



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

# CTC SENTINEL

OBJECTIVE . RELEVANT . RIGOROUS

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## About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

# The Future Role of U.S. Counterterrorism Operations in Africa

By Michael A. Sheehan and Geoff D. Porter



A French Tiger helicopter lands at Mopti airport in Seville, Mali, on February 2, 2013. - Pascal Guyot/AFP/Getty Images

**I**N HIS STATE OF THE UNION on January 28, 2014, President Barack Obama's speech focused on domestic issues, but singled out Africa, specifically mentioning Somalia and Mali, in reference to the evolution of the al-Qa`ida threat, the emergence of al-Qa`ida affiliates and the need for the United States to continue to work with partners to disrupt and disable these networks.

Just one year before this speech, the capital of Mali was threatened by an al-Qa`ida-dominated militia that had, in effect, hijacked a local rebellion of the northern region. Mali immediately became a high priority concern for the Obama administration, and although much more needs to be accomplished in the region, the multilateral response to Mali provides many lessons for how the United States may engage with al-

Qa`ida threats in various regions across the globe—depending on the nature of the threat and the willingness of other partners to participate.

The multilateral campaign's success notwithstanding, numerous violent non-state actors persist in Africa, in the Sahara, and to its north and south. They include jihadists and ethnic or regionalist militias. Much analysis of terrorist organizations in Africa has focused on whether different groups are collaborating with one another, and while this would unquestionably increase the threat they pose were it to be true, the emphasis on collaboration detracts from a more fundamental problem—all of the groups are already significant risks to their own country's stability. Although the destabilization of one Saharan or Sahelian country may not be an actionable threat in and

of itself, the region presents a scenario where the sum is greater than the parts: the disparate destabilization of several Saharan and Sahelian countries simultaneously.

Not only do all of the groups pose significant risks to their own country's stability, but they also all have a cross-border component. This cross-border dimension has led to the notion of an arc of instability stretching east to west across the Sahel and Sahara, but it also leads to another newer and often overlooked arc spanning the Sahara north to south.

The primary counterterrorism challenge in the region going forward is to ensure that these groups do not carry out future offensives like the one in Mali. Additionally, conditions that can radicalize those who feel aggrieved to turn frustration into violence should be recognized and addressed. When such offensives do occur, however, France's Operation Serval in Mali may provide many lessons for how to contain the threat by using carefully coordinated coalition operations.

#### Operation Serval

In the summer of 2012, different Islamist groups, including al-Qa`ida affiliates, dominated a largely ethnic separatist rebellion in northern Mali. In January 2013, militants made a surprisingly aggressive southward push and President Amadou Haya Sanogo, who came to power through a coup in March 2012, appealed to the international community for help. By the middle of the month, France deployed fighter jets to blunt the rebels' offensive, quickly adding ground forces and several thousand Chadian fighters. For its part, the United States responded to French requests to contribute three critical components to the initial stages of the campaign, including in-flight refueling for French aircraft, heavy airlift of French and Chadian soldiers and vehicles, and all sources of U.S. intelligence. One consequence of this counterterrorism cooperation was to reinvigorate the United States' operational relationship with France to the point where it is stronger than it has been in a decade or more. This strengthened counterterrorism relationship was most recently evinced by French President François Hollande's

visit to the White House on February 11, 2014, where he and President Obama discussed intelligence sharing and counterterrorism.

By the end of January, French and Chadian troops controlled Mali's three major cities along the Niger River. The rebel factions, including terrorists and insurgents, splintered and fled throughout northern Mali. The Élysée then sought international support via a UN peacekeeping operation, while French forces continued to hunt for high value targets. For its part, the United States trained and equipped some of the peacekeeping contingents prior to their deployment. In addition, U.S. Special Operations Forces and other units provided training and assistance to regional countries around Mali, including Niger, Libya, Mauritania and Burkina Faso. The United States also provided intelligence to support these operations, including use of an unarmed MQ-9 drone.

#### Lessons Learned

Operation Serval yielded several important lessons for counterterrorism operations. Foremost, the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation was helped by identifying the appropriate players for appropriate roles: an international coalition against an al-Qa`ida threat need only be led by a single major country such as the United States, France, or the United Kingdom, which are the only countries that are capable of leading complex, multilateral operations; when either of the latter two leads, the United States can provide vital enabling support such as airlift, logistics and intelligence; the UN's ability to provide effective peacekeepers in Africa should not be underestimated as long as their capabilities are not overextended by conducting offensive operations and as long as they are supported through training, equipment, and embedded advisory support. Doing so frees the coalition leader to pursue terrorist leaders, disrupt lines of communication, and identify remote camps and safe houses while maintaining a low profile. Such has been the case in Mali, where a small French and U.S. footprint materially augmented the effectiveness of the UN operation.

#### New and Emerging Threats

Operation Serval, however, was fundamentally a reactive action, rather than a proactive or preemptive one, and apart from the operation's successes, terrorism in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa appears to be increasing. While the reasons for the emergence of terrorism in the region vary as do the reasons for the intensifying trend, there are nevertheless some commonalities. The region is characterized by scant

**“Instability in one country can not only spread to another, but simultaneous instability in several countries—regardless of whether or not the causes are related—can pose an enormous challenge.”**

economic opportunities and fierce competition for those that do exist, both legal and illegal. Security services are alternately ineffective or indiscriminate. And there is a complex mix of ideologies, ethnicities, and nationalisms.

Although almost no data supports the notion that poverty leads to terrorism, the sharp perceptions of injustice inherent in the unequal distribution of wealth and poverty can lead individuals to embrace extreme ideologies, either to justify fighting for resources to alleviate poverty or to punish those individuals they hold responsible for making them and others poor. In Mali, the rebellion that was hijacked by AQIM and other Islamists was fueled by the Tuareg population's sense of economic marginalization and perceptions that the country's southern capital neglected the north. In Nigeria, Boko Haram and Ansaru condemn secularism's role in fostering an environment conducive to corruption and inequality that can only be combated through the implementation of Shari`a (Islamic law). Poverty, lack of opportunity, and acute injustice sparked the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and those same sentiments continue to be exploited by Ansar al-

Shari`a and proponents of Salafi-jihadi ideology. In Algeria, perceptions that the oil and gas sector job market was unfair and unequal led to protests in Ouargla and Ghardaia, which then led to the radicalization of some individuals seeking to redress the sector's injustices. In Libya, contestation for control

**“Operation Serval may be seen as a template for future counterterrorism engagements: a threat is perceived, it is quickly acted on, and objectives are clearly delineated.”**

over limited economic activities in the Sahara, particularly over provision of services to international oil companies in the upstream and over smuggling routes, has led to bouts of violence, some sporadic and others sustained.

In part, the limited and seemingly unfair economic opportunities that characterize the Sahel and Sahara stem from poor governance. In some instances, governments are genuinely unjust and uneven. In others, the government is absent, thereby creating space for illicit commercial activities on which terrorists and violent non-state actors thrive. Somalia and Libya and parts of northern Nigeria, northern Mali and western Tunisia lack a meaningful government presence. These are not ungoverned spaces—the so-called stateless areas that terrorist groups are said to favor—but they are poorly and only intermittently governed spaces. They are not stateless, but the states do fall short of maintaining a continuous and beneficial presence. The collapse of authoritarian regimes in the region during the Arab Spring has amplified this shortfall and afforded terrorists and violent non-state actors more room to maneuver.

Making matters worse, the economic unevenness and inconsistent projection of states' hard and soft power are exacerbated by ideological and ethnic differences. In Mali, the rebellion that was eventually taken over by Islamists began as an ethnic separatist

movement. In Nigeria, Boko Haram and Ansaru are violently at odds with not only Christian aspects of Nigerian state and society, but also with proponents of Sufi Islam, both of which overlay with a strong regionalist element. Somalia's al-Shabab is riven with clan rivalries and jingoism. Tunisia is struggling to come to terms with not only divisions over the role of religion in state and society, but also divisions about the use of violence in Salafism. And Libya's numerous militias draw inspiration from almost anything—ethnicity, region, hometown, interpretations of Islam, tribe, or even an urban neighborhood or city suburb.

It is in this complex environment that terrorist organizations operate and evolve. Past analysis has emphasized trying to understand whether groups like Boko Haram or al-Shabab are shifting to a more internationalist stance and whether there are any actionable linkages between the groups. The groups themselves debate this, weighing the benefits and costs of joining forces, and while these are no doubt worrying developments, it overlooks a more fundamental problem. Instability in one country can not only spread to another, but simultaneous instability in several countries—regardless of whether or not the causes are related—can pose an enormous challenge. At the moment, Mali is far from stable. Somalia is even worse off, with Libya not too far behind. Niger has started to sound the alarm bells, while the trend in Tunisia is troubling. The Algerian state remains strong, but social grievances can quickly turn deadly. In some instances, the causes of instability are related and in others they are not, but the cumulative impact could be catastrophic. In the case of terrorists and violent non-state actors in Africa, the sum of the parts may be greater than the whole.

Violent non-state actors and terrorist groups' cross-border connections add a north-south arc of instability to the commonly understood one that stretches east-west across the Sahara. Boko Haram may be linking with AQIM which may be linking with Ansar al-Shari`a in Libya and also the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade in Tunisia. Militant groups in southern Libya have revived ties to northern Niger. Mokhtar Belmokhtar's

al-Murabitun Brigade appears to be as adept at moving north and south as it is at moving east and west. The impact that these groups can have on their home countries means that not only is there a potential east-west instability axis, but there is a north-south one as well. Taken together, the vectors of instability and insecurity morph and multiply.

Operation Serval may be seen as a template for future counterterrorism engagements: a threat is perceived, it is quickly acted on, and objectives are clearly delineated. The U.S. commitment is limited, but its strategic objectives are achieved. The challenge going forward will be to try to apply the lessons learned from Operation Serval elsewhere in Africa and against more diffuse targets than a coordinated—but ultimately heterogeneous and disparate—rebel offensive.

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*The viewpoints expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.*

## Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate

By Ken Menkhaus

AL-SHABAB'S ATTACK ON Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall in September 2013 raised important questions about the resilience and possible resurgence of a jihadist group that most believed had fallen on hard times since 2011. Some questioned whether the attack was evidence that al-Shabab had become a more dangerous transnational threat, while others suggested it was an act of desperation by the beleaguered group.<sup>1</sup> This question has taken on even more urgency in the wake of al-Shabab's bold terrorist attack on Somalia's presidential palace, Villa Somalia, on February 21, 2014.

This article examines the state of al-Shabab today and the significance of the Westgate mall attack. It begins with a review of the troubles that have afflicted al-Shabab in the past several years, and then explores the new nature of the organization, its aims, the types of threats it poses, and its future prospects. It finds that al-Shabab is a franchise with distinct components, the fastest growing of which is a wing that identifies as much with East Africa as Somalia. The group is simultaneously weaker and, at least in the short term, more dangerous in Kenya and Somalia.

### Al-Shabab's Troubles

Some analysts had concluded that al-Shabab was in decline and in "dramatic turmoil" because the group's meteoric rise in 2007 was followed by several years of eroded public support, internal divisions, and self-inflicted wounds.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Shabab constituted a powerful Islamo-nationalist insurgency in 2007-2008 when it emerged as the main armed resistance against an Ethiopian military occupation of southern Somalia.<sup>3</sup> It

enjoyed considerable support from a broad section of Somali society at home and in the large Somali diaspora, from which it raised funds and attracted recruits.<sup>4</sup> It also enjoyed sympathy and support from individuals in the wider Islamic world, and absorbed several hundred foreign jihadists into its ranks.<sup>5</sup> Although not formally an al-Qa`ida franchise during this time, al-Shabab benefited from public relations support and advisers from al-Qa`ida.<sup>6</sup> By mid-2008, it was able to recapture most of the territory of south-central Somalia as well as most of the capital Mogadishu, pinning Ethiopian forces, African Union peacekeepers, and the weak Transitional Federal Government (TFG) down in a few districts of the city. Within a two year period, al-Shabab had ascended from a small and little-known armed group to one of the most successful and high visibility jihadist movements in the world.<sup>7</sup>

The year 2008 was its high water mark, however. During the next three years, al-Shabab's progress stalled. It was unable to dislodge the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers and the TFG from the capital, and it took heavy losses trying to fight AMISOM's better equipped forces, which alienated

Peace(building)," *Review of African Political Economy* 36:120 (2009).

4 Roland Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," SciencesPo/CERI, March 2011.

5 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008)," United Nations, March 2010, p. 15.

6 Ties between al-Qa`ida and al-Shabab were far thinner in 2006-2009 than was feared at the time, as made clear by the recently recovered, translated, and declassified diary of the top al-Qa`ida "assistant" to al-Shabab, Fazul Abdullah Mohammad. See Nelly Lahoud, *Beware of Imitators: Al-Qa`ida Through the Lens of its Confidential Secretary* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012), p. 87. For an assessment of al-Qa`ida's early public support for al-Shabab, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab," *Middle East Quarterly* 16:4 (2009). In February 2012, al-Shabab leader Godane announced a formal merger with al-Qa`ida, but that remained a merger on paper only. Al-Shabab has actually lost much of its support from foreign jihadists in recent years. See Abdi Aynte, "Understanding the al-Shabaab/al Qaeda 'Merger,'" *African Arguments*, March 19, 2012.

7 Stig Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

clans that suffered the most casualties.<sup>8</sup> Its draconian interpretations of Shari`a (Islamic law) and rule by fear proved unpopular among Somalis, and this led to defections.<sup>9</sup> The group's suicide bombing attacks—which included targeting newly-graduated medical doctors and students lining up for scholarships—demonstrated a callous indifference to civilian casualties and further alienated Somalis.<sup>10</sup> Aid and support from the diaspora shrank, in part because al-Shabab was designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. government and others in 2008, creating high legal risks for financial backers. Whole clans, including two particularly large and powerful lineages (the Habar Gidir Ayr and the Ogaden), broke from al-Shabab and began fighting it.<sup>11</sup> Reports of internal splits in al-Shabab's leadership—principally over tactics, clan interests, affiliation with al-Qa`ida, and policies toward international aid agencies—increased.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Shabab's fortunes slid quickly in 2011. In June of that year, a top al-Qa`ida figure working with al-Shabab, Fazul Abdullah Mohammad, was killed in a checkpoint shoot-out that was widely believed to be a set-up by his rival in al-Shabab, Ahmed "Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr" Godane.<sup>13</sup> This incident, along with the 2012 death of UK-born jihadist Bilal al-Berjawi and several other foreign jihadists, prompted an

8 Christopher Anzalone, "Al-Shabab's Setbacks in Somalia," *CTC Sentinel* 4:10 (2011).

9 Marchal.

10 "Somalia: Al Shabaab Attack Indefensible," Human Rights Watch, October 5, 2011.

11 These clans did not defect entirely—some individuals and groups stayed with al-Shabab—but the main base of these clans swung quickly away from the group at the behest of clan leaders. The Habar Gidir Ayr shifted support to the armed Sufi group Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama, while the Ogaden, organized as the Ras Kamboni militia, split with al-Shabab over control of Kismayo seaport revenues and, after losing a battle against al-Shabab, turned to Kenya and Ethiopia as external allies. These sudden shifts highlight how thin ideological commitment is to "radical" Islamist positions in Somalia, and how clan interests frequently trump ideology.

12 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008)," p. 6.

13 "Al Shabaab Leader Arranged Fazul's Death," *Somalia Report*, June 16, 2011. Whether true or not, the rumor was accepted by many Somalis and shaped their perceptions of al-Shabab.

1 Robert Rotberg, "A Wounded Leopard: Why Somalia's al-Shabab Attacked a Nairobi Mall," *Globe and Mail*, September 23, 2013.

2 Raffaello Pantucci, "Bilal al-Berjawi and the Shifting Fortunes of Foreign Fighters in Somalia," *CTC Sentinel* 6:9 (2013).

3 For background on the two year Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia in 2007-2008, see Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: They Created a Desert and Called it

exodus of many foreign fighters who believed that Godane was purging non-Somali leaders, and as a consequence these foreign fighters no longer trusted their Somali counterparts.<sup>14</sup> That same year, al-Shabab presided over one of the worst famines in two decades, which cost 260,000 Somali lives.<sup>15</sup> The group damaged its reputation among Somalis by blocking international food aid from entering most of its areas of control, denying that a famine existed, and by seeking to prevent famine victims in

### “Battle lines are not as clear as they appear to be in Somalia due to al-Shabab’s extensive collusion with and penetration of rivals.”

rural southern Somalia from traveling to areas where aid was available.<sup>16</sup> One analyst concluded that “the political cost [of blocking food aid] was tremendous” for al-Shabab.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 2011, al-Shabab also withdrew from most of the areas of Mogadishu it had controlled, conceding that it was too costly to wage conventional war against AMISOM. During the ensuing year, Mogadishu enjoyed a boom of new development and real estate construction fueled by returning diaspora members, a sharp and public rebuke of the group.<sup>18</sup> Al-Shabab was subsequently pushed out of most of the remaining urban centers under its control, including from the strategic port city of Kismayo in October 2012, which had been al-Shabab’s principal source of revenue.<sup>19</sup>

14 Pantucci.

15 “Mortality Among Populations of Southern and Central Somalia Affected by Severe Food Insecurity and Famine during 2010-2012,” London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Johns Hopkins University School Bloomberg School of Public Health, May 2, 2013, p. 8.

16 Ken Menkhaus, “No Access: Critical Bottlenecks in the 2011 Somali Famine,” *Global Food Security* 1:1 (2012).

17 Marchal.

18 Laila Ali, “‘Mogadishu is Like Manhattan:’ Somalis Return Home to Accelerate Progress,” *Guardian*, January 11, 2013.

19 The UN Monitoring Group in July 2011 estimated that al-Shabab earned \$35-50 million per year from port revenues in Kismayo, and another \$30-60 million in taxes on Somali businesses. See Barbara Starr, “UN Report:

In June 2013, a bloody internal battle broke out within al-Shabab, culminating in a major purge. This internecine blood-letting was the culmination of years of mounting internal rifts between Godane and a growing number of his critics within al-Shabab, who publicly criticized him for killing “true Muslims,” committing strategic blunders, and having dictatorial tendencies.<sup>20</sup> In some ways, what was surprising is how long the group managed to remain cohesive before the clashes occurred.<sup>21</sup> The purge is thought to have killed an estimated 200 members of al-Shabab’s feared “Amniyat” network—described by a recent United Nations report as al-Shabab’s “‘secret service,’ which is structured along the lines of a clandestine organization within the organization.”<sup>22</sup> Al-Shabab leaders opposing Godane met different fates. Top al-Shabab figures Ibrahim al-Afghani and Maa’lim Hashi were executed; American Omar Hammani (Abu Mansur al-Amriki) was killed; Shaykh Mukhtar Robow escaped and remains at large; and Hassan Dahir Aweys fled but was captured by pro-government militias, handed over to the Somali Federal Government (SFG), and placed under arrest.<sup>23</sup> The hard-liner Godane consolidated his control over a smaller, weaker, but now more unrestrained al-Shabab.<sup>24</sup>

Al-Shabaab is Raising Millions Illegally in Somalia,” CNN, August 5, 2011.

20 Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, “Despite Setbacks, al-Shabab Still a Potent Threat,” *Voice of America*, November 19, 2013.

21 Stig Hansen argued forcefully that the group had greater cohesion than its critics appreciated, which was true up until June 2013. See Stig Hansen, “Somalia: Rumors of Al-Shabaab’s Death are Greatly Exaggerated,” *African Arguments*, April 25, 2013.

22 “Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012),” United Nations, July 2013, p. 5; personal interview, international security official, Mogadishu, Somalia, January 2014.

23 Maruf and Joseph. The SFG is the post-transition, successor government to the TFG, selected in August 2012 for a four year term. It remains a weak authority with limited capacity to govern the capital and minimal influence in the countryside, necessitating the continued presence of AMISOM for its protection.

24 For an excellent analysis of Godane’s consolidation of control over al-Shabab and what it means for the organization’s new orientation, see Matt Bryden, *The Re-invention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International

### The New Al-Shabab

Even prior to its disastrous in-fighting in 2013, al-Shabab was morphing into an entity quite different from the jihadist force it represented in 2007-2008.

