least two Ansaru cells there have been sending fighters to train with IS in Libya (Thenewsnigeria.com.ng, August 22, 2016; Premium Times; February 9, 2016).

While some Nigerians traveled to Libya independently to fight with IS, West Africa Province has likely facilitated others — at least five men and one child have featured in IS propaganda in Libya, and several Nigerian women have been recorded as married to IS fighters.

The reason for this coordination is that West Africa Province, Ansaru and presumably the Muslim Brotherhood share a common ideology, history (West Africa Province's key leaders were former Ansaru members), area of operations and strategic objectives in Nigeria that make experience and training in Libya mutually beneficial. The West Africa Province-planned attack on the U.S. and UK embassies, for example, which was exposed in April, reflects the long-standing "far enemy" targets of Ansaru (Vanguard, April 12).

In sum, the new Muslim Brotherhood group is likely related to Ansaru and both the Muslim Brotherhood and Ansaru may be cooperating with West Africa Province for mutual gain, regardless of their affiliations.

The State of Play for JAS

Boko Haram's faction under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau — known as Jamaat Ahlisunnah Liddaawati Wal-Jihad (JAS) — is neither affiliated to al-Qaeda nor IS and is operating independently but keeping a hand extended to IS.

It still claims to be an Islamic State in West Africa and issues video footage with IS branding, even though its films are not made or promoted by IS, and Shekau still

declares al-Baghdadi to be the caliph. That aside, West Africa Province (and mainstream Muslims more generally) criticize JAS for its killing of Muslims civilians who Shekau deems to be "apostates" for not joining his group.

JAS has been engaged in a new narrative campaign targeting Nigeria's Salafists and Ansaru sympathizers. JAS argues that Nigeria's largest Islamic group, the Salafist/Wahhabist Izala movement, was wrong to have ultimately rejected the preaching of Boko Haram founder Muhammed Yusuf, whose blood JAS says "is valuable to us, more valuable than the blood of all Nigerians, all Nigerians, starting from [Nigerian President Muhammadu] Buhari, his aides, ministers, judges, military and everyone" (Youtube, April 3).

At the same time, JAS has reaffirmed its commitment to Yusuf's successor, Shekau, who JAS describes as "the strong, courageous one, feared by the West, who is now the biggest threat to Nigeria." Two other recent JAS videos have focused specifically on JAS attacks in Cameroon. They also, for the first time in JAS' media output, highlighted French-speaking fighters, suggesting Shekau is trying to break out of his isolation by targeting Nigerian Salafist/Wahhabist and Cameroonians (Youtube, April 1; Vanguard, February 27).

Despite JAS's "outreach," West Africa Province's Abu Musab al-Barnawi — along with his close allies Mamman Nur and Abu Fatima, both of whom used to operate with Ansaru — continues to criticize Shekau's killing of fellow Muslims (Sahara Reporters, August 5, 2016). This criticism, which is the same as that al-Qaeda levies against IS, suggests there are ideological differences between the leaders of West Africa Province and the leadership of IS, even if for the time being West Africa Province's belief in the legitimacy of al-Baghdadi's position as IS caliph supersedes these differences.

Ansaru, for its part, is leaderless and largely inactive operationally, even if its members or former members still engage in jihadist activities. Some supporters still post on Facebook and criticize Shekau. Historically, Ansaru criticized Shekau not only for his killing of Muslims civilians and his bizarre mannerisms — such as a "crotch-scratching" incident during his video claiming the bombing of the Grand Mosque in Kano in November 2014 — but also his apparent heterodoxy (al-Hiddaya, February 10, 2015). For example, Ansaru supporters in a

video posted on Facebook declared Shekau as an apostate for saying that Jesus Christ was not born through the word of God (Zalunci Haram, April 1).

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Maintaining Preeminence in West Africa

The jihadist landscape of West Africa is prone to shifting alliances. To maintain its pre-eminence in the region, al-Qaeda will attempt to keep the newly formed JNIM clear of IS infiltration and JNIM is unlikely to openly cooperate with any IS-affiliated group.

In the long-term, if West Africa Province withdraws its support for IS — especially if al-Baghdadi dies, or IS loses its territory and there are doubts over the legitimacy of the caliphate — then JNIM could be further strengthened. An IS collapse could see West Africa Province, together with former Ansaru members and Muslim Brotherhood members, re-integrate into al-Qaeda structures and ultimately join JNIM.

Issues such as Ansaroul Islam's current rejection of JNIM are manageable for JNIM. It seems unlikely that even if the Burkina Faso-based group pledges allegiance to IS it can overshadow JNIM's operational tempo, even if allied with the other IS factions operating around Burkina Faso.

In Nigeria, JAS is unlikely to re-integrate into al-Qaeda structures unless Shekau is killed. But even that scenario is not so difficult to imagine — an assassination could come at the hands of West Africa Province or by former Ansaru members who tend to know the location of his hideouts. Shekau now refuses to meet with West Africa Province leaders for fear they will plant a tracking device on him (Vanguard, February 24).

The best-case scenario for JNIM — and as such for al-Qaeda — would be if al-Baghdadi dies, the IS caliphate folds and Shekau is killed. In that situation, it would not be inconceivable that JNIM could pull a newly united West Africa Province, JAS, Ansaru and the Muslim Brotherhood into the JNIM fold, likely under new names.

In such a case, Ansroul Islam or any other pro-IS leaning factions would be left marginal and obsolete, and would likely eventually fall into JNIM's orbit.