As the group ceded control of most urban centers, its tactics shifted toward asymmetrical warfare, featuring greater reliance on suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices, hit-and-run attacks, political threats and assassinations, and grenade attacks. This allowed it to fight AMISOM and its Somali enemies on its terms, and put fewer of its fighters at risk.<sup>25</sup> To execute these tactics, the group relied increasingly on its Amniyat network.<sup>26</sup> This shift in tactics hinted at a change in al-Shabab’s wider strategy, which focused on the role of a spoiler—blocking any progress by the federal government, preventing normalization of life in the capital, and harassing AMISOM with the aim of eventually driving it out of the country.<sup>27</sup>

The group’s tactical shift also included an emphasis on collusion with its erstwhile enemies in Somalia, resulting in head-spinning deals and tactical alliances that have confounded external actors attempting to defeat the group. This included al-Shabab temporarily cooperating with the Somali national armed forces in common cause against Kenyan forces and the Ogaden clan militia (known as the Ras Kamboni militia) after the latter captured the seaport of Kismayo from al-Shabab in October 2012, and then subsequent al-Shabab collusion with Kenyan forces and the Ras Kamboni militia in illegal charcoal exports out of Kismayo seaport.<sup>28</sup> The group is rumored to have a number of other mixed relationships with rival Somali actors, the result of extortion, penetration,

al Studies, 2014).

25 “Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012),” United Nations, June 19, 2012, p. 6.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

27 This was a chronic problem for the group even in 2007-2008. It was able to articulate clearly what it was against, but not what it was for. That made it a spoiler.

28 “Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012),” p. 7. Kenyan authorities denied this charge. See “Kenya Denies Defying UN Ban on Somalia Charcoal trade,” BBC, July 15, 2013.

or shared interests in making money or temporarily avoiding conflict.<sup>29</sup> A confidential UN Monitoring Group report in February 2014 charged that arms provided to the Somali government were being channeled to al-Shabab, suggesting collusion at high levels in the government.<sup>30</sup> Battle lines are not as clear as they appear to be in Somalia due to al-Shabab's extensive collusion with and penetration of rivals.<sup>31</sup>

Al-Shabab also shifted its recruitment tactics. Having lost much of its core base of support among the strongest clans, it began courting support from marginalized, aggrieved sub-clans and minority groups, a tactic which continues to work well for the group.<sup>32</sup> It also coerced recruits, which backfired, producing desertions, low morale, and community resentment. In addition, its recruiting energies were redirected toward Kenya, again targeting the marginalized. These included: poor slum-dwellers in Nairobi, who were convinced to convert to Islam and wage jihad; Somali Kenyans, many of whom feel they are second-class citizens; and Swahili coastal Muslims who feel dominated by "up-country" Kenyan Christians.<sup>33</sup> Al-Shabab's messaging began to include Swahili language as part of this campaign, and paid off with 200-500 East African recruits in training camps in the Jubba valley of Somalia.<sup>34</sup> This effort was, in retrospect, the beginning of al-Shabab "franchising" into East Africa, and the start of its new role as a voice for the marginalized.

Al-Shabab also shifted its attention to "taxation"—involving a combination of willing support, extortion, and partnership—of businesses operating in south-central Somalia, as well

as international humanitarian agencies and local non-governmental organizations.<sup>35</sup> Refusal to pay risked lethal reprisal, and nearly everyone in the private sector or the aid industry was compelled, directly or indirectly, to contribute to al-Shabab's coffers.<sup>36</sup> This gave the group a diversified source of revenue that sustained it after losing diaspora contributions and seaport revenues from Kismayo.

Finally, the group expanded its network and operations beyond south-central Somalia, both into East Africa and northern Somalia. This site expansion served it well when it began losing territory and support in south-central Somalia.

#### Disaggregating Al-Shabab

The result of these changes is an al-Shabab today that manifests itself in several different forms. Disaggregating al-Shabab is helpful in clarifying the kinds of threats it now poses. These different manifestations include:

##### *Al-Shabab as a Network: Amniyat*

The clandestine Amniyat network remains the most intact and feared part of the organization, and according to some observers is the main base of support for Godane, answering directly to him.<sup>37</sup> Some of Amniyat's operatives pose as secularized Somalis and assume roles across the full spectrum of

35 Jeffrey Gettleman and Nicholas Kulish, "Somali Militants Mixing Business and Terror," *New York Times*, September 30, 2013. UN Monitoring Group allegations that top Somali contractors for the World Food Programme were major financial contributors to al-Shabab provoked a major controversy, since any financial support to a designated terrorist group constituted a violation of the USA PATRIOT Act and other counterterrorism legislation. See "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008)."

36 On February 2, 2014, al-Shabab arrested 15 members of the Telecom company Hormud in the town of Jilib for refusing to pay \$50,000 to the group. See "Al Shabaab Arrests Hormud Staff, Manager in Jilib," Radio Bar-kulan, reported in AMISOM Media Monitoring, February 3, 2014. Many aid agencies and their local counterparts reject the claim that they have had to divert funds to al-Shabab when operating in or near its areas of control, but evidence is strong that local staff had no choice but to disguise fees that went to the group. See Menkhaus, "No Access: Critical Bottlenecks in the 2011 Somali Famine." 37 Mayat Ibrahim, "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Amniyat Branch Tasked with Protecting Godane," *Sababi*, July 16, 2013.

Somali society, including in positions in the SFG and foreign missions.<sup>38</sup> It serves as both an effective intelligence network and an operational arm of al-Shabab, with units specializing in assassinations, explosives, and hit-and-run attacks.<sup>39</sup> Amniyat's reach is now felt in previously peaceful parts of northern Somalia, such as in Puntland, where al-Shabab related attacks are occurring on an almost daily basis.

##### *Al-Shabab as an Armed Force*

The military command of al-Shabab, known as Jaysh al-Usra (the Army of Hardship), was estimated to control 5,000 fighters before the recent infighting. Al-Shabaab's fighting units—including irregulars who can be called up for "pay as you go" missions<sup>40</sup>—are mainly composed of young recruits, and have not proven to be especially capable in the face of superior AMISOM forces. This group is more fluid than Amniyat, includes some fighters who have joined mainly for a paycheck, and has seen its share of desertions or defections. Yet it has also contributed "martyrs" to recent hybrid al-Shabab terrorist attacks involving both suicide bombers and suicide infantry.<sup>41</sup>

##### *Al-Shabab as an Administration*

Although al-Shabab does not take on the role of a state within a state in its area of control, it continues to provide basic administration, including oversight of education and health sectors, policing, judicial, and arbitration roles.<sup>42</sup> In consequence, communities under its control consistently enjoy higher levels of law and order than when "liberated" by AMISOM and left to deal with Somali national armed forces that are predatory and poorly controlled.<sup>43</sup> Al-Shabab's

38 Reno; personal interviews, international security officials, Mogadishu, Somalia, January 2014, and Nairobi, Kenya, July 2013.

39 Most of the small-scale, hit-and-run attacks, especially grenade attacks, which occur daily in Mogadishu, are believed to be carried out by young men who are paid by Amniyat per attack, but who are not part of the group. See personal interview, UN official, Mogadishu, Somalia, January 2014.

40 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008)," p. 15.

41 Bryden, p. 7.

42 Marchal; Ibrahim.

43 The Somali National Armed Forces consist of brigades organized around clans which pursue clan rather than national interests. In the recovered areas of the Lower

29 Personal interview, international security official, Mogadishu, Somalia, January 2014.

30 Louis Charbonneau, "Exclusive: UN Monitors Warn of 'Systematic' Somali Arms Diversion," Reuters, February 13, 2014.

31 The issue of al-Shabab penetration of the Somali government is documented in William Reno, "Rethinking Counterinsurgency in Somalia," *CTC Sentinel* 6:4 (2013).

32 Marchal.

33 For more detailed discussion of al-Shabab recruitment, see Marchal.

34 Starr. Al-Shabab now publishes a Swahili and English magazine, *Gaidi Mtaani* ("Terrorism Street"). See "Shabaab Supporters Focus on Westgate in 4<sup>th</sup> Issue of Gaidi Mtaani," SITE Institute, January 15, 2014.

ability to provide basic law and order continues to attract some Somalis in the countryside. This branch of al-Shabab, however, has been weakened with the group's loss of territory.

#### *Al-Shabab as a Criminal Racket*

The group's systematic collection of "taxes" on Somali businesses is little more than extortion, and points to the fact that the group is acting increasingly like a mafia in much of the country. Al-Shabab has not degenerated into a criminal racket the way many protracted insurgencies do, but there are signs that the group is moving in that direction, including alleged involvement in illicit smuggling of ivory.<sup>44</sup> Roland Marchal's close analysis of the group concluded that the main source of al-Shabab's finances today is "protection money."<sup>45</sup>

#### *Al-Shabab as an East Africa Franchise*

Al-Shabab's East Africa affiliate, al-Hijra, consists of hundreds of recruits from Kenya and neighboring countries who have trained under the al-Shabab flag in Somalia but whose grievances and targets are in East Africa. This wing of al-Shabab executed the July 2010 bombings in Kampala, Uganda, that killed 74 people, an attack attributed to al-Shabab but involving a group of terrorists that included only one Somali. Al-Hijra group is the subject of intense Kenyan and Western counterterrorism efforts, especially since the Westgate bombing. Previously viewed as "fumbling and amateurish operationally," the group has gained sophistication and discipline.<sup>46</sup> The

and Middle Shabelle, these clan paramilitaries are being used to consolidate claims by their clan over contested land, prompting armed resistance from other clans in areas recently vacated by al-Shabab. These clashes are now occurring on an almost daily basis, and are considered by UN observers to be one of the top threats for armed conflict in Somalia in 2014. This information is based on personal interviews, UN officials, Mogadishu, Somalia, January 2014. These same government security forces are the main perpetrators of rape and assault in local villages and internally displaced persons camps, according to UN human rights investigations. Most of the rape victims are children. For details, see "Report of the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia, Shamsul Bari," United Nations, August 16, 2013, p. 11; "World Report 2013: Somalia," Human Rights Watch, 2013.

44 Gettleman and Kulish.

45 Marchal.

46 Matt Bryden, quoted in Nicholas Kulish and Josh

extent to which al-Shabab's leadership exercises direct control over this network is difficult to determine. Yet the various constituencies of the East Africa wing—the Nairobi slum recruits, the Swahili coastal recruits, and the Somali Kenyan recruits—are widely viewed as among the most dangerous in the al-Shabab franchise, in part because they can more easily access soft targets in East Africa.<sup>47</sup> The group has also exerted influence and even indirect control over critical areas inside Kenya, most notably the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi (a slum heavily populated by ethnic Somalis) and the border town of Mandera.<sup>48</sup>

#### *Al-Shabab as a Global Icon*

Al-Shabab's global reputation is tarnished, and its global network clearly weakened in recent years, but it may have been partially revived with the high visibility Westgate attack. The group still enjoys some support from the Somali diaspora and is known to have links to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Boko Haram.<sup>49</sup>

#### *Al-Shabab as a Voice of the Disenfranchised*

The group's turn since 2008 toward recruiting from marginalized groups in Somalia and East Africa gives it a powerful "Robin Hood" narrative and a deep pool of grievances upon which to draw across the region.

#### **Threat Assessment: Westgate and Beyond**

Critical details of the Westgate mall attack are still either in dispute or not in the public domain, so caution must be used when drawing conclusions about the attack and what it suggests about al-Shabab. Still, some observations can be made.

First, the attack was only the latest and most deadly incident in a pattern that had already been set by al-Shabab's East Africa wing when it launched twin terrorist bombings in Kampala, Uganda, in July 2010. That was the first instance of spillover of the current insurgency

Kron, "Extremist Group Gains Foothold Among Kenyans," *New York Times*, October 9, 2013.

47 "Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalization," International Crisis Group, January 25, 2012, p. 8.

48 "Al-Shabaab Militias Run the Show in Mandera, Says Report," *Daily Nation*, January 25, 2014.

49 "Africa's Islamist Militants Co-ordinate Efforts in Threat to Continent's Security," *Guardian*, June 26, 2012.

and counterinsurgency violence in Somalia into neighboring states that have armed forces inside Somalia.

The presence of Kenyan military forces inside Somalia (now reframed as part of AMISOM) served as a powerful pretext for the attack, allowing al-Shabab to justify the act of terrorism as retaliation for Kenyan forces "bombing innocent people" in Somalia and to demand a Kenyan withdrawal or face additional attacks.<sup>50</sup> Yet fears that al-Shabab would launch a major terrorist attack in Kenya have been raised for years, and might have occurred with or without the Kenyan military's incursion into southern Somalia in October 2011. The Kenyan government is an ally of the West in counterterrorism directed against al-Shabab; it is replete with soft targets such as hotels and shopping malls frequented by a large expatriate community; al-Shabab has its al-Hijra network inside Kenya; and Kenya's security sector, though improved, remains compromised by weak capacity and corruption.<sup>51</sup> All the ingredients were in place for al-Shabab to commit a major terrorist attack in Kenya.

In past years, al-Shabab appears to have been constrained from launching a large-scale terrorist attack inside Kenya for fear of the consequences it could have on the many Somalis who now reside in Kenya and who have major fixed investments in the country.<sup>52</sup> Fear of blowback from within

50 Hamza Mohamed, "Q&A: Al-Shabab Defends Nairobi Attack," al-Jazeera, September 25, 2013.

51 "Al Shabaab Westgate Mall Attack Focuses Attention on Corruption in Kenya's Security Forces," *OE Watch* 3:11 (2013). A recently completed Kenyan Parliamentary investigation into the Westgate attack levels serious charges against Kenyan security agencies. See "Kenyan Security Agencies Ignored Warnings Before Westgate Attack: Report," Reuters, January 26, 2014.

52 Al-Shabab had, prior to the Westgate attack, engaged in numerous small-scale attacks and assassinations inside Kenya, mainly in northeast Kenya. According to one study, al-Shabab launched 100 attacks inside Kenya between 2008 and 2012, and a quarter of all the group's acts of terrorism occurred inside Kenya. But nearly all of these were relatively low-level incidents, often involving single grenades thrown into a compound. As such, they did not constitute "game-changing" acts of terrorism on the scale of the Westgate mall attack. See "Background Report: Al-Shabaab Attack on Westgate Mall in Kenya," National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), September 2013.

the Somali community may have kept al-Shabab from taking the war into Kenya on a grand scale. The Westgate mall attack indicates that the group is now both less constrained under Godane's consolidated rule and willing to take a major gamble with little regard for Somali reactions. This could be interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part of a group that desperately needs to reverse its losses and reframe its narrative as a fight against the foreign invasion of Somalia.<sup>53</sup>

Second, although the attack was carefully planned, it was relatively simple and low cost, and involved a small cell.<sup>54</sup> Only four gunmen, using semi-automatic weapons, were directly involved in the attack, which killed 67 people, while at least four others have been arrested for abetting the operation.<sup>55</sup> The lethality of the attack revealed little about al-Shabab's robustness or sophistication; it only served to remind how vulnerable all open societies are to acts of terrorism.

Third, unlike the 2010 Kampala bombings, which were executed almost entirely by non-Somali East African members of al-Shabab, the Westgate mall attack was carried out and supported mainly if not entirely by ethnic Somalis, at least one of whom had Norwegian citizenship.<sup>56</sup> Whether the ethnic Somalis entered Kenya from Somalia or were Kenyan Somalis remains contested, but the Somali identity of the attackers makes it less likely that this could have been a freelance operation by al-Hijra that was not sanctioned by Godane.<sup>57</sup> The willingness to kill dozens of civilian shoppers fits Godane's profile, and raises the question of whether al-Shabab's policies—once the result of

deliberation by a *shura* (council)—have now been reduced to the impulses of the group's most gratuitously violent, and now unopposed, leader.

Inside Somalia, some manifestations of al-Shabab are weaker and less threatening today. The group's ability to hold contested territory against AMISOM and Somali national armed forces is now limited, a reflection of the weakness of its standing armed forces. It is also a much weaker political movement. It now stands little chance of establishing an Islamic state in Somalia, a goal that was not so improbable in 2008. The territory under its control is still large, but is shrinking, as the group is pushed into more remote rural areas by AMISOM offensives. Al-Shabab has been reduced to a powerful spoiler in Somali political affairs, but it is not a viable alternative to the SFG.

Amniyat, however, continues to pose a chronic and serious threat. It maintains a capacity to launch frequent, sometimes deadly attacks and suicide bombings against AMISOM, the SFG, and international diplomatic missions and aid agencies. Most of al-Shabab's daily attacks in Mogadishu are low-level—grenades thrown into compounds, assassinations, and hit-and-run shootings. Yet over the past year the group has launched numerous high visibility and devastating attacks, including a suicide bombing and assault on the United Nations compound, a bombing of the high court, and multiple bombings of popular restaurants and hotels. It is the principal source of insecurity in most of Somalia, including the northern state of Puntland. Penetrating and breaking the committed Amniyat network, and encouraging defections, will take time. As a recent UN monitoring report concluded, Amniyat has been structured "with the intention of surviving any kind of dissolution of al-Shabab."<sup>58</sup>

This notion that dangerous elements of al-Shabab could survive the organization itself is critical. The past 23 years of war and state collapse in Somalia has seen the rise and

dissolution of dozens of armed groups and movements. Al-Shabab's strong secret network, its mafia-like extortion practices, and its collusion with a range of Somali political actors put it in a strong position to dissolve and re-emerge within other entities if it sees fit, or to morph into a violent criminal syndicate. It is important not to conflate al-Shabab and the threat of violent extremism in Somalia; the latter could easily outlive the former.

This is especially the case with regard to the East African manifestations of al-Shabab, which could survive longer than the original franchise in Somalia. Al-Shabab has found in East Africa a rich supply of aggrieved populations ripe for recruitment.

### Conclusion

Al-Shabab today is both weaker and more dangerous and unconstrained than in the past. In the short term, this is bad news for Kenya, Ethiopia, the Somali government and people, and international actors operating in Somalia. Al-Shabab's Amniyat network retains the capacity to launch destabilizing and demoralizing attacks inside Somalia and extort funds from Somali businesses and polities. The group's franchises in East Africa are in a position to recruit from marginalized groups and mount acts of terrorism in the wider region.

Kenya, and possibly other countries in East Africa and the Horn, is likely to be the target of additional al-Shabab attacks, especially as al-Shabab responds to a major AMISOM offensive inside Somalia in the first months of 2014.<sup>59</sup> Kenyan security crackdowns intended to disrupt the group and prevent such attacks run the risk of setting off wider tensions with the Somali Kenyan and Kenyan Muslim communities if executed in a heavy-handed manner.<sup>60</sup> Al-Shabab

53 Ken Menkhaus, "What the Deadly Attack on a Kenya Mall Was Really About," *Think Progress*, September 22, 2013.

54 One estimate of the total cost of the operation settled on a figure of \$100,000. See Gettleman and Kulish.

55 Tom Odula, "Kenya: Names of Two Other Mall Terrorists Revealed," Associated Press, February 6, 2014.

56 "Bodies of Westgate Gunmen 'Are with FBI,'" *New Vision*, February 11, 2014.

57 Because so many Somalis have been able to secure Kenyan identity papers illegally, distinguishing between who is a *bona fide* Somali Kenyan citizen and who is a Somali from Somalia has become very problematic for the Kenyan government.

59 Al-Shabab has already attempted another attack, which failed—a bomb left at an outdoor restaurant at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. See "Four Somalis Charged over Kenya 'Light Bulb' Airport Attack," Agence France-Presse, February 3, 2014.

60 This occurred in early February 2014 when a Kenyan police raid on what was described as a meeting of jihadist elements provoked several days of clashes in Mombasa. See "Foreigners Among the Mombasa Mosque Chaos Suspects," *The Standard*, February 5, 2014. For an earlier warning about blowback from heavy-handed Kenyan responses, see "Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalization."

58 "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012)," p. 5.



has every interest in inflaming tensions between Kenyan Muslims and the government.

In the longer term, however, al-Shabab's downward trajectory since 2009 shows few signs of reversal, at least inside Somalia. Additional losses of top leaders could lead to a quick unraveling of the group, at which point the chief security threat will be the residual Amniyat network, which will retain the capacity for extortion and political violence. Al-Shabab's best hope for resurgence is the incompetence and venality of its domestic rivals, chief among them the Somali Federal Government.<sup>61</sup> Corruption and failure to deliver basic services is eroding the government's legitimacy, while land grabs and predatory behavior by poorly controlled and clannish government armed forces in areas recovered from al-Shabab threaten to drive local communities back into al-Shabab's arms.<sup>62</sup>

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61 U.S. government concern about the weak leadership and in-fighting in the SFG was publicly voiced by Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. See Katarina Manson, "Somalia President Fights Back on 'Weak Leadership' Claim from US," *Financial Times*, February 7, 2014. Also see "Recently Accused Government Forces in Lower Shabelle Accused of Crimes by Local District Chiefs," Harar24News, February 1, 2014. Land-grabbing in the Lower and Middle Shabelle Regions by clan militias "hatted" as government forces is considered by UN officials as a top source of possible armed conflict. This is based on personal interviews, UN officials, Mogadishu, Somalia, and Nairobi, Kenya, January 2014.

62 Ibid.

## An In-Depth Look at Al-Shabab's Internal Divisions

By Stig Jarle Hansen

AL-SHABAB'S ATTACK ON Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall in September 2013 led many to question whether it signified the group's increased focus on international targets. Yet since its inception in 2006-2007, al-Shabab has always issued global rhetoric. The group frequently attacked international targets in Somalia, and it conducted a terrorist attack in Kampala in 2010 as retaliation for the Ugandan government's decision to send troops to Somalia. Although the attack on Westgate mall suggests that al-Shabab will continue to attack targets in the region, the bulk of its military efforts will remain concentrated in Somalia.

The Westgate mall attack depicted al-Shabab as a strong, coherent organization. Al-Shabab, however, suffered from a number of setbacks in 2013. Besides key battlefield losses, some of its top leadership was purged as a result of infighting. In June 2013, forces loyal to al-Shabab's leader, Ahmed "Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr" Godane, killed al-Shabab members Ibrahim al-Afghani and his close companion, Maa'lim Hashi.<sup>1</sup> Godane also reportedly ordered the death of the well-known American jihadist, Omar Hammami, in September 2013.<sup>2</sup>

This article first examines how al-Shabab has used tribal politics to gain support in Somalia, and then provides an in-depth look at some of the infighting that plagued al-Shabab in 2013. It argues that understanding the internal dynamics of al-Shabab will help to better determine the potential trajectories of the group. It finds that the group remains a potent threat to both Somalia and to African states that have deployed troops to Somalia.

1 "Godane Loyalists Reportedly Execute al-Shabaab Leader Ibrahim al-Afghani," *Sababi*, June 28, 2013.

2 Nicholas Kulish, "American Jihadist is Believed to Have Been Killed by His Former Allies in Somalia," *New York Times*, September 12, 2013.

### Embedded in the Local Economy and Tribal Politics

Al-Shabab's success can be partly explained by its ability to embed itself in Somalia's local context. In Kismayo, for example, al-Shabab profited by taxing exports from the port city, which was accomplished by levying fees on the transport trucks on the road into Kismayo.<sup>3</sup> Although the Kenyan military took control of Kismayo in October 2012, al-Shabab still manages to earn significant revenues from the town. According to a report from the Arms Monitoring Group of the United Nations, "revenue that al-Shabaab currently derives [in 2013] from its Kismaayo shareholding, its Barawe exports and the taxation of ground transportation likely exceeds the estimated \$25 million it generated in charcoal revenues when it controlled Kismaayo."<sup>4</sup> Al-Shabab also controls parts of several of the most important roads in central Somalia, where it can demand taxes.

In terms of tribal politics, al-Shabab has harnessed manpower support, for example, from the Gaaljecel and Duduble, sub-clans of the Hawiye clan, and gained influence in their territories.<sup>5</sup> In Hiiraan and Galguduud respectively, these sub-clans have a strong presence.<sup>6</sup> Al-Shabab has posted videos purporting to show these clan members pledging allegiance to al-Shabab, although it is unclear to what extent these tribes support the group.<sup>7</sup>

Somali clan politics have provided al-Shabab several potential opportunities for growth, as the group can exploit clan grievances and clan conflicts. Members from the Ogaden clan (known as the Ras Kamboni militia), for example,

3 "United Nations Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea," United Nations, 2013, p. 39.

4 Ibid.

5 For an example, see "Hubayr Sub-Clan Pledges Allegiance to al-Shabaab," al-Shabab, June 24, 2012; "Bay'at of the Gaaljal Clan to al-Shabaab in the Shao Region in the Islamic State of Hiraan," al-Shabab, November 15, 2012; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group* (London: Oxford University Press and Hurst, 2013). For an overview of recruitment patterns, see "Somalia: Rekruttering til al-Shabaab," The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo), July 6, 2012.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

initially used their allies in al-Shabab to gain partial control over Kismayo port in 2008, although this relationship eventually turned sour.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in Beledweyne, one clan enlisted al-Shabab's support to fight against a rival clan. Before 2010, al-Shabab was active in Murusade clan territories, and fought for the Murusade against that clan's rivals.<sup>9</sup> By fighting on behalf of one side in a clan conflict, al-Shabab can earn that clan's support in the future.<sup>10</sup>

Local clans, in return, have also taken advantage of al-Shabab. Clans have, at times, offered recruits to al-Shabab, intending to infiltrate the organization by moving its clan members into positions of leadership within the group. This allows them to influence al-Shabab and to gain access to resources or to enlist the support of al-Shabab in their clan conflicts. Some clans pursue a "hedging" strategy, where traditional clan leaders attempt to insert prominent clan members in high positions in both the government and in al-Shabab, thus gaining influence within both organizations, although it is hard to measure how widely this tactic is practiced.<sup>11</sup>

Al-Shabab leader Godane has few clan connections in al-Shabab's main area of operations, yet he continues to operate in regions where he lacks established roots. Al-Shabab also has had sub-commanders from a diverse pool of clans operate in territories controlled by other clans, seemingly illustrating the group's ability to transcend clan dynamics. Indeed, al-Shabab has been able to transcend clan politics more than other Somali organizations.

8 "The Smiling Warlord Who Controls Ras Kamboni," *Daily Nation*, June 12, 2012.

9 See, for example, Roland Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," SciencesPo/CERI, March 2011; Hansen.

10 Somalia today faces several contingent clan issues, such as the discrimination of the Ayr sub-clan of the Hawiye against Benadiris in Lower Shabelle, the wider discrimination of minority clans, and the issue over the control of the southern port of Kismayo, the latter putting the Ogaden clan against the government in Mogadishu, a government that many Ogaden clan members consider dominated by the Hawiye clan family.

11 The author personally observed this "hedging" strategy when in Somalia interviewing government and al-Shabab leaders from the same clan.

It would be incorrect, however, to assume that al-Shabab is a clan-based organization due to these internal dynamics. Instead, al-Shabab is an organization that attempts to survive in an environment plagued by the fragmented forces of Somali clan politics. Al-Shabab takes advantage of clans at times, while at other times clans take advantage of al-Shabab.<sup>12</sup>

This local dynamic, however, should not detract from the global aspect of al-Shabab's rhetoric and the group's ties to other jihadist organizations. Al-Shabab itself is a complex organization with both global and local aims, but its focus is primarily local, which is seen as a stepping stone to achieving more global objectives.<sup>13</sup> Nor should it detract from the fact that al-Shabab's attacks in Mogadishu have increased in severity in February 2014. This was best displayed by al-Shabab's assault on the presidential palace on February 21, illustrating an ability to penetrate even the most secure areas of Mogadishu.

#### Al-Shabab's Internal Divisions

Internal divisions have also weakened al-Shabab. The roots of the current split date as far back as 2010 and the ill-fated Ramadan offensive, when al-Shabab attempted to oust the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces in a frontal attack, rather than the asymmetric operations it usually favors. The Ramadan offensive left sub-commanders Hasan Yaqub and Mukhtar Robow disgruntled with Godane's leadership.<sup>14</sup> After the offensive, one of al-Shabab's strengths, its *shura* council, ceased to exist, probably due to animosity between members and fear of attack from the United States.<sup>15</sup> Anger within the organization, however, was not only directed against Godane, but also against sub-commanders such as Robow for withdrawing from combat too quickly.<sup>16</sup>

12 Marchal; Hansen.

13 Remote global issues in line with al-Qa`ida's narrative.

14 Hansen.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.; Mohamed Shil, "Al-Shabab: What Will Happen Next?" *Somalia Report*, September 3, 2011.

Al-Shabab re-established itself along looser lines of command. By 2011, it became a rather decentralized organization. According to a military source, al-Shabab's centralization of taxation was weakened, as were training and command lines. Local al-Shabab leaders less frequently sent

**"The major disagreements were not about internationalism vs. nationalism, but instead about other ideological and tactical issues."**

or received recruits from centralized training institutions.<sup>17</sup> The level of decentralization varied, however. For example, al-Shabab's secret police, the Amniyat, which is controlled by Godane, was disbanded as a concession to dissenters in al-Shabab, but then later re-established. Over time, as battlefield losses increased and al-Shabab suffered more defeats, old issues of contingency resurfaced, as did the discussion of the treatment of Muslims and disregard for Muslim casualties.

Al-Shabab and its leader, Godane, had been criticized on this specific subject as early as 2009 by Usama bin Ladin and al-Qa`ida operative Fazul Abdullah Mohammad.<sup>18</sup> In 2012, these criticisms burst into the open when the American jihadist Omar Hammami broke ranks and launched a video attack on al-Shabab's leadership, which he later directed more forcefully at Godane. Hammami also focused his criticism on issues of military strategy, the marginalization of foreign fighters in the organization, Shari`a implementation, and al-Shabab's general mistreatment of other Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

17 Hansen.

18 Nelly Lahoud, *Beware of Imitators: Al-Qa`ida Through the Lens of its Confidential Secretary* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012); Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012).

19 Omar Hammami, "Urgent Message to Whoever it Might Reach," 2012, available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAr2srINqks](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAr2srINqks).

In response, al-Shabab tried to kill Hammami on a number of occasions,<sup>20</sup> and forces reportedly loyal to Godane succeeded in killing the American jihadist in September 2013.<sup>21</sup> Al-Shabab's attacks on Hammami after the latter's critique of the militant group's central leadership led to further discussions and the breakdown of cooperation between leaders within al-Shabab.

Several al-Shabab leaders announced a *fatwa* (religious ruling), removing the requirement that al-Shabab fighters be loyal to the *amir* if he was violating the Qur'an, which they alleged Godane guilty of by targeting dissenters within al-Shabab.<sup>22</sup> These leaders ranged from al-Shabab's second-in-command, Ibrahim al-Afghani, to late-comer Hassan Dahir Aweys, a leader more or less forced into al-Shabab after his clan-based Islamist organization, Hisbul Islamiyya, had been defeated by al-Shabab on the battlefield.

Godane's retribution was swift, and veteran al-Shabab leader and internationalist Ibrahim al-Afghani was killed on June 20, 2013.<sup>23</sup> Fighting ensued in all al-Shabab-controlled provinces, and al-Shabab leaders in opposition to Godane, such as Fuad Khalif "Shongole" and Mukhtar Robow, retreated.<sup>24</sup> A propaganda battle ensued, where Robow accused Godane of failing to protect Muslims, being "an American spy," and not respecting other Muslims.<sup>25</sup> Godane, however, seemed to outflank Robow on his home turf, while Shongole remained on the defensive.

20 Kulish.

21 Ibid.

22 "Officials in Shabaab Faction Give Fatwa Against Targeting Hammami," SITE Institute, January 15, 2014.

23 "Godane Loyalists Reportedly Execute al-Shabaab Leader Ibrahim al-Afghani."

24 Personal interview, human rights activist based in Baidoa, January 1, 2014; personal interview, Yahya Ibrahim, professor based in Mogadishu, December 22, 2013.

25 Zubair al-Muhajir, "Yes There is a Problem - Open Letter From Sheikh Zubayr al-Muhajir to Sheikh Abu al-Zubair," April 18, 2013, available at [www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no](http://www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no); Ibrahim al-Afghani, "Urgent and Open Letter to Our Amīr Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri," April 2013, available at [www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no](http://www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no); Hammami; Mukhtar Robow, "The Martyrdom Night in Barawe, [and what happened] Before and After It," 2013, available at [www.cunaabi.com/playaudio.php?id=395](http://www.cunaabi.com/playaudio.php?id=395).

Important sub-commanders in the organization—such as spokesperson Ali "Dheere," Ali Jabal, Yuusuf Ciise "Kabakutukade" and Maxamad Dulyadeyn—made no indications of supporting the al-Shabab opposition, although as of December 2013 there were rumors that Godane made attempts to arrest Kabakutukade.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, al-Shabab's Kenyan allies in the Muslim Youth Center (MYC), now known as al-Hijra, seemed to indicate support for Godane.<sup>27</sup>

#### Implications

Godane's victory over his opposition was interpreted by some as a victory for internationalists over nationalists, claiming that Godane himself had been the main impetus behind al-Shabab's increasingly international focus on targeting the West, and for following the global agenda of al-Qa`ida.<sup>28</sup> This view, however, is filled with inconsistencies because it puts individuals such as Omar Hammami and Ibrahim al-Afghani in the so-called nationalist camp. Hammami delivered a four-part lecture criticizing al-Qa`ida for being too nationalist, and al-Afghani was a veteran of Afghanistan who was highly respected internationally. This view also overlooks Godane's references and allegories in speeches to local Somali issues, although these references are carefully phrased to appeal to nationalist sentiments without using the word "nation" or mentioning "sacrifices for Somalia," instead emphasizing the position of the Somali fight in the wider struggle of the *umma* (Islamic community). It also overlooks Mukhtar Robow's more

26 Personal interview, Yahya Ibrahim, professor based in Mogadishu, December 22, 2013.

27 "Swift and Appropriate Action Demanded to Deal with Abu Mansoor Al-Amriki," Muslim Youth Center, March 29, 2013, available at [www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no](http://www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no); Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, "Turning Away From The Truth Won't Make It Disappear: Demystifying the Abu Mansur Saga," February 23, 2013, available at [www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no](http://www.somalisecuritystudies.blogspot.no); Sam Adams, "Terrorist Widow's Angry Twitter Rant at al-Qaeda 'Prat': Wife of 7/7 Bomber Breaks Cover to Accuse Rival Extremist of Being 'Irritating,'" *Daily Mail*, April 11, 2013; Bosir Boniface, "Kenyan Jihadist Resurfaces, Sheds Light on Current State of al-Shabaab," *Sababi*, July 12, 2013.

28 See, for example, Magnus Taylor, "Westgate Attack Puts Al Shabaab Top of the Global Jihadist Premier League," *African Arguments* September 24, 2014.

internationalist statements.<sup>29</sup> By taking a nuanced view of the infighting, the major disagreements were not about internationalism vs. nationalism, but instead about other ideological and tactical issues.

These issues included al-Shabab's actions toward Muslims—specifically, the group's killing of large numbers of Muslim civilians—as well as the treatment of al-Shabab figures who disagreed with certain policies of

### **"Al-Shabab's biggest danger to the West is most likely through potential logistics support for other al-Qa`ida units, its indoctrination of Somalis into al-Qa`ida's ideology, and its growing reach in other African countries."**

the group's leader, Godane. Other disagreements centered on strategy, Shari`a implementation, and the control of power within the organization. Rather than interpret the Westgate attack as an indication of increased focus on international targets, it should instead be viewed as an extension of al-Shabab's ongoing strategy of striking their opponents in Somalia in their home countries, as they did in Kampala, Uganda, in 2010.<sup>30</sup>

29 See, for example, M. Hassan, "Al-Shabaab Bans Somali Flag," *Hiiraan*, 2010. Also see "Audio Speech of Sheikh Mukhtar Abu Al-Zubair Amir of the Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahideen About the Recent Developments in the Country," April 2012, available at [www.azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/shaykh-mukhtar-abc5ab-al-zubayr-22about-the-situation-in-the-country22-en.pdf](http://www.azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/shaykh-mukhtar-abc5ab-al-zubayr-22about-the-situation-in-the-country22-en.pdf).

30 Nevertheless, the huge increase in alleged al-Shabab activity targeting East Africa is notable. Al-Shabab has gained a foothold in Kenya, and Tanzanian and Ethiopian authorities report internal al-Shabab activities as well. See, for example, "Training Video AK 47," al-Shabab, June 26, 2013, available at [www.jihadology.net/page/4/?s=al-Kat%C4%B1%E2%80%99b+Media&submit](http://www.jihadology.net/page/4/?s=al-Kat%C4%B1%E2%80%99b+Media&submit). In Ethiopia, there were at least two court cases against an alleged al-Shabab cell in Haraar and a wider network in 2012-2013. In Tanzania, al-Shabab-related materials were confiscated in 2013, and Tanzanian police

Godane has strengthened his control over al-Shabab. Although Mukhtar Robow still wields militias, according to sources within his own clan as well as in the United Nations he is on the defensive, even in his own areas. Al-Shabab will likely still attack civilian targets in the region and kill foreigners to gain international attention. Al-Shabab will likely continue to attack countries that have deployed forces in Somalia. Additionally, although al-Shabab has formally merged with al-Qa`ida, it appears to still operate parallel to the al-Qa`ida structure.

Al-Shabab's biggest danger to the West is most likely through potential logistics support for other al-Qa`ida units, its indoctrination of Somalis into al-Qa`ida's ideology, and its growing reach in African countries. Its Western members are decreasing, and a majority of members appear to be ethnic Somalis, but returning foreign fighters will clearly remain a threat. Similarly, it is possible that al-Shabab would target the United States, especially since U.S. drones and special forces have targeted and killed al-Shabab members in Somalia.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the United States and other Western targets serve as a "media enhancer" for al-Shabab; it gains more attention through attacks on Western targets and creates the impression that the organization is increasingly powerful.

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allegedly closed down an al-Shabab-affiliated "radicalization camp," although the "camp's" exact purpose is not known.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Mohammed Ibrahim, "U.S. Drone Strike Kills Foreign Commander Fighting for Militants in Somalia," *New York Times*, January 22, 2012; David D. Kirkpatrick et al., "U.S. Raids in Libya and Somalia Strike Terror Targets," *New York Times*, October 5, 2013.

## The Malian Government's Challenge to Restore Order in the North

By Bruce Whitehouse

AS OF MID-FEBRUARY 2014, only 1,600 French troops remain in Mali, down from 2,500 at the beginning of the year and from more than 4,000 shortly after the start of the French intervention in January 2013. From the outset, the government of French President François Hollande has sought to portray its military engagement in Mali as a short-term endeavor. Hollande stated last month that "most of the mission has been accomplished."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the past year brought many signs of a return to stability in the troubled West African country. In May, international donors pledged more than \$4 billion in aid to support Mali's recovery, while in July a United Nations peacekeeping force, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), took control from an African Union mission.<sup>2</sup> The presidential election in July, in which voter participation reached an all-time high (despite low turnout in areas where rebel groups remained active), was hailed both at home and abroad as a surprise success. The pervasive insecurity and political uncertainty that followed the country's March 2012 coup d'état seemed diminished.

Six months after the election, however, the challenges to Mali's long-term stability remain daunting, as the new government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita struggles to find its footing. The government desperately needs to reestablish state sovereignty over the country's northern regions, reform the armed forces, and clamp down against corruption and strengthen the rule of law. Until major progress is made in each of these areas, little can be done to reduce the threat of terrorism. This article finds that the underlying causes of Mali's 2012 instability—

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<sup>1</sup> "Mali: les effectifs militaires français ramenés mi-février de 2.500 hommes à 1.600," Agence France-Presse, January 8, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> "Donors Pledge About \$4.22 Billion to Aid Mali Recovery," Reuters, May 15, 2013.

disaffection in the north, a fractured military, and systemic corruption—have yet to be fully addressed by the Malian government and its international partners.

### The Northern Regions

Mali's three northernmost regions of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal comprise an area the size of Texas. These regions spent most of 2012 under the control of jihadist groups allied with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which had hijacked a separatist rebellion launched by the Tuareg-dominated Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNL) after the fall of Libya's Mu`ammar Qadhafi.<sup>3</sup> In January 2013, militants pushed southward toward the town of Mopti, perhaps intending to forestall international intervention by capturing the nearby airbase.<sup>4</sup> This action brought an immediate French military response. French troops needed only a few weeks to drive these groups out of the cities and towns they had occupied. The MNL, after having fallen out with its erstwhile jihadist allies, subsequently retook control of the town of Kidal, its stronghold in the far north and the historical flashpoint of previous Tuareg nationalist rebellions. Its fighters supported, or at least tolerated, French and Chadian troops in the region as they searched for jihadist hideouts in the desert.<sup>5</sup>

The Malian government aims to assert its presence in Kidal in accordance with a peace agreement signed in June 2013, but it was not until November, through the concerted efforts of UN negotiators, that the MNL finally agreed to vacate the governor's office and state radio station, key symbols of central government authority in the region.<sup>6</sup> Government services are currently nonexistent. The process of cantonnement of the region's rebels has stalled, and thousands of armed MNL fighters continue to move freely

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Lebovich, "The Local Face of Jihadism in Northern Mali," *CTC Sentinel* 6:6 (2013); Georg Klute, "Post-Gaddafi Repercussions in Northern Mali," *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 35:2 (2013).

<sup>4</sup> "Mali Asks France for Help as Islamist Militants Advance," France 24, January 11, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> "Mali War Shifts as Rebels Hide in High Sahara," *New York Times*, February 9, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> "Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Mali," United Nations, January 2, 2014, p. 7.

in Kidal. Malian officials and security forces maintain only a token presence in the town, and the Malian judicial system has yet to extend to the region where, according to a report by the UN secretary general, “the authority of judicial officers is not recognized by local residents,” and traditional authorities have only a tenuous grip on public order.<sup>7</sup> The Malian government’s presence is more pronounced and welcome in other northern cities such as Timbuktu, Gao, and Ansongo, where Tuareg separatism has historically been much weaker and which are more multiethnic than Kidal. Nevertheless, in late 2013, these towns witnessed violent public protests against corrupt public officials, police racketeering, and endemic insecurity.<sup>8</sup> The sentiment runs strong among northerners that their state has abandoned them.

#### The Armed Forces

President Keita has made greater headway in reasserting authority over Mali’s restive armed forces. Most notably, he ordered the arrest of Amadou Haya Sanogo, the officer who led a junta that took power in March 2012.<sup>9</sup> Sanogo’s broad support in the army rank-and-file, as well as among certain sectors of the population in the capital Bamako, had previously dissuaded civilian authorities from challenging him, but in the wake of deadly clashes within the security forces, he is now awaiting trial for the killings of at least 21 of his comrades-in-arms.<sup>10</sup> Keita also dissolved Sanogo’s army reform commission and removed many of his allies from senior posts.<sup>11</sup> After nearly two years of tense civil-military relations, the Malian armed forces are again under civilian control.

7 Ibid.

8 “Mali: à Kidal et Tombouctou, le ras-le-bol monte chez les habitants,” Radio France Internationale, October 12, 2013; “Corrupt Police Blamed as Jihadists Return to Mali’s Streets,” Sapa-Agence France-Presse, October 17, 2013.

9 “Mali’s President Replaces Junta-Linked Army Chief,” Reuters, November 9, 2013.

10 “Mali: General Sanogo Arrested and Taken into Custody in the ‘Missing Red Berets’ Case,” International Federation for Human Rights, December 3, 2013.

11 “Mali’s President Replaces Junta-Linked Army Chief.”

The European Union, meanwhile, has sought to strengthen the Malian military, overseeing the creation and training of four new battalions. The EU Training Mission in Mali was launched in February 2013 with the aim of building discipline, unit cohesion and combat capacity, all of which have been sorely lacking. Yet this mission has also exposed longstanding fault lines in Mali’s military: in June 2013, members of the inaugural training battalion boycotted their graduation ceremony, accusing their commanders of embezzling European Union funds intended for their upkeep.<sup>12</sup> Mutinies and disputes over leadership, pay, and promotions have broken out among soldiers both in Bamako and in the north, sometimes turning deadly.<sup>13</sup> This partly explains why, in light of the army’s operational impediments, Mali’s previously elected president, a former army officer himself, outsourced security in the north to various local militias and opted not to confront AQIM.<sup>14</sup> The military’s dysfunctions, coupled with its spotty human rights record,<sup>15</sup> have left foreign governments reluctant to offer assistance. The United States, most notably, has yet to renew cooperation with Mali’s armed forces. “Any eventual resumption of assistance to the Malian military will prioritize security sector reform, professional norms, the reassertion of civilian authority, accountability mechanisms, and the rule of law,” a U.S. Department of State spokesperson said in September 2013.<sup>16</sup>

12 “La révolte du premier bataillon malien formé par l’Union européenne,” *La Croix*, June 14, 2013.

13 “Une attaque par des soldats maliens d’un camp militaire de ‘Bérets rouges’ à Bamako fait plusieurs blessés,” *Les Echos*, February 8, 2013; “Au Mali, l’armée humiliée engage sa refondation,” *Le Monde*, July 12, 2013.

14 On the history of the “militiary” strategy in Mali, see Martin van Vliet, “The Challenges of Retaking Northern Mali,” *CTC Sentinel* 5:11-12 (2012). According to Colonel El Hajj Ag Gamou, one of the Malian army’s top commanders in the north, the government of Amadou Toumani Touré (president from 2002-2012) had a tacit agreement with AQIM not to molest the group as long as it did not carry out hostile acts on Malian soil. See Isabelle Lasserre and Thierry Oberlé, *Notre Guerre Secrète au Mali* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), p. 101.

15 “Mali: Preliminary Findings of a Four-Week Mission: Serious Human Rights Abuses Continue,” Amnesty International, June 7, 2013.

16 “U.S. Lifts Restrictions on Bilateral Assistance to Mali,” U.S. Department of State, September 2013.

#### Corruption

Nepotism, graft, and lack of discipline in the army merely reflect the wider pattern of venality within the Malian state. Donor governments, convinced that the country was on the right track after its 1991 transition to democracy, were largely willing to overlook this problem. The subsequent influx of international assistance only made matters worse, rendering Mali’s government utterly dependent on foreign aid and unaccountable to its people.<sup>17</sup> A culture of impunity emerged, such that public officials caught abusing their office ran little risk of losing their jobs, let alone going to prison. President Keita has represented himself as a reformer who will clean out the “Augean stables” in Bamako, and declared 2014 “the anti-corruption year.” He arrested magistrates and the head of the national lottery; his anti-corruption czar issued a report detailing tens of millions of dollars of losses from state coffers due to embezzlement for 2012 alone.<sup>18</sup>

Previous presidents, however, all announced anti-corruption drives amid great fanfare but without significant impact. It remains to be seen whether Keita’s administration will succeed where its predecessors failed. One of the most worrisome forms of corruption is the growing trend of land expropriation in and around Bamako and other Malian cities: members of Mali’s *classe politique* have often been able to count on the complicity of dishonest officials to force poor families off their property, and the problem has become widespread enough for civil society leaders and human rights groups to take notice.<sup>19</sup>

Public faith in the state’s ability to uphold the rule of law has ebbed tremendously, and not only in the north. While the brutal punishments inflicted by jihadist groups in northern Mali generated considerable

17 Isaline Bergamaschi, “Mali: How to Avoid Making the Same Mistakes,” *Good Governance Africa*, April 1, 2013.

18 Thierry Oberlé, “Au Mali, IBK lance la lutte contre la corruption,” *Le Figaro*, January 10, 2014; Mamadou Fofana, “IBK à propos de la lutte contre la corruption: ‘J’ai déjà remis 100 dossiers à la justice,’” *L’Indépendant*, January 11, 2014.

19 Adama Dao, “Journée mondiale de l’habitat au Mali: Mettre fin aux expulsions forcées,” *Le 26 Mars*, October 12, 2013; Madiassa Diakitè, “Spéculation foncière: le Mali sur une poudrière?” *Le Républicain*, January 9, 2014.

international outrage in 2012, few outside of Mali paid attention to the upsurge in lynching of suspected thieves throughout the country—a phenomenon that began well before the 2012 crisis.<sup>20</sup> In many neighborhoods in Bamako, anyone accused of theft faces the threat of being doused in gasoline and set alight by a mob.<sup>21</sup> Residents have so little trust in law enforcement's effectiveness that they have removed suspects from police custody expressly to see them lynched.<sup>22</sup>

The harsh justice exacted by AQIM and its allies can only be understood against the backdrop of chaos that has prevailed throughout Mali for many years, abetted by crooked elites and negligent officials. The jihadists, while they controlled the city of Timbuktu, were disliked for their ideology but tolerated for bringing order. “Whether the person is white or black, they are lashed with the same whip,” one resident told a journalist.<sup>23</sup> If AQIM commander Abu Zeid was a bloodthirsty zealot, he was perceived as an honest one, and he even paid off his local debts before fleeing Gao last year ahead of the French advance.<sup>24</sup> Many Malians would not expect the same of their political leaders, who often appear to citizens as not only incapable of ensuring justice, but actively opposed to it.

### Conclusion

President Keita must make significant progress if he wants to restore his people's faith in the Malian state, its ability to uphold the law, and its willingness to protect the weak against the predations of the powerful. While Keita's rhetoric has been encouraging, some of his actions risk repeating the mistakes of his predecessors. In recent legislative elections, his party backed several northern candidates connected to Tuareg rebels, leading some to suspect that he seeks to co-opt

northern elites instead of fostering an open, inclusive dialogue to air long-held grievances.<sup>25</sup> Under the previous government, a similar divide-and-rule strategy created short-term stability, but it undermined long-term stability by further weakening the state and leaving northern populations dependent on trafficking and other illicit activities for survival, which paved the way for rebellion.<sup>26</sup>

The country's future, however, is not entirely in Keita's hands. Mali's international supporters have been slow to match their promises of support with action. MINUSMA remains chronically underfunded and undermanned (its troop strength currently stands at half of its authorized 12,600 total).<sup>27</sup> As of October 2013, a substantial portion of the aid funds pledged for Mali have yet to be disbursed. Aid from some key donors, including Canada, has been suspended since the 2012 coup.

In the meantime, northern Mali remains volatile. Sporadic rocket and improvised explosive device attacks, as well as car bombings, have occurred in Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, killing civilians and MINUSMA peacekeepers. The jihadist groups that fled the field of battle early last year have not given up the fight, and could simply be awaiting the departure of French forces before reasserting themselves on the ground. As France's military operation in Mali draws down, it is clear that until the Malian government offers basic services and earns the respect of more of its citizens, the terrorist threat will persist for the foreseeable future.

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20 Bruce Whitehouse, “A Festival of Brigands: In Search of Democracy and Political Legitimacy in Mali,” *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 35:2 (2013).

21 Bruce Whitehouse, “Vigilante Democracy,” *Bridges from Bamako* blog, April 12, 2012.

22 Ibid.

23 Jon Lee Anderson, “State of Terror: What Happened When an Al Qaeda Affiliate Ruled in Mali,” *New Yorker*, July 1, 2013.

24 “Aqmi: la face cachée du chef terroriste Abou Zeid,” *Radio France Internationale*, February 24, 2013.

25 “Mali: Reform or Relapse,” International Crisis Group, January 10, 2014.

26 Peter Tinti, “Illicit Trafficking and Instability in Mali: Past, Present and Future,” *The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, January 2014.

27 “Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Mali,” p. 11.

## The In Amenas Attack in the Context of Southern Algeria's Growing Social Unrest

By Hannah Armstrong

IN JANUARY 2013, 32 militants seized control of the Tigentourine gas plant at In Amenas in southern Algeria, beginning a four-day siege that killed dozens of foreign hostages. In agreement with early statements by Algerian officials, investigators from Norway's national oil company, Statoil, concluded it was “likely that the terrorists benefited from some insider knowledge in their planning of the attack.”<sup>1</sup> The plant—a joint venture among Norway's Statoil, BP, and the Algerian public hydrocarbons company Sonatrach—was guarded by the Algerian military, and it accounted for 10% of Algeria's natural gas production, generating revenues of approximately \$5 million per day.<sup>2</sup>

Survivors said that while militants lacked crucial technical details,<sup>3</sup> they appeared well-informed about the facility. They knew, for example, the location of the management office, when top management would arrive, that high-level executives would be, unusually, on site,<sup>4</sup> and how to kill the electricity within the first few minutes of the attack.<sup>5</sup> In addition to agreeing that insider knowledge was a key component in the attack, Algerian officials and Statoil investigators also

1 “The In Amenas Attack, Report of the Investigation into the Terrorist Attack on In Amenas,” Statoil, February 2013, available at [www.statoil.com/en/NewsAndMedia/News/2013/Downloads/In%20Amenas%20report.pdf](http://www.statoil.com/en/NewsAndMedia/News/2013/Downloads/In%20Amenas%20report.pdf).

2 Geoff D. Porter, “The New Resource Regionalism in North Africa and the Sahara,” *SciencesPo/CERI*, July 2013.

3 The militants reportedly did not know how to restart the flow of gas, which might have enabled them to blow up the plant. See Paul Sonne and Benoit Faucon, “Algeria Probes Possible Role of Local Workers in Attacks,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 2013.

4 According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “Top executives there at the time included Statoil's country manager in Algeria; a senior London-based executive from BP; the top adviser and former vice president of JGC; and all three senior on-site managers for BP, Statoil and Sonatrach. A number of those executives died.” See *ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

concluded in unison that there was no direct link between a six-month strike at the Tigentourine plant, which had succeeded in shutting down the facility in the lead-up to the attack, and the attack itself.<sup>6</sup>

This article provides an analysis of the In Amenas attack that situates the event within the context of recent momentum-gaining social movements in southern Algeria. These movements are not in and of themselves radical, but reflect a growing disenchantment with the Algerian state's ability to fulfill the functions expected of it in the south, such as providing employment opportunities and development, and curbing corruption. It is only the coarsest interpretation that views counterterrorism in southern Algeria as a matter of killing militants; mapping terrorism onto the failure of peaceful movements to achieve significant change and reform, on the other hand, may reveal root reasons for radicalization and subsequent policy measures to address them.

#### Rising Discontent in Southern Algeria

Algeria stands out among Arab and African states for its hard-won competence in counterterrorism, having defeated various terrorist groups between 1993 and 2003 and overseen a transition from civil war to peace since then. Today, the jihadist threat, which during the "black decade" hailed largely from northern Algeria, has changed. Southern, Saharan *katibas* (battalions), which were formed in Algeria during the 1990s but played a negligible role at that time, launched the careers of a new generation of leaders such as Abu Zeid and Mokhtar Belmokhtar.<sup>7</sup> Both built jihadist support networks on the backs of criminal smuggling networks in the Sahara, and served as key figures in the seizure of northern Mali by a trio of al-Qa`ida-linked groups. Abu Zeid was reported killed by intervention forces in northern Mali in February 2013.<sup>8</sup> Belmokhtar went on to mastermind the attack on the Tigentourine gas facility

as well as a fresh round of attacks four months later upon French mining facilities in northern Niger and upon Nigerien security forces.<sup>9</sup> Belmokhtar hails from the southern Algerian city of Ghardaia,<sup>10</sup> which though situated squarely in the Sahara, functions as a gateway between southern and northern Algeria.

The rise of Islamist terrorist attacks in southern Algeria can only be understood within a larger framework. Apart from smuggling, recent radicalization in southern Algeria can be attributed to the social and economic grievances of the marginalized southern population. Since 2011, southern Algeria has witnessed an unprecedented largely

**“The current challenge for Algerian stability in the south lies within the grey area that separates peaceful protest from radicalized violence.”**

peaceful protest movement, centered on demands to address unemployment, fight corruption, and improve development in Ouargla, Laghouat and Ghardaia—the three largest cities that border the gas and oil extraction zones of Hassi Rmmel and Hassi Messoud.<sup>11</sup> In defiance of defamatory claims that its goal was secession and its adherents terrorists, the protest movement has remained mostly peaceful, although at times reaching riotous peaks. Perceived corruption and inequality in the extractive industries, the most high profile economic activity in a zone that suffers from a dearth of economic opportunities, played a key role in animating protests in southern Algeria as well as in numerous other sites in North Africa and the Sahara in the past several years.<sup>12</sup> Aware

that being written off in the national press as violent radicals or separatists would prevent them from being taken seriously, protesters sought to fend off criticism by, for example, singing the national anthem and waving flags during a sit-in in front of the mayor's office in Ouargla.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, militants may prey upon the despair that results when peaceful means of struggle are repressed or remain unaddressed. Yacine Zaid, a leader of the southern protest movement, was imprisoned in Ouargla in October 2012. Among more than 100 people sharing a space in jail, he said, were drug dealers, Islamic radicals who had kidnapped the governor of Illizi, arms traffickers, civil society activists, and petty criminals.<sup>14</sup> In the prison, he saw the influence of religious extremists spread among the inmates:

They won't tell you the terrorists are right, but they won't tell you they're wrong...there is a [tacit] approval, that these are men of God who stand up for their ideas. They say, "they're right, it's not normal what we're suffering the people of the south," so they start to lean towards the bad kind of struggle.<sup>15</sup>

He added that "youths who see that the peaceful movement will not succeed are tempted by other means. The terrorists are everywhere and nowhere."<sup>16</sup>

Ali Arhab, a salaried Sonatrach worker and trade union leader at the Hassi Rmmel gas facility, described the difficult conditions at the extractive industry plants in the desert, where 99% of workers are men. "It's like a barracks, like an open-sky prison—

areas in North Africa and the Sahara. He pointed out that "protests for more employment opportunities, better education, and better infrastructure have focused on the extractive industries because it is often the most high profile economic activity in a region that suffers from a deficit of economic opportunities." See Porter.

<sup>13</sup> Walid Ait Said, "Les chômeurs du sud ont manifesté dans la sérénité et la vigilance; Une leçon de patriotisme," *L'Expression*, March 16, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Personal interview, Yacine Zaid, Algiers, Algeria, January 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; "The In Amenas Attack, Report of the Investigation into the Terrorist Attack on In Amenas."

<sup>7</sup> For more on this, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Fractured Jihadi Movement in the Sahara," Hudson Institute, January 8, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Erlanger, "France Confirms the Death of a Qaeda Leader in Mali," *New York Times*, March 23, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> "Mokhtar Belmokhtar 'Masterminded' Niger Suicide Bombs," BBC, May 24, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> "Profile: Mokhtar Belmokhtar," BBC, June 4, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this, see "The Protest Movement of the Unemployed in Southern Algeria," Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, May 14, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> North Africa scholar Geoff D. Porter shed light on how mining facilities are perceived in underdeveloped desert

even if you are free, there is nowhere to go,” he explained.<sup>17</sup> Employees belong to different ranks depending on where they are from: expatriates working as mechanics or operators, Arhab said, earn three to four times more than the salaried Algerians—most of whom hail from northern Algeria—who fill the very same roles.<sup>18</sup> One rank lower, Arhab said, are the contractors—in catering, transport, and lodging—who in turn make three to four times less than salaried Algerians.<sup>19</sup> It is in contracting that locals, or Saharans, are most likely to find employment. It is the contractors who were on strike at the Tigentourine facility in the lead-up to the terrorist attack. “[Saharan] contract workers are much more of a risk than [salaried] Sonatrach workers,” Ali said.<sup>20</sup>

Southern youths are motivated to achieve stable, salaried careers within extractive industry installations. The prevalent negative stereotypes of southern youths being “lazy” and only seeking jobs that will allow them to sit all day, as security guards or drivers, are false, according to Leah Bittat, an American who set up a career center in Ouargla with countering violent extremism funding from the U.S. Embassy in Algiers.<sup>21</sup> The students travel from all over the south, including Illizi on the Libyan border and El Oued, to attend the regional university in Ouargla, and tend to have a much higher level of English than northern Algerians as well as a higher level of initiative, she said.<sup>22</sup> Bittat stated there was a high demand for the career center services, which focus on preparing local university students to enter the private sector extractive industry job market. The service ended up registering 10 times more students a month than it planned, and all training sessions were standing room only. The Algerian economy is slowly transitioning toward a more liberal model, and the private sector is making efforts to better prepare

southern Algerians for the job market. Anadarko, for example, has agreed to fund and expand the Ouargla university career center after March 2014.<sup>23</sup>

#### The Risks in Stifling Peaceful Protests

Grievances that first seek redress in the form of peaceful protest may sour and turn radical if handled carelessly or with coercion. Lamine Bencheneb, a man from Illizi in southeastern Algeria, began as a peaceful protester on behalf of the rights of southerners to employment and development, but died last year in the attack on Tigentourine, which he helped mastermind.<sup>24</sup> Belmokhtar’s group, an offshoot of an offshoot of al-Qa`ida, managed to deploy a couple of blond Canadians in the Tigentourine attack, and received a majority of the media attention as a result, yet it was Bencheneb’s group, Sons of the Sahara for Islamic Justice, that connected with local driver contractors working inside the gas complex, who provided insider knowledge used in the attacks.<sup>25</sup>

Another southern Algerian group calling itself Sons of the Sahara began releasing confused jihadist-style YouTube videos replete with Kalashnikov rifles months after the Tigentourine attack, asserting “Saharan” as a nationality, yet denying that its goal is independence.<sup>26</sup> According to the video, the first of the three concrete demands is “justice with regard to the natural resources that come from the Sahara.”<sup>27</sup> Reflecting the ambiguity of the southern population’s status with regard to the state, the speaker said: “We have reached a point where we prefer death to life as Algerians under the domination of your laws!”<sup>28</sup>

The tragic trajectory of Lamine Bencheneb and the appearance of new Sons of the Sahara videos demonstrate that the current challenge for Algerian stability in the south lies within the

grey area that separates peaceful protest from radicalized violence. They also reveal the centrality of the extractive industries—as either a symbol or a target—to both ideological frameworks. The Tigentourine attack came as a particular shock, as it was the first time terrorists had targeted an extractive industries installation in Algeria. In this sense, it uniquely reflects how the threat has migrated from the north of the country in the 1990s to the south in the present day.

#### Conclusion

Two overlapping but distinct narratives emerged in the early hours of the Tigentourine attack. On the one hand, Belmokhtar’s group issued classically transnational demands for the withdrawal of Western intervention forces from Mali and the release of Aafia Siddiqui and the “blind shaykh” from prison<sup>29</sup>; on the other hand, the Sons of the Sahara called upon the youth of Algeria “to respond to injustice and aggression” by overthrowing the Algerian regime and installing an Islamic state.<sup>30</sup>

Analysis of the attack on the Tigentourine gas plant that narrowly focuses on the narrative of global jihad, or on how insecurity in Libya may have facilitated the coordination and attack, ignores the underlying local context without which the attack cannot be properly understood. Extractive industries in southern Algeria are a central focus of a well-organized, largely peaceful social movement for justice and livelihoods, the repression and ignoring of which risks further fueling radicalization.

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17 Personal interview, Ali Arhab, Algiers, Algeria, January 2014.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Personal interview, Leah Bittat, Algiers, Algeria, January 2014.

22 Ibid. One reason is “because French isn’t their second language.”

23 “Algeria Fact Sheet 2013,” Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, 2013.

24 Ibid.

25 Mounir Boudjemaa, “In Amenas, Révélations sur une attaque terroriste,” *Liberte*, January 19, 2013.

26 This group is distinct from, but linked to, the Sons of the Sahara for Islamic Justice.

27 The video is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZBwAjPLZyU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZBwAjPLZyU).

28 Ibid.

29 Myra MacDonald, “Insight - In Amenas Attack Brings Global Jihad Home to Algeria,” Reuters, January 24, 2013.

30 Duncan Gardham, “Terrorist Group Behind Algerian Gas Plant Attack Filmed Training in the Desert,” *Telegraph*, January 23, 2013.



## Will Terrorism in Libya be Solely Driven by Radical Islamism?

By Geoffrey Howard and Henry Smith

TERRORISM IN NORTH AFRICA and the Middle East is widely portrayed as the domain of violent Islamist groups. This conclusion is reasonable given the record of political violence in North Africa since the colonial period. Libya's experience with terrorism before the 2011 uprising was consistent with this paradigm. There was a campaign of violence in the 1990s against the Mu`ammar Qadhafi-era authorities led by groups inspired by radical, violent interpretations of Sunni Islam,<sup>1</sup> predominantly in the northeast of the country. The authorities at the time used this threat to justify violence and repression against the population, which was also sometimes explained in terms of counterterrorism, and certainly after 9/11 in terms of the U.S. narrative of the global war on terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

Terrorism, and other forms of political violence, has changed starkly since the end of the 2011 conflict. A myopic focus on Islamist radicalism as the sole driving force of terrorism misses the complexities of Libya's politics and society, and the challenges facing Libya's stability, security and internal cohesion.

This article seeks to demonstrate that the range of actors with the capability—and, more importantly, the potential intent—to pursue political violence in forms that could be described as terrorism have increased in Libya, encompassing Islamist extremists, marginalized Arab tribes, and non-Arab ethnic minority groups. This article assesses each of the main groups of actors to demonstrate how their evolving capabilities and degrees of intent to use terrorism as a political tactic are products of a set of interrelated legacies of Qadhafi's capricious ruling system and the 2011

conflict. These legacies include: the lack of functioning state institutions, the atomization of political power, and cleavages and changing power dynamics between Arab tribes and ethnic minorities that were exploited by Qadhafi. These factors have been exacerbated by the realities of conflict and the post-conflict competition for power and influence. Recognizing that the evolution of terrorism in Libya will be inherently linked to the trajectory and inclusiveness of politics, the article also identifies the common factors driving these actors' intent to adopt extremist violence.<sup>3</sup>

### Islamists and Violence

Domestic Islamist groups with a range of political affiliations, ideological positions, degrees of engagement and cooperation with state institutions, and attitudes toward the use of violence have been implicated in terrorist-type incidents and other forms of political violence, most regularly in the northeastern towns of Benghazi and Derna.<sup>4</sup> Ansar al-Shari`a was implicated in the September 2012 attack against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, although it has denied responsibility.<sup>5</sup> The Brigade of the Imprisoned Shaykh `Umar `Abd al-Rahman, a group about which little is known, claimed responsibility for the rocket attack against the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Benghazi in May 2012, accusing the non-governmental organization of attempting to convert internally displaced members of the Tawergha ethnic minority to Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from these incidents, in the vast majority of cases responsibility is not claimed by any group. Unclaimed attacks include a number of assassinations against members of the Qadhafi-era security services, which now exceed

100 deaths since mid-2012.<sup>7</sup> These incidents are attributed to Islamist groups in the northeast who allegedly seek retribution for repression and violence committed against them under Qadhafi.<sup>8</sup> Although this claim is not proven, it is an eminently plausible explanation. The changing relationship between new power centers, in this case Islamist militias, and Qadhafi-era power centers, such as his security forces, is one of the key fault lines in Libya. This fault line has driven political violence between a range of actors in the post-conflict period.<sup>9</sup> It is not the only possible motivation, however, for Islamist groups to adopt violence. Other explanations include fears of political marginalization by other actors, and—particularly for the more ideologically zealous groups, such as Ansar al-Shari`a and those with ideologies comparable to al-Qa`ida—perceptions that their interpretation of Islamic principles is not being respected in the forthcoming constitutional process, or, at a further extreme, their interpretation of Islamic principles is being rejected in favor of political systems perceived as secular or threatening.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, ideologically motivated Islamist groups are just one set of actors whose grievances and perceptions of their interests—be they commercial, political or ideological—being marginalized are likely to drive terrorism. Libya is characterized by the proliferation of local and regional power centers that emerged during and after the 2011 uprising. New power centers are competing for influence and resources with established groups that formed the backbone of Qadhafi's

7 See the various articles in the *Libya Herald*.

8 See Maha Ellawati, "Dead Intelligence Officer Names," *Libya Herald*, September 2, 2012; Pargeter, "The Capture of Abu Anas al-Libi: Reactions and Militancy in Libya."

9 Wolfram Lacher, "Fault Lines of the Revolution," SWP Research Paper, May 2013.

10 Some of Ansar al-Shari`a's statements have reflected an agenda that is hostile toward Libya's political transition and Western interests. One of the group's commanders, Mahmoud al-Barasi, in early December 2013 criticized protesters in Derna as secularists, liberals and proponents of democracy, and attacked Western values and political structures. See Ansar al-Shari`a's twitter feed, available at [www.twitter.com/AnsarShariaa\\_ly](http://www.twitter.com/AnsarShariaa_ly), and "Ansar Al-Sharia Threatens Bloodshed in Libya," *Libya Herald*, November 25, 2013.

3 This article does not seek to apportion blame for past incidents. It also does not assess the potential role of the state's security forces in terrorism.

4 Alison Pargeter, "The Capture of Abu Anas al-Libi: Reactions and Militancy in Libya," *CTC Sentinel* 6:11-12 (2013).

5 David D. Kirkpatrick, "Libyan Militia Blamed for Attack on U.S. Consulate Denies Responsibility," *New York Times*, September 19, 2012.

6 "Red Cross Says One Wounded in Attack on Office in Libya," Agence France-Presse, June 12, 2012.

1 Dirk Vanderwalle, *Libya Since Independence; Oil and State-Building* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1998).

2 Douglas Birch, "Moammar Gaddafi Offered to Help U.S. Fight Against Terrorism," Associated Press, February 25, 2011; Ronald Bruce St John, *Libya From Colony to Revolution* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2012).

patronage networks and his security forces. This struggle for influence has the potential to increase these groups' intent to engage in violence to highlight grievances, put pressure on or disrupt national-level politics, or pursue ideological and other goals. While these dynamics affect Islamist groups—as outlined above—these clashes between pre- and post-conflict power centers affect a broader range of actors.

### Manipulation and Evolution of Relations

#### Among Tribes

Shifting power dynamics among tribes have been among the primary drivers of violence since the end of the 2011 conflict.<sup>11</sup> Many of the factors fueling the violence have political overtones. Local tribes and ethnic groups competed for resources and political influence following the 2011 uprising, during which tribes that had been powerful under King Idris (1951-1969) and earlier attempted to regain their ascendancy over those that had been influential under Qadhafi. Despite initially attempting to reduce the influence of tribes under the banner of “modernization,” Qadhafi fell back on the support of tribal groups to strengthen his political position.<sup>12</sup> He used patronage to promote certain tribes while marginalizing others. In simplified terms, three tribes emerged as key to this strategy: Qadhafi's own Qadhadhfa tribe, which is based primarily in Sebha and Sirte; the Warfalla, which is Libya's largest tribe and whose members are spread throughout the country; and the Merghara, whose members tend to be found largely in the southwest.<sup>13</sup>

Tribes marginalized by Qadhafi have attempted to supersede groups that he favored. In Sebha, for example, the Awlad Suleiman attempted to supplant the Qadhadhfa and other tribes in the city, leading to intermittent outbreaks of violence.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, tribes have

been subject to political stigmatization and reprisal attacks resulting from perceptions that their members were loyal to Qadhafi. Forces from Misrata, for example, have engaged in violent reprisal attacks against the town of Bani Walid—traditionally home to the Warfalla tribe—because of its association with Qadhafi, perceptions that it stands against the 2011 uprising, and long-standing enmity between these communities that pre-dates Qadhafi.<sup>15</sup>

Tribes empowered by the uprising will probably continue attempts to remove Qadhafi-era networks from positions of influence, or seek retribution for past injustices. In turn, these tribes are likely to express discontent to the interim authorities due to their fears that they will become economically marginalized and politically disenfranchised. There is clearly a risk that the exclusion of these groups from the transition could lead them to resort to violence as a political tactic to express their grievances, but also as their sole means of being politically relevant. The recent violence in Sebha appears to be an example of this dynamic.<sup>16</sup>

#### Relationships Between Arabs and Ethnic Minorities

Comparable to how relationships among Arab tribes were manipulated, Libya's three main ethnic minorities—the Amazigh (Berber), Tubu and Tuareg populations—were also marginalized and instrumentalized to different degrees by Qadhafi. Unsurprisingly, these groups have taken advantage of their newfound freedom and political space to cement their influence and guarantee their interests. When these groups perceive that their interests are not being adequately represented or respected, or that they are being

actively marginalized by the majority Arab population, their intent to engage in violence may increase.

There are important differences between Libya's ethnic minorities, but their political demands are fairly consistent: cultural and linguistic rights and recognition in the new constitution, with mechanisms to guarantee that these are preserved and protected. At the same time, these groups have attempted

**“Tribes empowered by the uprising will probably continue attempts to remove Qadhafi-era networks from positions of influence, or seek retribution for past injustices.”**

to increase their enfranchisement in the formal and informal economies, for instance through employment in the energy sector and control of the smuggling trade.<sup>17</sup> These dynamics have caused significant violence, as well as disruption affecting the state and other non-state actors.

Some notable examples of violence occurred in the southeastern town of Kufra between the Tubu and the Zwai tribe, in the southwestern town of Sebha between various Arab tribes and ethnic minorities, and in Ghadames between the local Arab and Tuareg populations.<sup>18</sup> Such violence reflects competition between different actors for political and commercial influence, particularly it seems with the Tubu, who achieved ascendancy in the regions south of Sebha through their control of the southern borders and cross-border smuggling.<sup>19</sup> Competition for control

*Libya Herald*, March 11, 2013.

15 Government-aligned militias in effect laid siege to the town for around a month from early October 2012, and launched rocket attacks and other military strikes against it. The offensive was fueled by tensions between the town and neighboring Misrata, which worsened following the death in September 2012 of Omran Shaban, the Misratan militia member credited with capturing Qadhafi in October 2011. Shaban had been abducted in July 2012 and was subsequently tortured by elements from Bani Walid. See “Clashes in Ex-Gadhafi Bastion Bani Walid,” BBC, October 21, 2012.

16 “Clashes Leave 88 Dead in Libya,” Agence France-Presse, January 25, 2014.

11 Wolfram Lacher, “The Rise of Tribal Politics” in Jason Pack ed., *The 2011 Libyan Uprising and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

12 Dirk Vanderwalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

13 Hanspeter Mattes, “Formal and Informal Authority in Libya Since 1969” in Dirk Vandewalle ed., *Libya since 1969* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

14 “Tense Calm in Sebha After Six Days of Clashes,” *Libya Herald*, January 4, 2013; “Four Die in Sebha Clashes,”

17 Jamal Adel, “Demonstrators Quit Sarir Power Station After Successful Negotiations,” *Libya Herald*, January 16, 2014.

18 Rebecca Murray, “Tribal War Simmers in Libya's Desert,” Inter Press Service, October 11, 2012; “Uneasy Calm in Sebha After Clashes,” IRIN, May 14, 2012; Marcus Rhinelander, “Distrust in Ghadames as Tuareg Dream of a New City,” *Libya Herald*, April 7, 2012.

19 See Henry Smith, “The South” in Pack.

of lucrative smuggling networks and informal economic activity has been a major cause of violence.<sup>20</sup> Another example is the violence between the Amazigh residents of the northwestern town of Zuwarah and the Arab residents of the neighboring towns of Jmail and Rigdalin.<sup>21</sup> This reflects Qadhafi's repression of Libya's Amazigh population, and the perception among the Amazigh that people from Jmail and Rigdalin took part in this repression and benefited from preferential employment patterns in the energy sector under the former leader.<sup>22</sup>

Libya does not have a history of ethno-nationalist uprisings or rebellions comparable to countries in the Sahel, such as Mali and Niger. Political violence linked to ethnic minorities' marginalization and disenfranchisement, however, occurred both before and after the 2011 uprising.<sup>23</sup> As such, perceptions of marginalization would encourage groups to engage in violence, or potentially increase separatist sentiment. The process of drafting Libya's new constitution will be a key indicator as to whether the minorities' demands for cultural and political rights will be respected; an exclusive focus on Libya's Arab identity or a lack of protection for non-Arab culture and languages will be indicators that these demands are being ignored.

### Conclusion

The fragmentation of post-conflict Libya means that there is a broad range of actors that have the capability to engage in political violence. Such violence has taken forms that can be labeled terrorism. Capacity shortfalls in centralized security provision, coupled with the widespread availability of weapons, means that these groups can act with relative impunity while the state struggles to gain a monopoly over the use of force. Despite the legacy and complexity of relationships among

the state, Islamists, tribes and ethnic minorities, there are commonalities behind the factors driving these different groups to engage in violence. Most importantly, intent to engage in violence will be tied to political developments in the transitional process, and the extent to which the process is inclusive. If groups perceive that their interests are not being adequately represented or that they are being actively marginalized by others during the constitution-drafting process, then they might resort to violence as a political tactic.

It is for this reason that the motivations for Islamist groups to commit violence will not be too dissimilar to the motivations for marginalized tribes and ethnic minority groups, and it would be misguided to focus analysis or policy solely on the former actors. Despite these comparable motivations, these different actors do not currently show many signs of cooperation or coordination. It is plausible, however, that shared discontent among marginalized Arab tribes, ethnic minorities and Islamist groups could encourage their collaboration as the transitional process stutters along. Such a development would be destructive to the nascent Libyan state.

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## Religious Violence in Tunisia Three Years after the Revolution

By Anne Wolf

IN FEBRUARY AND JULY 2013, suspected Islamist extremists assassinated Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi, two left-wing opposition politicians and fierce critics of Tunisia's Islamist Ennahd-led government.<sup>1</sup> In August 2013, the Initiative for Discovering the Truth about the Assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi (IRVA)<sup>2</sup> accused Ennahda and officials at the Ministry of Interior for "complicity in the killings" and "collusion with terrorist movements."<sup>3</sup> The Ennahd-led government vehemently denied the charges. Although most of IRVA's accusations are unverified,<sup>4</sup> they reflect the mood of an increasing number of Tunisians who hold Ennahda responsible for the rise in religiously-motivated violence in Tunisia.<sup>5</sup> This dynamic led to the launch of a National Dialogue in October 2013 that ultimately forced the Islamist-led government out of office.

This article details recent incidents of religious violence in Tunisia, as well as the core domestic and regional factors behind it. It then discusses domestic strategies to counter violent Salafists in

1 "Tunisia Brahmi Killing: 'Same Gun Used' in Belaid Murder," BBC, July 26, 2013; "La liste des terroristes impliqués dans les assassinats de Belaïd et Brahmi," *Leaders*, July 26, 2013.

2 IRVA was established shortly after the assassination of Chokri Belaid. Although it claims to be an independent initiative, IRVA members include mostly relatives and friends of Belaid, as well as opposition party members, most of whom are fiercely opposed to the Islamists.

3 "Assassinats de Belaïd et Brahmi: Laâguili remet des documents à la justice," *La Presse*, October 8, 2013.

4 Most of IRVA's accusations derive from unnamed sources and have not been independently verified. See, for example, Monia Ben Hamadi, "Tunisie: Le gouvernement Larayedh accusé de crime d'Etat après de nouvelles révélations sur l'assassinat de Mohamed Brahmi," *Al Huffington Post Maghreb*, September 20, 2013.

5 Most of Tunisia's opposition parties and the often secular-leaning media outlets have treated IRVA's statements as "revelations" and "independently verified facts." See, for example, "Réactions de figures de l'opposition: Indignations," *La Presse*, October 3, 2013; "Tunisie: L'IRVA livrera demain de nouvelles révélations sur l'assassinat de Belaïd," *Tunisie Numérique*, November 6, 2013.

20 These details are based on the authors' interviews and research conducted in Libya since July 2011.

21 "31 Claimed Dead as Fighting Around Zuara Intensifies," *Libya Herald*, April 3, 2012.

22 "Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts," International Crisis Group, September 14, 2012.

23 A notable pre-2011 conflict example of ethnic violence in Libya was in 2008, when the Tubu and the Qadhafi-era security forces clashed in the southeastern town of Kufra.

Tunisia, and evaluates whether future governments are likely to be more effective in controlling the spread of religious violence. It finds that active collaboration between Tunisia's secular parties and Ennahda should be a priority to launch an effective and long-term strategy to counter religious violence.

#### Recent Incidents of Religious Violence

Since the Tunisian revolution in early 2011, religiously-motivated violence has steadily increased. Until late 2012, however, it was primarily characterized by small scale attacks and vandalism. In June 2012, for example, Tunisian Salafists angered at an arts exhibition they considered blasphemous rioted in Tunis and other cities, throwing rocks and petrol bombs at police stations and other buildings.<sup>6</sup> Yet the real threat of religious violence was first witnessed in September 2012, when protesters outside the U.S. Embassy in Tunis turned violent and attacked the embassy, leaving three people dead.<sup>7</sup>

An unprecedented scale of religious violence was reached with the assassinations of Belaid and Brahmi, incidents that deeply unsettled the country. The government was quick to create a list of suspects and linked Tunisia's Ansar al-Shari'a (AST)<sup>8</sup> to both killings.<sup>9</sup> Yet the speed with which Ennahda presented the names of the suspects, especially at a time when political opposition blamed the Ennahda Party for the killings, should prompt caution.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as no group

has declared responsibility for the killings and investigations appear to be full of loopholes, it is still not entirely clear who is responsible.<sup>11</sup>

Equally worrying, the same month that Brahmi was assassinated, violence in the Mount Chambi area close to the Algerian border came to the fore when eight Tunisian soldiers were shot and their throats slit.<sup>12</sup> Clashes between security forces and al-Qa`ida-linked groups in Mount Chambi have been

**“The attack in Sousse marked the first suicide bombing in Tunisia since the Djerba attack in 2002. These incidents clearly indicate that religiously-motivated violence in Tunisia is not only on the rise, but that attacks are increasingly organized.”**

ongoing since December 2012. In July 2013, a bomb exploded in La Goulette in a car belonging to the National Guard, while a second bomb went off in the town of Mhamdia in Ben Arous Province targeting a security patrol of the National Guard.<sup>13</sup>

In October 2013, a few days after the start of the National Dialogue, a suicide bomber attacked a hotel resort in Sousse, while authorities barely averted another attempted suicide bombing on the mausoleum of Tunisia's first President Habib Bourguiba.<sup>14</sup> The attack in Sousse marked the first suicide bombing in Tunisia since the Djerba attack in 2002. Most recently,

11 Kamel Gadhgadi, who the government accused of both assassinations, was killed during a police raid in early February 2014. See “Alleged Killer of Chokri Belaid Dead,” al-Arabiya, February 4, 2014.

12 Oussama Romdhani, “In Tunisia's Mount Chaambi Attack, Pictures Add to Tragedy,” al-Arabiya, August 4, 2013.

13 NissafSlama, “Second Bomb Targeting National Guard Detonates Near Tunis,” Tunisia Live, July 31, 2013.

14 “Suicide Attack Hits Tunisia Resort Town,” al-Jazira, October 30, 2013.

on February 16, 2014, suspected Islamist militants killed two policemen in the Jendouba area of western Tunisia.<sup>15</sup> These incidents clearly indicate that religiously-motivated violence in Tunisia is not only on the rise, but that attacks are increasingly organized.

#### Domestic Factors of Jihadist Activity in Tunisia

The factors driving the increase in religious violence in Tunisia are complex and include socio-political, economic, and regional dynamics. An important event that contributed to the rise in Salafist activity was the release of all political prisoners, including jihadists, following a general amnesty shortly after the revolution.<sup>16</sup> Ennahda's initial dialogue-seeking strategy, in which they turned a “blind eye” to many instances of small-scale religious violence, also likely helped violent Salafists to evolve, both ideologically and organizationally.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, only following the assassination of Mohammed Brahmi in July 2013 did Ennahda's leaders clearly distance themselves from the AST, declaring it a terrorist organization.<sup>18</sup>

AST's classification as a terrorist organization came despite the fact that many of its members were not jihadists.<sup>19</sup> Alaya Allani, a specialist on radicalization in Tunisia, explained that some Salafists were appalled when they learned the group might be involved in the assassinations, and left AST as a result.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, some members of Ennahda's doctrinal

6 Tarek Amara and Lin Noueihed, “Tunisian Salafi Islamists Riot over ‘Insulting’ Art,” Reuters, June 12, 2012.

7 For more details, see Anne Wolf, “Tunisia: Signs of Domestic Radicalization Post-Revolution,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:1 (2013).

8 AST was founded after the Tunisian revolution by Afghanistan veteran Sayf Allah bin Hussayn, also known as Abu Iyadh. It quickly became Tunisia's main Salafist organization, bringing together up to 5,000 people at its first congress in Kairouan in May 2012. Following the assassination of Mohammed Brahmi, Tunisia declared AST a terrorist organization due to its alleged involvement in the killing. On January 10, 2014, the U.S. Department of State declared AST a foreign terrorist organization.

9 “Tunisia Prime Minister: Ansar al-Sharia Assassinated Belaid and Brahmi,” Middle East Online, August 27, 2013.

10 See Andrew Lebovich and Aaron Zelin, “Alleged Brahmi Killer: Tracing Ties Between Aboubaker el-Hakim, Ansar al-Sharia, and Al-Qaeda,” Tunisia Live, July 26, 2013.

15 “Militants in Tunisia Kill Four, Including Two Police,” BBC, February 16, 2014.

16 “Tunisie: tous les prisonniers politiques auraient été libérés,” *Le Monde*, March 2, 2013.

17 For example, no action was taken when a group of Salafists attacked protesters who expressed solidarity with the owner of Nassma TV, Nabil Karoui, who was accused of violating sacred values. For details, see Roberta Lusardi, “Tunisia's Islamists: Ennahda and the Salafis,” Middle East Policy Council, May 8, 2012.

18 Already in May 2013, the Interior Ministry announced that AST was an illegal organization and that it would prohibit its activities. In August 2013, Prime Minister Ali Larayedh declared AST a terrorist organization, insisting that “anyone belonging to it must face judicial consequences.” See “Tunisia Declares Ansar al-Sharia a Terrorist Group,” BBC, August 27, 2013.

19 Some members of AST, for example, only pursued charity work for the group.

20 They focused solely on *da`wa*. See personal interview, Alaya Allani, Tunis, Tunisia, November 2013.

wing are ideologically close to non-violent Salafists,<sup>21</sup> as are many young Ennahda militants, many of whom never had the opportunity to learn about moderate Islamist ideologies during the repressive regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.<sup>22</sup>

Regardless, many analysts agree that a security approach alone does not help to tackle many of the root causes of radicalization in Tunisia, such as economic marginalization, which is particularly high among the youth. Indeed, university graduates have the highest unemployment rate, which International Monetary Fund statistics placed at 33.5% in late September 2013—almost 10% higher than before the revolution.<sup>23</sup> The extent of the youth's current economic frustration is particularly severe in light of their initial hope for a quick economic recovery following the ousting of Ben Ali.<sup>24</sup>

Political exclusion is another key factor that has made some young Tunisians more prone to religious violence.<sup>25</sup> Most political parties struggle to integrate the youth, and young Tunisians often describe party politics as “sclerotic” and the “same as before.”<sup>26</sup> Immediately after the revolution, many international donors gave money for civil society projects that absorbed some of the youth, but such funding has declined during the past year, leaving even more youth without prospects. Such socio-political

21 For more details, see Anne Wolf, “An Islamist ‘Renaissance’? Religion and Politics in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia,” *Journal of North African Studies* 18:4 (2013).

22 For more details, see Anne Wolf, “The Salafist Temptation: The Radicalization of Tunisia’s Post-Revolution Youth,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:4 (2013). Fabio Merone, for example, insisted that “declaring Ansar al-Sharia a coherent and homogenous terrorist organization is a big mistake.” See Fabio Merone, “One Last Chance for Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia,” *Tunisia Live*, August 30, 2013.

23 These details are from IMF Tunis staff.

24 An Arab Barometer survey conducted shortly after the revolution revealed that 78% of young Tunisians expected the economic situation to improve within the next few years following the revolution. For details, see Alissa Strunk, “Tunisia’s Feuding Youth,” *The Middle East Channel*, August 12, 2013.

25 See Monica Marks, “Youth Politics and Tunisian Salafism: Understanding the Jihadi Current,” *Mediterranean Politics* 8:1 (2013).

26 Personal interviews, youth activists, Tunis, Tunisia, December 2013.

exclusion partly explains why even an increasing number of young Tunisians from middle-class families have joined the Salafist movement.<sup>27</sup> For example, Bizerte, a middle-class coastal city, has one of the highest numbers of jihadists fighting in Syria.<sup>28</sup>

**Regional Factors of Jihadist Activity in Tunisia** Reinforced by criminal cross-border activities, the links between domestic and regional jihadist organizations have become increasingly fluid.<sup>29</sup> In January 2013, authorities were deeply alarmed when 11 of the 32 hostage takers of Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s “Signed-In-Blood Battalion” at the In Amenas gas facility in Algeria were Tunisians.<sup>30</sup> Concern only heightened when Belmokhtar created the al-Qa`ida-affiliated al-Murabitun in August 2013, a merger with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) that aims to pursue jihad against Western targets throughout the region, including in Tunisia.<sup>31</sup> One month after its creation, Tunisian radio station Mosaïque FM reported that around 300 Tunisians have joined al-Murabitun.<sup>32</sup> Although it is impossible to independently verify this possibly exaggerated number, it is beyond a doubt that Tunisians are active members of al-Murabitun, in particular as heightened security measures have recently made jihadist training more difficult in Tunisian territory.<sup>33</sup>

27 This assertion is based on the author’s personal observations in Tunisia. It cannot be proven, as no reliable surveys or similar studies exist.

28 Hazem al-Amin, “Tunisia’s ‘Road to Jihad’ in Syria Paved by Muslim Brotherhood,” *al-Monitor*, October 23, 2013.

29 For details, see “La Tunisie des frontières: jihad et contrebande,” *International Crisis Group*, November 28, 2013.

30 For details, see Anne Wolf and Raphael Lefèvre, “Algeria: No Easy Times for the Generals,” *Journal of North African Studies* 18:3 (2013).

31 Mohammad Ben Ahmad, “North African Terror Groups Merge,” *al-Monitor*, August 26, 2013.

32 Jamel Arfaoui, “Tunisians Join Mourabitounes Terrorist Group,” *Magharebia*, September 20, 2013.

33 On August 30, 2013, Tunisian authorities instituted heightened security measures by creating a buffer zone at the southern borders with Libya and Algeria. Also in August, Tunisian security forces launched a bombing campaign and intensified army patrols in the Mount Chambi area. That being said, the creation of this buffer zone may have limited impact since the vastness of the Sahel makes full control of cross-border activity nearly impossible.

Although activism occurs primarily outside Tunisia,<sup>34</sup> some members of al-Murabitun have been found in the Mount Chambi region where militants close to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leader Abdelmalek Droukdel train.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, as France’s military intervention in northern Mali pushes AQIM fighters toward other countries, security forces have discovered Algerians, Malians and Mauritians in the Tunisian mountains.<sup>36</sup> Some of them have been part of the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade, an AQIM-linked cell the Tunisian interior minister announced dismantled in December 2012<sup>37</sup> but that has been de-facto active in the Mount Chambi region ever since. Some of the Mount Chambi militants have been active members of AST, yet AST leader Abou Iyadh denies any organizational links between them.

Another key cause of the rise in jihadist activity in Tunisia is the increasing number of Tunisians who have traveled to Syria to fight against the Bashar al-Assad regime. Tunisian foreign fighters in Syria have fought alongside the al-Qa`ida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra,<sup>38</sup> as well as the more radical fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Motives for fighting in Syria include ideological conviction, economic opportunities, as well as the prestige and social recognition that jihadists associate with the experience.<sup>39</sup> Jihadism in Syria has been supported by several public figures and imams in Tunisia.<sup>40</sup> A recent estimate by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation placed

34 Libya, especially, has become a site for training and strategic operations following the fall of the Mu`ammar Qadhafi regime.

35 Benjamin Roger, “Tunisie: sur la trace des jihadistes du mont Chaambi,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 7, 2013.

36 “Tunisie, Terrorisme: Les terroristes de Châambi se composaient de 30 individus dont 15 algériens, et 15 maliens, tunisiens et mauritaniens,” *Tunivisions*, August 31, 2013.

37 Monia Ghanmi, “Tunisia Foils al-Qaeda Expansion Plan,” *Magharebia*, December 24, 2012.

38 Aaron Y. Zelin, “Meeting a Returned Tunisian Foreign Fighter from the Syrian Front,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, November 8, 2013.

39 Fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra make \$250-300 a month. For more information, see *ibid*.

40 Amira Masrour, “Syria Claims Tunisian Government Support for Fighters in Syria,” *Tunisia Live*, June 21, 2013.

the number of Tunisian fighters in Syria at 970, making Tunisia the third biggest contributor of foreign fighters after Jordan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>41</sup> This figure is particularly significant when one considers Tunisia's relatively small population. How authorities choose to deal with fighters returning from Syria will partially determine Tunisia's future stability.

### Confronting Jihadists

The Tunisian government has employed a number of measures to counteract Salafi-jihadi activity in the country. To limit the number of Tunisians going to fight in Syria, officials have asked individuals under the age of 35 to show a parental authorization when traveling to Libya or Turkey, as most Tunisians leave for Syria through these two countries.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, on August 30, 2013, authorities ordered the creation of a buffer zone at the southern borders with Libya and Algeria.<sup>43</sup> The creation of this zone, however, may not prevent jihadists from leaving Tunisia since the vastness of the Sahel makes full control of cross-border activities nearly impossible. Also in August, security forces launched an aerial bombing campaign and intensified army patrols in the Mount Chambi area. These efforts have made militant activities more difficult to maintain in Tunisia's mountains, but violent cells have remained operationally close to the Algerian border. Clashes between security forces and jihadists have continued throughout the country.<sup>44</sup>

The legal framework for such counterterrorism operations is Ben Ali's 2003 anti-terrorism law, although the Ministry of Interior has repeatedly announced additional steps toward increased security, including the

creation of anti-terrorist crisis cells.<sup>45</sup> In August 2013, Tunisian Prime Minister Ali Larayedh declared that a national committee to formulate a strategy to combat terrorism would be established.<sup>46</sup> Most of these declarations, however, have not translated into action.

Tunisia also increased coordination with neighboring countries to fight jihadists, especially with Algeria.<sup>47</sup> Deep mistrust between countries in North and West Africa continues to undermine in-depth coordination and multinational strategies, despite the fact that transnational threats emanating from AQIM and al-Murabitun require regional responses.<sup>48</sup>

Security expert Haykel Ben Mahfoudh argued that the absence of a clear and transparent domestic strategy to combat religious violence partially accounts for increased jihadist activity, as post-revolution politics have focused primarily on transitional justice and constitution-drafting. All prior counterterrorism strategies have lacked basic requirements such as a statement of the scope, budget, and overall objective of operations, therefore undermining their effective implementation.<sup>49</sup> Although officials recognize that the fight against religiously-motivated violence needs to also tackle some of the root causes of radicalization—most importantly, youth marginalization—these factors have largely remained unaddressed. Tunisians returning from jihad in Syria have been questioned and some have been imprisoned, but no reintegration policy has been formulated.

45 "Tunisie: création de cellules de crise antiterroristes," Radio France Internationale, March 27, 2013.

46 "Ali Laarayedh: 'Vers la formation d'un conseil consultatif pour la formation d'un comité national de lutte contre le terrorisme,'" Kapitalis, August 6, 2013.

47 "L'Algérie réaffirme son soutien à la Tunisie et à la Libye en insistant sur la sécurité régionale," *Al Huffington Post Maghreb*, December 7, 2013; Jamel Arfaoui, "Collaboration algéro-tunisienne contre le terrorisme," *Magharebia*, August 5, 2013.

48 For more information, see Raphael Lefèvre, "Commentary on Current Events," *Journal of North African Studies* 18:5 (2013).

49 Personal interview, Haykel Ben Mahfoudh, security expert, Tunis, Tunisia, November 2013.

### Conclusion

A unified strategy to combat religiously-motivated violence in Tunisia seems distant. Tunisia's political environment remains divided, and major opposition parties have criticized the nomination of Mehdi Jomaa as interim prime minister on December 14, 2013. There are even splits within Tunisia's Ministry of Interior, which has manifested in sensitive information being leaked to opposition politicians and newspapers critical of Ennahda.<sup>50</sup> Secular parties are still struggling to form coalitions, and are strategizing to form coalitions based around an anti-Islamist (or, anti-Ennahda) stance rather than an elaborate security program, in order to attract votes. Little change to the status quo can be expected until these coalitions solidify. The election of Jomaa is unlikely to change much in that respect, as his main duties consist of organizing the next elections.

The finalization of the constitution is a sign of hope that Tunisia's Islamists and more secular parties might be able to collaborate eventually, despite mutual distrust. Further collaboration should be a priority, as the only ones who have benefited from political crisis and stagnation so far are the jihadists; political and economic disillusionment can push some Tunisians toward jihadist activity, and the failure to develop a concrete security policy prevents effective action against jihadist groups. If cooperation can be achieved, Tunisia could launch the wide-ranging political, socio-economic and security reforms that are needed to tackle the root causes of radicalization, establish reintegration programs for fighters returning from Syria, and pave the way for an effective strategy against jihadists currently operating in Tunisia.

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50 Documents purportedly leaked by Tunisian security officials allege that U.S. intelligence informed the Ministry of Interior about a plan by extremists to assassinate Brahmi. The then-minister of interior, Lofi Ben Jeddou, claimed that the information was withheld from him. See Asma Smadhi, "Leaks Prompt Inquiry into Brahmi Assassination," *Tunisia Live*, September 18, 2013.

## Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria

By Jacob Zenn

IN MAY 2013, NIGERIAN security forces launched a military offensive targeting Boko Haram's safe havens after President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in northeastern Nigeria. Despite an initial reduction in Boko Haram attacks, the militant group reestablished a base in Borno State, along Nigeria's border with Cameroon, and killed more civilians than in any period since its first attack under leader Abubakar Shekau in September 2010.<sup>2</sup>

Although Shekau is Boko Haram's most visible leader, recent Boko Haram and Ansaru operations suggest that Shekau is not the only leader. This article examines other militant leaders who contributed to the operational and ideological development of Boko Haram and Ansaru, but specifically focuses on Khalid al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur. The article also discusses Adam Kamar, who may have been in contact with Usama bin Ladin; Abu Muhammed, whose kidnapping cell targeted foreigners in northern Nigeria; and Kabiru Sokoto and Habibu Bama, who attacked churches in Nigeria's Middle Belt region.<sup>3</sup>

1 Boko Haram identifies itself as Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da'wa wa al-Jihad, meaning "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" in Arabic. Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf differed from mainstream Nigerian Islamists by prohibiting Western-style education and service in Nigeria's secular government.

2 According to Shekau, killing civilians for the purpose of "conquering and taking their money follows verses of the Qur'an" about *ghanima*, or spoils of war, that "we take from our enemies in the battle we fight in the name of Allah." Boko Haram carried out sporadic attacks before Shekau took over leadership of Boko Haram in July 2010, but its first attack after Shekau became leader was on September 7, 2010, when approximately 50 fighters attacked Bauchi prison and freed more than 100 Boko Haram members. See Sani Muhd Sani, "Attack On Bauchi Prison - Boko Haram Frees 721 Inmates," *Leadership*, September 8, 2010.

3 Nigeria's "Middle Belt," which includes Kaduna, Jos (Plateau State), and Abuja, is a region of central Nigeria populated by diverse ethnic groups. It is where majority Muslim northern Nigeria and majority Christian southern Nigeria meet and clash, particularly over land use

It finds that Khalid al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur are uniquely capable of expanding Boko Haram's international connections to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabab, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO),<sup>4</sup> Mokhtar Belmokhtar's factions,<sup>5</sup> al-Qa`ida core and other militant groups in Africa. On the local level, al-Barnawi and mid-level commanders from Ansaru are likely operating with Shekau and Boko Haram, but Nur's ideological disagreements with Shekau may inhibit his followers from collaborating with Boko Haram at this time.

### Muhammad Yusuf's Disciples

Before 2009, Abubakar Shekau was the deputy of Boko Haram leader Muhammad Yusuf, while Mamman Nur, who reportedly introduced Shekau to Yusuf, was Yusuf's third-in-command.<sup>6</sup> The three met as theology students in Borno.<sup>7</sup> Yusuf admired the Taliban, Usama bin Ladin and al-Qa`ida (particularly AQIM), while Shekau preached *takfiri* (excommunication) ideology, but they both focused on their native Nigeria.<sup>8</sup> Nur, who is Cameroonian,<sup>9</sup> may have had an

and during election season.

4 MUJAO was the governing authority in Gao, Mali, in 2012 and early 2013, but has also carried out operations in Timbuktu and Kayes, Mali, Algeria, Niger and Mauritania. See Andrew Lebovich, "Trying to Understand MUJWA," al-Wasat blog, August 22, 2012.

5 Belmokhtar's Katibat al-Mulathimin (Veiled Brigades) announced it merged with MUJAO in August 2013 into a new group called al-Murabitun. Belmokhtar, however, ceded leadership of al-Murabitun to an unnamed commander who reportedly fought against both the Soviets and the United States in Afghanistan. See Bakari Gueye, "Belmokhtar, MUJAO Launch New Jihadist Group," *Magharebia*, August 25, 2013.

6 "How Nur, Shekau Run Boko Haram," *Vanguard*, September 3, 2011; "Profile of Nigeria's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau," BBC, June 4, 2013.

7 "Profile of Nigeria's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau."

8 *Takfiri* ideology is the practice of declaring other Muslims infidels. In his pre-2009 sermons, Shekau cited Salafists, such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Wahhab, to argue that any Muslim who pledged allegiance to the Nigerian flag instead of Islamic symbols or associated with Christians was an infidel. See "Mallam Abubakar Shekau," YouTube, undated.

9 Although some reports suggest Nur is Chadian, he is most often described as Cameroonian. The prominent Shaykh Ibrahim Mbombo Mubarak of the Central Mosque in Douala, Cameroon, also said that Nur is Cam-

eroonian. See "Boko Haram Infiltrates Cameroon," *Cameroononline.org*, January 11, 2012.

incentive to regionalize Boko Haram's ideology, and he was the mastermind of the bombing of the UN Headquarters in Abuja on August 26, 2011.<sup>10</sup>

Nigerian security forces killed Yusuf and 800 of his followers, who called themselves "Yusufiya,"<sup>11</sup> in clashes in July 2009.<sup>12</sup> After this, AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel offered his "Salafist brothers" in Nigeria "men, weapons, and ammunition to gain revenge on Nigeria's ruling Christian minority" for killing "the martyr Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf" and the deaths of Muslims in clashes with Christians in the Middle Belt.<sup>13</sup>

Dozens of Yusuf's followers fled Nigeria, including the future commander in Kaduna, Abu Muhammed, who trained in Algeria under the Nigerian Khalid al-Barnawi,<sup>14</sup> the latter of whom was

eronian. See "Boko Haram Infiltrates Cameroon," *Cameroononline.org*, January 11, 2012.

10 Nur said, for example, that "replacing the Shari'a from Usman dan Fodio's jihad" in Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon with the "European secular constitution caused poverty and misery." During the early 1800s, Usman dan Fodio, a Fulani, led a revolt against the Hausa kingdoms in what is now southern Niger, northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon and subsequently established an Islamic caliphate based in Sokoto. Dan Fodio believed the rulers of the Hausa states were mixing Islam with aspects of traditional religions, which is a practice he wanted to eliminate. For details, see Jacob Zenn and Atta Barkindo, "Religious Roots of Boko Haram," Council on Foreign Relations, May 9, 2013; Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf, "Tarihini Musulmai (History of Muslims)," YouTube, undated; Jide Ajani, "UN House Blast: Mastermind, Nur, Declared Wanted," *Vanguard*, September 1, 2011.

11 "Yusufiya" means the "followers of Yusuf."

12 "Boko Haram Leader, Yusuf, Killed," *Vanguard*, July 30, 2009; Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Radical Ideologue: An In-Depth Look at Northern Nigeria's Abu Shekau," *Militant Leadership Monitor*, September 1, 2011.

13 Droukdel also praised "Brother Farouk," the 20-year-old Nigerian who attempted to blow up a Detroit-bound airliner on Christmas Day 2009 on behalf of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) was the only other al-Qa`ida affiliate to condemn the killing of Yusuf. See "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Condolence, Support and Comfort for our Brothers and People in Nigeria 20/08/09," available at [www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=11556](http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=11556); "North Africa Qaeda Offers to Help Nigerian Muslims," Reuters, February 1, 2010.

14 Al-Barnawi's *nisba* of Barnawi (the Bornoan) indicates that either he or his descendants are from Borno.

Mokhtar Belmokhtar's longtime kidnapping and smuggling accomplice.<sup>15</sup> Another follower, Adam Kamar, who was arrested in Kano in 2007 after training with AQIM in Algeria, met al-Barnawi in Algeria in 2011, but became the leader of an AQIM training camp.<sup>16</sup>

Nur was one of Yusuf's few followers who fled to East Africa (reportedly to Somalia) and trained with al-Shabab and AQIM militants.<sup>17</sup> Kamar was based in Kano, served as the "main link" between Boko Haram and AQIM and al-Shabab, and also financed training for Nigerians with AQIM in Mali for attacks on "Western interests" in Nigeria that Nur would later carry out.<sup>18</sup> Kamar

A *nisba* identifies a person's place of origin, tribal affiliation or ancestry. The author interviewed a Mauritanian with contacts to AQIM members who said al-Barnawi was the person who ordered the murders of more than 10 Mauritanian soldiers in Lemgheity, Mauritania, in a Belmokhtar-led operation with the GSPC in 2006.

<sup>15</sup> After his arrest, Kabiru Sokoto reportedly said that "the leader of Boko Haram, Imam Abubakar Shekau, is calling the shots from Borno State, while another key strategist, Abu Muhammed, is in charge of North Central [Kaduna]." See "Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram's Leaders," *The Nation*, February 14, 2012; "Exclusif...Mort des deux otages occidentaux tués au Nigeria: Une source d'AQMI livre quelques détails," Agence Nouakchott d'Information, March 10, 2012; "Suspects Charged in Nigeria Bombing," al-Jazeera, December 25, 2011; "Taking the Hostage Road," *Africa Confidential*, March 15, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> The U.S. government subsequently listed both al-Barnawi and Kamar as specially designated terrorists. See "Barnawi, Kamar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties," Agence France-Presse, June 21, 2012; "Revealed: Wanted Suspect Arrested, Released in 2007," *This Day*, September 2, 2011; "Five Nigerians on Terror Charges," BBC, November 27, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> "JTF Claims 'Global Terrorist' Kamar Killed," *Vanguard*, June 7, 2013; "Letter Dated 12 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations, July 12, 2013; Jemaal Oumar, "AQIM Link to Abuja Suicide Bombing," Magharebia, September 9, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> According to *Africa Confidential*, Kamar "returned to Nigeria and settled in Kano, where he is said to have received messages from Usama bin Ladin. An Ansaru source who was close to Kamar claims that there was only one intermediary between Ansaru and Bin Ladin, and his then deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, now al-Qa`ida's leader." See "Bin Laden Files Show al-Qaida and Taliban Leaders in Close Contact," *Guardian*, April 29, 2012; Bashir Adigun, "Nigeria Government Freed Bomb Suspect," Associated Press, September 1, 2011; "JTF Claims 'Global Terrorist' Kamar Killed"; "Taking

may have facilitated Nur's meeting with the two African al-Qa`ida affiliates, as well as Nur's return to Kano in early 2011.

Shekau was shot and detained during the July 2009 clashes, which allowed Nur to become leader until Nur left Nigeria and Shekau was released from custody.<sup>19</sup> In July 2010, Shekau announced from a hideout in Borno that he succeeded Yusuf and formed Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad,<sup>20</sup> although it was commonly known as "Boko Haram." Shekau pledged loyalty to "the *amir* of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb," Usama bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri and the "Islamic states" in Iraq and Somalia, declaring "Oh America, jihad has just begun."<sup>21</sup>

#### Nur's Break with Shekau

After returning to Nigeria, Mamman Nur masterminded the UN bombing on August 26, 2011, which killed 21 people in Abuja.<sup>22</sup> Nur coordinated the attack from a base in Kano with two Nigerians who trained with Kamar in Algeria, and a Nigerian militant, Habibu Bama.<sup>23</sup> Bama also carried out the Christmas Day 2011 church bombing near Abuja with Kabiru Sokoto, the commander that Muhammad Yusuf appointed for Sokoto State.<sup>24</sup> Kabiru received his

the Hostage Road"; "UN Office Bombing: FG Seeks to Re-open Case, Plans to Amend Charges," *Nigerian Tribune*, January 23, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Shekau may have been misidentified and released from prison or "rescued" by other high-level officials with Boko Haram connections who paid for Shekau to be released. Shekau claimed in a video that he was rescued by "fellow believers." See "Borno Shivers Over Threats of Boko Haram's Return," *Sunday Trust*, July 4, 2013; "The Boko Haram Terror Chief Who Came Back from the Dead," *France 24*, January 13, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> *Da`wa* in Arabic and Hausa means preaching for the purpose of proselytizing. "Jihad" means holy war for Islam or self-discipline, but Muhammad Yusuf rejected the latter notion, saying that Western countries brainwashed Muslims who were educated in the West to believe that jihad meant self-discipline and not holy war. Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad (Sunni Group for Preaching and Jihad) may reflect Yusuf's "preaching" and Shekau's "jihad." See "Tahirin Musliminai" (History of Muslims), YouTube, undated.

<sup>21</sup> "Periodical Review July 2010 - No. 2," ICT's jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, August 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Ajani.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The investigation of the UN attack revealed that

funding from a terrorist group based in Algeria, which possibly came from Khalid al-Barnawi.<sup>25</sup> This funding likely contributed to Nur's attack on the United Nations and some of the more than 10 church bombings in the Middle Belt in 2012 that, according to Nigerian security forces, bore the "hallmark of al-Qa`ida" and followed Droukdel's offer of support for attacks on Christians in the Middle Belt.<sup>26</sup>

Nur may also have taken part in the Federal Police Headquarters attack in Abuja on June 16, 2011. This attack, which was the first suicide bombing in Nigeria's history, was claimed by the same intermediary to Agence France-Presse who claimed the UN bombing, employed the same tactics as the UN

"Mamman Nur, a notorious Boko Haram element with al-Qaida links who returned recently from Somalia, worked in concert with the two suspects in masterminding the attack on the United Nations building in Abuja." It was later revealed that one of the two Algerian-trained operatives in the attack was Babagana Ismail Kwaljima (also known as Abu Summaya), who was arrested in Kano in 2007 after returning from training with AQIM in Algeria on suspicion of plotting attacks against U.S. targets in Nigeria. The other suspect also trained with AQIM in Algeria. The UN attack in Abuja in 2011 occurred the same day that AQIM attacked Algeria's premier military academy outside of Algiers. In addition, the two Nigerian suspects who carried out the attack with Nur and the car used in the bombing were traced to the same district in Kano where AQIM-trained Nigerian militants, including Kamar, were arrested in 2007. See John Gambrell, "Nigeria: 2 Suspects Arrested in UN HQ Bombing," Associated Press, August 31, 2011; "Boko Haram Gets Sponsorship from Algeria, FG Tells Court," *Vanguard*, May 10, 2013; "Boko Haram Promises Bloodier Days; Threatens More Attacks On Churches And Government Buildings," Sahara Reporters, July 19, 2012; Lawan Adamu, "The Untold Story of Kabiru Sokoto," *Daily Trust*, February 13, 2012; "I am Alive, Says Abubakar Shekau in New Video," *Vanguard*, September 26, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> "Boko Haram Gets Sponsorship from Algeria, FG Tells Court."

<sup>26</sup> The Christmas Day bombings in Jos in 2010, for example, employed a method never seen before in Nigeria, including more than five bombings on churches in two districts simultaneously. See Charles Obi, "Kabiru Sokoto's Phone Calls," *Insider Weekly*, 2013; "Boko Haram Gets N40million Donation From Algeria," Sahara Reporters, May 13, 2013; "Arrested Kingpin Opens Up," *Nigerian Tribune*, February 13, 2012; "I Belong to Shura Council, not Boko Haram," *Vanguard*, July 1, 2013; "Jos: Bombers Linked to Al-Qaeda," *Nigeria Politico*, January 1, 2011; Andrew McGregor, "The Mysterious Death In Custody Of Boko Haram Leader Habib Bama," *Terrorism Monitor* 10:13 (2012).



bombing, involved Kabiru Sokoto and Habibu Bama, and was forewarned by a Boko Haram spokesman who one day before the attack said that “brothers who arrived from Somalia,” possibly referring to Nur, would launch “fierce” attacks in Abuja.<sup>27</sup>

There were rumors that some militants believed Nur’s al-Qa`ida connections made him a more competent leader than Shekau.<sup>28</sup> Shekau’s reported favoritism of ethnic Kanuris of Borno also may have driven Hausas, non-Nigerians and other non-Kanuris to ally with Nur, who was also non-Nigerian.<sup>29</sup> Shekau, however, ordered the “death penalty” for anyone who did not follow his orders and killed defectors.<sup>30</sup> This may have been the origin of the split between Boko Haram and Ansaru in 2012.

#### Al-Barnawi’s Unsuccessful Collaboration with Shekau

Concurrent with Nur’s operations, Khalid al-Barnawi’s trainee, Abu Muhammed, masterminded northern Nigeria’s first terrorism-related kidnapping of foreigners—a British and Italian engineer—in May 2011. The operation was claimed by “al-Qa`ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel”—a name that reflected the vision of Belmokhtar and his Malian brother-in-law and MUJAO spokesperson, Oumar Ould Hamaha, to expand their zone of operations “throughout the entire Sahara” to Nigeria.<sup>31</sup> Boko Haram’s

denial of this kidnapping was likely related to Shekau’s feud over control of funding with Abu Muhammed.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of the feud, Boko Haram reportedly informed on Abu Muhammed’s *shura* (council) to the Nigerian security forces, who killed Abu Muhammed and several *shura* members in Kaduna on March 7, 2012, and uncovered the mortally wounded British and Italian hostages in Sokoto.<sup>33</sup> In addition, this information led security forces to the location of a German engineer who was kidnapped by a Mauritanian-led AQIM cell in Kano in January 2012, which was broken up in May 2012, and to Kamar, who was killed in Kano in August 2012.<sup>34</sup> Other militants connected to Abu Muhammed’s *shura*, including Kabiru Sokoto and Habibu Bama, were also arrested or killed in 2012.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Boko Haram spokesman Abu Qaqa reportedly said, “In the case of the 41 million naira (\$250,000) there was acrimony because they did not quite know how the money was spent and nobody dared ask questions for fear of Shekau, who could pronounce death as his punishment.” Kabiru Sokoto reportedly said in trial that “there is a group in Algeria...that sends money to us and also told us how they spend the money...the money made Boko Haram to split into two because of the way it was shared.” As Abu Muhammed and al-Barnawi operated with AQIM, they were also most likely accustomed to AQIM’s meticulousness with “expense reports” and transparency, unlike Shekau. See “Exclusif...Mort des deux otages occidentaux tués au Nigeria: Une source d’AQMI livre quelques détails”; “Boko Haram Deny Kidnapping, Killings of Sokoto Hostages,” *ThisDayLive*, March 9, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> “Horror in Sokoto - Al-Qaeda-Funded Group Killed Hostages,” *Vanguard*, March 11, 2012; Yusuf Alli, “Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram’s Leaders,” *The Nation*, February 14, 2012; “Power Tussle in Boko Haram Led to Sect Leader’s Arrest,” *Leadership*, March 26, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> The German engineer, like the British and Italian hostages in Sokoto, was shot and killed during the rescue operation. See Aminu Abubakar, “German Hostage Killed in Nigeria During Rescue Bid,” *Agence France-Presse*, May 31, 2012; “Boko Haram Looks to Mali,” *Africa Confidential*, November 30, 2012; “Power Tussle in Boko Haram Led to Sect Leader’s Arrest,” *Leadership*, March 26, 2012; “Nigeria: Taking the Hostage Road”; Aminu Abubakar, “Nigeria Detains 5 with ‘Al Qaeda-links’ over German Kidnap,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 27, 2012; Lawal Danuma, “Kidnapped German Killed in JTF Raid,” *Daily Trust*, May 31, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Kabiru Sokoto said at his trial that he was not a part of Boko Haram, and that “Shekau is a leader of Boko Haram but not the *shura* council and it is not true that when I escaped from police custody that I spoke to Shekau on

Due to the break-up of Abu Muhammed’s *shura*, the three main Nigerian leaders in Boko Haram’s network were Shekau in Borno, and al-Barnawi and Nur in the Middle Belt and Kano.

#### Local Defections and Ansaru’s Formation

While Shekau feuded with other factions, there was also growing local discontent with Shekau. In July 2011, a new group called the Yusufiya Islamic Movement (YIM)<sup>36</sup> released flyers in Borno “distinguishing” the YIM from “evil” Boko Haram, showing concern for the deaths of civilians, and proposing “reconciliation” with the government.<sup>37</sup> The YIM, however, may have been forced out of Borno by Shekau’s killing of defectors and resurfaced as part of Ansaru after Shekau ordered attacks in Kano on January 20, 2012, which killed nearly 200 people, mostly Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Within weeks of the attack, Shekau fled to Gao, northern Mali, which was then governed by MUJAO, after information gleaned from the arrest of one of Shekau’s “new recruits” led security forces to his hideout in Kano.<sup>39</sup>

the phone.” See “Northern Politicians Get Jittery as Kabir Sokoto is Rearrested,” *elombah.com*, February 12, 2012; “Catholic Church Bombing: I Know the Perpetrators - Kabiru Sokoto,” *Vanguard*, May 11, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Although it was short-lived, the YIM was deemed credible by the Nigerian media and Borno’s population and its message and method of delivering flyers was consistent with the way ex-members of Boko Haram would communicate. The flyers said, “We call on this evil group [Boko Haram] to desist, failing which we shall have no option but to expose and hunt them...We therefore distance our group from all the bombings targeted at civilians...This is necessary in the light of genuine concern by individuals and group to the mass suffering of innocent citizens caught in the crossfire between our members and the Nigerian troops.”

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Idonor et al., “Boko Haram Sect Splits,” *Vanguard*, July 21, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Boko Haram warned it would attack Kano for months before January 2012, and Shekau justified the attacks in a video and text messages and flyers distributed in Kano, saying the attack was retaliation for the security forces imprisoning Boko Haram militants and their wives.

<sup>39</sup> “Nigeria Arrests Boko Haram ‘Militants’ in Kano,” *BBC*, December 19, 2011; “Boko Haram National Leader, Abubakar Shekau, Narrowly Escapes Arrest,” *Premium Times*, April 6, 2012; Aminu Abubakar; “Boko Haram Leader (Shekau) Escapes Arrest In Kano - Wife Arrested,” *Nigerian Tribune*, March 5, 2012; Udumu Kalu, “Al-Qaeda-Boko Haram Links in Kano Since 2009,” *Vanguard*, December 24, 2011; “Shekau Leading Boko Haram from the Shadows,” *Vanguard*, January 28, 2012;

<sup>27</sup> “Nigerian Islamists Vow ‘Fiercer’ Attacks,” *Agence France-Presse*, June 15, 2011; “Madalla Bombing: Kabiru Sokoto Says ‘No Case to Answer,’” *Pilot Africa*, May 17, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> “How Nur, Shekau Run Boko Haram.”

<sup>29</sup> “Qaqa: Boko Haram is Under Duress, Divided,” *ThisDay*, February 7, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Boko Haram spokesman Abu Qaqa reportedly told interrogators after his arrest that “anyone who challenged Boko Haram’s use of violence, including seven recently, are slaughtered in front of their wives and children.” See “Abul Qaqa Confession Shows Bloodletting and Fear as Instruments of Control Within Boko Haram,” *Sahara Reporters*, February 6, 2012; “UN House: Boko Haram Unveils Suicide Bomber,” *ThisDay*, September 19, 2011; “Boko Haram: Six Killed in Factional Clash,” *ThisDayLive*, February 3, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Hamaha said Belmokhtar and he were “leaving behind AQIM’s appellation to the Maghreb region (north-west Africa) but remaining under al-Qa`ida” and “enlarging our zone of operations throughout the entire Sahara.” See Baba Ahmed, “Leader of al-Qa`ida Unit in Mali Quits AQIM,” *Associated Press*, December 3, 2012.

On January 26, 2012, Ansaru released flyers in Kano announcing its “public formation” and saying it was a “humane” alternative to Boko Haram that would only target the Nigerian government and Christians in “self-defense.”<sup>40</sup> Subsequent Arabic-language Ansaru videos in June 2012 dubbed in Hausa and English and statements to Kaduna-based *Desert Herald* showed Ansaru employed a pan-West African narrative similar to Mamman Nur and MUJAO.<sup>41</sup> Ansaru also displayed the “setting sun” logo of AQIM’s predecessor before 2007, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), whose commanders included Droukdel, Belmokhtar, al-Barnawi, Kamar, Oumar Ould Hamaha and other future MUJAO leaders.<sup>42</sup> Like the YIM, Ansaru condemned Boko Haram’s killing of Muslim civilians and defectors. In line with Droukdel, Ansaru demanded revenge for the “Christian government’s” violence against Muslims in the Middle Belt, while Ansaru’s charter checked the power of its *amir* to prevent the emergence of another Shekau.<sup>43</sup>

Kingsley Omonobi, “Boko Haram Leader Shekau Shot, Escapes to Mali,” *Vanguard*, January 19, 2013.

40 Shekau, in contrast, ordered attacks on Nigerian targets that Boko Haram perceived as “Western interests,” such as English language schools, churches, and the secular and democratic Nigerian government, and Shekau focuses his statements more on Nigeria’s President Goodluck Jonathan or his “masters,” such as President Barack Obama.

41 Ansaru claims it fights to restore the “lost dignity” of the Sokoto Caliphate, which was founded in 1804 by the Fulani shaykh Usman dan Fodio in northern Cameroon, northern Nigeria, and southern Niger, and lasted until the United Kingdom and France colonized the region and introduced Western education and Christianity in the 19th century. See “MOHD Nur & Yusuf.3gp,” YouTube, undated.

42 Jacob Zenn, “Ansaru Logo Gives Hints to Boko Haram and Transnational Links,” Council on Foreign Relations, June 21, 2013.

43 An Ansaru statement said, “There were some brothers who are under the umbrella of [Boko Haram] who executed a brother who was Muslim and a jihadist without any justification except that he disagreed with the group’s activities and showed the desire to be a part of Ansaru.” Ansaru’s charter therefore stated that an *amir* heads Ansaru’s hierarchy, but acts in accordance with a *shura*. Major decisions, such as the opening of a new battlefield, negotiations with the government, or the establishment of international relationships must be taken in concert with the *shura*, whose ruling is binding on the *amir*. See “Another Islamic Sect Emerges to Counter Boko Haram?” *Desert Herald*, June 2, 2012; “The Charter

Ansaru’s first high-profile operations included a prison break in Abuja in November 2012, kidnapping a French engineer in Katsina in December 2012, an ambush on Mali-bound Nigerian troops in Kogi in January 2013, and kidnapping and killing seven foreign engineers in Bauchi in February 2013.<sup>44</sup> Ansaru justified the operations as retaliation for the French-led intervention in Mali and “Western atrocities” in Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup> These operations and justifications carried the “signature” of al-Barnawi, who previously carried out kidnappings with Belmokhtar. Moreover, an Ansaru militant interviewed by the *New York Times* in 2013 claimed that al-Barnawi was Ansaru’s leader.<sup>46</sup>

Ansaru, therefore, likely represented the revival of Nigerian GSPC militants in Kano. It enjoyed the parentage of Droukdel via Kamar and Nur ideologically, and Belmokhtar via al-Barnawi operationally, combined with resentment toward Shekau of defectors who, like the GSPC, did not tolerate the killing of innocent Muslim civilians.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to the grassroots base of Boko Haram in Borno, Kano was

of Ansaru,” *snamalislam.com*, April 13, 2013.

44 For details on these attacks, see Jacob Zenn, “Cooperation or Competition: Boko Haram and Ansaru After the Mali Intervention,” *CTC Sentinel* 6:3 (2013).

45 Ibid.; “Islamist Group Ansaru ‘Kidnapped’ French Man,” BBC, December 24, 2012; “Islamists Ansaru Claim Attack on Mali-Bound Nigeria Troops,” Reuters, January 20, 2013; Suzan Edeh, “Bauchi Deadly Kidnapping: Gaping Bullet Holes in Expatriates’ Live Camp,” *Vanguard*, February 23, 2013.

46 Adam Nossiter, “New Threat in Nigeria as Militants Split Off,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2013.

47 Ansaru’s rejection of Boko Haram’s killing of civilians, in particular, resembles the way the GSPC broke from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria in the 1990s in response to the violence perpetrated by the GIA against Algerian civilians. In contrast to the GIA, the GSPC pledged to avoid attacks on civilians inside Algeria. According to AQIM research specialist Andrew Lebovich, “it is striking that, given the aspirational and possibly operational closeness between Ansaru and AQIM, Ansaru’s stated justification for its split from Boko Haram was largely the same as that of the GSPC in leaving the GIA.” See also Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti, “Question-and-Answer with Abu-al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti: Question Number 7618: Is it Permissible to Target a Regime-Sponsored School That Recruits its Students to the Army After They Complete Their Studies?” *Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, July 18, 2013; Andrew Lebovich, “Analyzing Foreign Influence and Jihadi Networks in Nigeria,” *al-Wasat* blog, January 31, 2013.

suitable for Ansaru’s internationalist militants because Kano was the hub for funding from al-Qa`ida in Pakistan for the training of Nigerian militants in the mid-2000s when Muhammad Yusuf and his deputies were sending followers to the Sahel and Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> Kano also hosted AQIM operatives like Adam Kamar, the AQIM cell that kidnapped the German engineer on the same day as Ansaru’s formation in January 2012, and the AQIM-trained accomplices of Mamman Nur in the UN Headquarters bombing.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the city was the base for regional deputies under Yusuf who had a “global network” and later became suspects in the Federal Police Headquarters bombing in June 2011.<sup>50</sup> In 2013, there were still anonymous factions in Kano that opposed Shekau’s leadership, supported negotiations with the government, targeted “Western” interests—such as anti-polio non-governmental organization workers—and carried out sophisticated attacks on Christian targets.<sup>51</sup>

If al-Barnawi and Nur are among Ansaru’s leaders, their refusal to show their faces or issue individual statements is consistent with Ansaru militants, who are veiled in Ansaru videos and photos and use pseudonyms.

48 A former Nigerian State Security Service officer confirmed in 2012 that Muhammed Ashafa was a courier between al-Qa`ida and the “Nigerian Taliban” and that the head of the al-Qa`ida network for West Africa, Malam Adnan Ibrahim, who lived in Kano as late as 2012, sent Ashafa to Pakistan in 2003 and 2004 with another Nigerian to meet al-Qa`ida representatives. See “Boko Haram Scare For Nigeria’s Police Boss,” PM News Nigeria, July 23, 2011; Ikechukwu Nnochiri, “Danger Alert: Al-Qaeda Boss in West Africa Lives in Kano,” *Odili.net*, April 8, 2012; “Nigerian ‘Trained in Afghanistan,’” BBC, September 2, 2009.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Such as the simultaneous car bombings in Kano’s Christian Quarter in July 2013 that killed more than 30 people. See Taye Obateur, “Boko Haram Leader, Yusuf, Killed,” *Vanguard*, July 30, 2009; Ademola Oni, “20 Die in Sabon Gari, Kano Bomb Blasts - 42 B’Haram Suspects Arrested in Lagos, Ogun,” *Punch*, July 30, 2013; David Smith, “Polio Workers in Nigeria Shot Dead,” *Guardian*, February 8, 2013; “Leader Of Boko Haram Faction in Official Talks With The Nigerian Gov’t Claims Responsibility for Deadly Kano Bombings, Says Abubakar Shekau Still Alive,” *Sahara Reporters*, August 4, 2013.

### Al-Barnawi's Renewed Role in Boko Haram

Despite al-Barnawi's suspected role in Ansaru, there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that al-Barnawi also operates with Boko Haram. First, Shekau promoted one of al-Barnawi's deputies, Habibu Yusuf ("Assalafi"), to lead Boko Haram operations in Sokoto in 2012.<sup>52</sup> The Nigerian government's "most wanted" list, released in November 2012, included al-Barnawi and Assalafi as the first and second ranking members in Shekau's *shura*.

Second, only since the French-led intervention in northern Mali in February 2013 has Boko Haram's new "special kidnapping squad" taken hostage dozens of government officials and their female family members in Borno and released them for imprisoned militants and ransoms that fund more operations.<sup>53</sup> If al-Barnawi's kidnapping squad is taking hostages and Boko Haram is providing them with safe haven, this would resemble the agreement al-Barnawi's trainee, Abu Muhammed, made with Shekau in 2011 for Boko Haram to provide cover for his kidnappings before that cooperation was undermined by their feud over funding.<sup>54</sup>

Third, the money Boko Haram received in ransom for the release of a seven-member French family kidnapped in northern Cameroon in February 2013

<sup>52</sup> "Boko Haram Looks to Mali."

<sup>53</sup> "Gunmen Kidnap Senior Lecturer in Maiduguri," *Vanguard*, February 24, 2013; David Molomo, "Dead or Alive? Customs Officer, Wife, Five Kids, Cousin Missing for 22 Days," *Sun News*, April 29, 2013; Kareem Ogori, "Gunmen Kidnap Ex-Borno LG Boss, Demand N50m," *Blueprint*, April 8, 2013; Njadvara Musa, "Gunmen Kidnap Ex-Council Chairman, Reject N10m Ransom," *The Guardian* [Lagos], April 13, 2013; Maina Maina, "Gunmen Kidnap DPO in Bama, Set Town on Fire in Borno," *Daily Post*, April 25, 2013; Yahaya Ibrahim, "Borno Water Board GM Kidnapped," *Daily Trust*, April 29, 2013; "Kidnapped Policeman Killed by Abductors in Borno," *Vanguard*, May 1, 2013; Ola Audu, "How Boko Haram Turned to Kidnapping to Raise Funds in Borno," *Premium Times*, May 20, 2013; Yusuf Ali, "Boko Haram Kidnaps 92-yr-old ex-Minister Ali Monguno," *The Nation*, May 4, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> According to Agence France-Presse, "Under the alliance, [Abu] Muhammed and his group were to carry out abductions for ransom, part of which would go toward financing Boko Haram operations. Boko Haram would in turn provide security cover for Muhammed's group." See "Barnawi, Kambar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties."

may override any grievances between al-Barnawi and Shekau over Shekau's feud with Abu Muhammed. While the kidnapping of the French family was not claimed by Ansaru, it was distinctly characteristic of Ansaru to kidnap foreigners, especially an engineer (the father of the family), operate outside of Nigeria's borders, speak Arabic and justify the kidnapping as revenge for France's "war on Islam" in Mali, demand millions of dollars in ransom and the release of imprisoned militants, and negotiate not with the Nigerian government like Boko Haram, but with the highest levels of the Cameroonian government.<sup>55</sup> It is likely that Ansaru transferred the family from northern Cameroon to Boko Haram in Borno, where they were later released for \$3.14 million and in exchange for 19 Boko Haram prisoners in Cameroon.<sup>56</sup>

Fourth, since the French-led intervention in Mali, Ansaru has claimed no attacks, except for one Ansaru militant who appeared in a video in which Belmokhtar and MUJAO claimed suicide bombings at two French mines in Niger in May 2013.<sup>57</sup> The intervention led to the elimination of key couriers connecting Ansaru to MUJAO, the killing of AQIM's southern commander, Abu Zeid, who possibly trained some Ansaru militants, and the retreat of Belmokhtar.<sup>58</sup> Ansaru is likely isolated from its Sahelian networks and has a weakened network in northwestern Nigeria due to the demise of Abu Muhammed's *shura*, so Ansaru may be able to operate more effectively with Boko Haram in Borno and northern Cameroon. At the same

<sup>55</sup> According to French President François Hollande, Cameroonian President Biya was "personally involved" in the negotiations for the release of the French priest and "played an important role" in securing the release of the French family.

<sup>56</sup> The kidnapers' second and third statements about the French family (some of which were not released publicly in the media) were delivered in Shekau's name and distinctly like Shekau to demand that the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments release Boko Haram militants and their wives from prison in return for the hostages.

<sup>57</sup> "Group Linked to Algeria Gas Plant Attack Claims Niger Raids," *LeMag*, May 24, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> The key couriers included, among others, Mokhtar Ibrahim and Abdullah Abdullah. See "Judge's Absence Stalls Trial of Mali-based Boko Haram Suspect," *Premium Times*, May 8, 2013; Nossiter.

time, Shekau's *shura* was depleted when Nigerian security forces killed Assalafi in March 2013, his successor in April 2013, and Shekau's *shura*'s fourth and fifth ranking members in the lead-up to and during the state of emergency.<sup>59</sup> Shekau could benefit from Ansaru's Sahelian connections, regionally diverse membership and experienced militants to train new Boko Haram recruits, smuggle weapons into Borno and carry out his latest threats to launch "retaliatory" attacks in Cameroon and the oil-rich Niger Delta.<sup>60</sup>

The reconciliation process between Ansaru militants and Boko Haram may have begun in Gao, Mali, where Shekau, Belmokhtar, MUJAO and Boko Haram and Ansaru militants were reportedly based or seen in 2012.<sup>61</sup> In November 2012, for example, an Arabic-language

<sup>59</sup> Mohammed Zangina, the commander for Kaduna, who may have replaced Abu Muhammed, was killed in January 2013, and Mummodu Bama, who was an expert in bomb-making and anti-aircraft weapons, was killed in August 2013. Other non-*shura* commanders who were eliminated include Ali Jalingo and Ibrahim Bashir. See Michael Olugbode, "JTF Kills Top Boko Haram Commander in Combined Operation," *This Day*, April 28, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> "Boko Haram Chief Threatens Attacks in Nigeria Oil Region," Agence France-Presse, February 20, 2014; "Boko Haram Met en Garde le Cameroun," *Le Septentrion*, February 17, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> According to journalists in Mali in 2012, Nigerians (reportedly in Boko Haram) were in Gao, and Nigerian intelligence reports stated that by April 2012 Shekau left Kano and went to Gao. Shekau's April 2012 video was his first with Sahelian-style veiled militants and in Arabic. In a Boko Haram video of Shekau released in November 2012, the opening narration praised Ansaru's prison break operation that freed Boko Haram members in Abuja three days earlier, which is evidence of possible reintegration, and the video was posted on an al-Qa'ida forum (not YouTube or delivered to Agence France-Presse, which Boko Haram regularly uses). See Abubakar Shekau, "Glad Tidings, O Soldiers of Allah," Ana al-Muslim network, November 29, 2012. The video also featured Shekau standing in a desert, possibly in Mali, with other armed militants issuing "glad tidings" to the "brothers and shaykhs in the Islamic Maghreb" and "Soldiers of the Islamic State of Mali." See "Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali's Rebel Seize Gao," *Vanguard*, April 9, 2012; "Mali - Mokhtar Belmokhtar, un des chefs d'Aqmi, est à Gao," *Lepoint.fr*, July 4, 2012; "Exclusive: The Last Days of Shekau, Boko Haram Leader," *Vanguard*, August 25, 2013; "Boko Haram Leaders Flee Hot Mali to Nigeria," *The Nation*, January 31, 2013; Jacob Zenn, "Nigerians in Gao: Was Boko Haram Really Active in Northern Mali?" *African Arguments*, January 26, 2014.

video posted on the Ana al-Muslim network featured Shekau for the first time in a desert with armed militants offering “glad tidings to soldiers of the Islamic State of Mali” and opening with a narration praising Ansaru’s attack on a prison that freed Boko Haram militants in Abuja three days earlier.<sup>62</sup> Subsequent Boko Haram training videos in March 2013 also for the first time opened with photos of al-Shabab leaders, had a higher quality that appeared similar to Ansaru’s videos, were uploaded on popular al-Qa`ida online forums instead of YouTube, and featured a mid-level commander in Ansaru’s network, Mummodu Abu Fatima. Fatima is a specialist in suicide operations, and he claimed the Federal Police Headquarters attack in June 2011.<sup>63</sup> He also told *Desert Herald* in June 2012 that Boko Haram and Ansaru have different interpretations of Islam but may cooperate in the future.<sup>64</sup>

The cooperation between Boko Haram and kidnapping specialists in Ansaru was confirmed when Boko Haram’s intermediary to Agence France-Presse said the kidnapping of a French priest in northern Cameroon in November 2013 was “coordinated with Ansaru.”<sup>65</sup> The priest, like the French family, was taken to Borno and exchanged one month later for a weapons smuggler that Cameroonian President Biya freed from prison in Cameroon.<sup>66</sup>

62 Abubakar Shekau, “Glad Tidings, O Soldiers of Allah,” November 29, 2012. Two days after appearing on popular jihadist websites, the video was posted to the Ana al-Muslim network website.

63 Mummodu Abu Fatima was in a Boko Haram video with Shekau and four of his sub-commanders in March 2013, but the version Boko Haram released publicly edited out the part showing the names of Shekau’s commanders and the “highlight clips” of them training. The author has seen the clips showing Abu Fatima and other commanders, which Boko Haram may have intended for an internal, rather than a public, audience. It was filmed in a forested area resembling Borno’s Sambisa Forest in contrast to Shekau’s November 2012 video, where he was in a desert, possibly in Mali. See “World Exclusive: Another Islamic Sect Emerges...to Counter Boko Haram?”; “Boko Haram: We Did Not Declare Ceasefire – Shekau,” *Vanguard*, March 4, 2013; “Police Headquarters Bombing: IG had Meeting with Bomber,” Point Blank News, June 16, 2011.

64 Ibid.

65 “Boko Haram Holding Kidnapped French Priest,” *Vanguard*, November 15, 2013.

66 Unsubstantiated reports in January 2013 suggested

### Mamman Nur’s Status

While it is probable that Shekau and al-Barnawi are cooperating, Boko Haram’s future trajectory may depend on Mamman Nur. Due to Nur’s ideological influence on Ansaru and operational connections to AQIM, al-Shabab and the late Kamar, Nur may be the “Boko Haram” leader communicating with AQIM, al-Shabab, al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Pakistan and other al-Qa`ida affiliates.<sup>67</sup> Al-Barnawi has connections to Belmokhtar and MUJAO in the Sahel, but it is unclear whether al-Barnawi has Nur’s ability to connect to formal al-Qa`ida affiliates like AQIM and al-Shabab. Al-Barnawi, therefore, may be unable to unite Boko Haram with al-Qa`ida in the way Shekau sought since his first overture to al-Qa`ida in July 2010 and his more recent call after the state of emergency for “brethren” in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria to join “jihad” in Nigeria, to which no al-Qa`ida affiliate responded.<sup>68</sup>

Nur and Ansaru are likely still in good standing with al-Barnawi, whose kidnappings rarely harm Muslim civilians, but not necessarily with Shekau. Ansaru, for example, sent “greetings” to al-Barnawi’s longtime co-kidnapper, Belmokhtar, and condemned the Egyptian military’s coup against Mohamed Morsi—as did AQIM and Belmokhtar. Yet in April and September 2013, Ansaru issued its first statements specifically concerning Borno, which condemned Boko Haram’s killing of civilians in attacks that Shekau claimed in Baga and Benisheikh as well as its wanton destruction of churches in Borno and “misunderstanding of the goals of Shari’a.”<sup>69</sup>

Boko Haram may also have been paid \$12.5 million for the French priest. See Guibai Guitama, “Cameroun - Libération du père Georges Vandenbeusch: Le négociateur désigné de Boko Haram réclame son argent,” *L’Oeil du Sahel*, January 6, 2014.

67 An al-Qa`ida “conference call” reportedly included representatives from Boko Haram, the Pakistani Taliban, al-Qa`ida in Iraq, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). See “Al Qaeda Conference Call Intercepted by U.S.,” *Daily Beast*, August 7, 2013.

68 “Boko Haram Denies Losing Nigeria Battle,” al-Jazeera, May 30, 2013.

69 “Resolution to the Two Groups Mulathamin and MUJAO and their Unifying in the Murabitun with a

As a Cameroonian, Nur may also have played a role in negotiations with the Cameroonian government after Ansaru “coordinated” the hostage-takings with Boko Haram in northern Cameroon. In addition, Nur may be the highest-ranking AQIM-connected militant in Ansaru’s network.

### Conclusion

Abubakar Shekau, Khalid al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur are the three most influential leaders in Boko Haram’s network.

Nur is connected to al-Qa`ida affiliates in Africa and is an operational and ideological leader. He likely cooperates with al-Barnawi and Ansaru militants now in Boko Haram, but opposes Shekau’s style of leadership in Borno.<sup>70</sup> Nur, therefore, was likely based in Kano with former followers of Muhammad Yusuf, who were dissatisfied with Shekau and have an internationalist outlook. Nur could, however, become less relevant because some of his key contacts to AQIM, al-Shabab and al-Qa`ida core are dead or in prison, and al-Barnawi’s suspected reintegration with Shekau may isolate Nur in Kano.<sup>71</sup>

New Amir,” Agence Nouakchott Internationale, August 22, 2013; “Ansar al-Muslimeen Leader Criticizes Boko Haram, Greets al-Qaeda Officials in Eid al-Adha Speech,” SITE Institute, November 15, 2013; “Ansar al-Muslimeen Leader Criticizes Boko Haram, Greets al-Ansar al-Muslimeen Condemns Massacre in Baga, Calls for Revenge Qaeda Officials in Eid al-Adha Speech,” SITE Institute, May 3, 2013; “Ansar al-Muslimeen Denies Targeting Civilians, Calls for Revolution,” SITE Institute, May 13, 2013; “AQIM Official Sees Foreign Role in Morsis’ Ouster,” SITE Institute, July 7, 2013.

70 Nur may follow the principles outlined in documents uncovered from AQIM after the French-led intervention in Mali in 2013, which were written by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s, when Ayman al-Zawahiri was its leader. The documents said, “even if the *amir* is a very bad person, yet is trying to fight non-Muslims, we should work with him and join him...the second-in-command should not become an *amir* unless the original *amir* has died or suffered a lethal injury that prevents him from performing his duties. The second-in-command should not fight the *amir* over leadership...If this is not possible, he should try to find another front or a good *amir* and fight under his command.” See Abdulkader bin Abdul-Aziz, “The Invitation for Monotheism,” series 3, The Complete Guide to Prepare Yourself for Jihad for the Sake of Allah, undated.

71 Nur may be “Muhammed Marwana,” who claimed to be second-in-command to Shekau in January 2013, when he discussed his involvement in negotiations with the

Khalid al-Barnawi is regionally connected, but unless he cooperates with Boko Haram he will lack grassroots support in Nigeria because he operated for years in the Sahel and has few religious credentials. Al-Barnawi is likely willing to carry out kidnappings with Ansaru, Boko Haram, MUJAO, AQIM or any other militant group regardless of ideology. He may have drifted from Ansaru toward Boko Haram or formed new cells under Shekau, similar to how Belmokhtar unilaterally “drifted” from AQIM’s central leadership in favor of “for-profit” kidnappings and smuggling.<sup>72</sup>

Shekau is a divisive leader, but has legitimacy because he was Yusuf’s deputy and remained close to grassroots followers in Borno. He likely retains a core group of loyalists because many militants who opposed him, such as the YIM and Ansaru, already defected or were killed by Boko Haram, leaving only the more ruthless and indoctrinated militants with Shekau.

If Shekau is killed, a scenario could emerge where al-Barnawi takes over Boko Haram operationally and Nur takes over ideologically, but this is unlikely because both al-Barnawi and Nur lack sufficient grassroots networks in Borno, where Boko Haram carries out more than 80% of its attacks.<sup>73</sup> Although Nur was close to Muhammad Yusuf and al-Barnawi is a skilled kidnapper with Sahelian connections, Shekau’s current sub-commanders, whose aliases are not revealed publicly but are shared with Boko Haram internally, would likely compete to succeed Shekau.

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Nigerian government after Yusuf’s death in 2009, and in August 2013 wore a veil and claimed the attacks in Kano’s Christian Quarter that killed more than 30 people. See “Another Boko Haram Figure Speaks, Ruling Out Dialogue With Nigeria Gov’t,” Sahara Reporters, January 29, 2013; “Leader Of Boko Haram Faction in Official Talks With The Nigerian Gov’t Claims Responsibility For Deadly Kano Bombings, Says Abubakar Shekau Still Alive,” Sahara Reporters, August 4, 2013.

72 “Algeria: ‘Laaouar’ Quits AQIM,” Magharebia, December 4, 2012; Madjiara Nako, “Chad Says it Killed Algeria Hostage Mastermind in Mali,” Reuters, March 3, 2013; “Boko Haram Militants Shows Off Weapons ‘Captured’ From an Army Baracks,” Sahara TV, April 29, 2013; “Al Qaeda Leaders Sent Scathing Letter to Troublesome Employee,” Associated Press, May 29, 2013.

73 Jacob Zenn, “Boko Haram’s Abubakar Shekau: Dead Again?” Council on Foreign Relations, August 6, 2013.

At the same time, Shekau’s death could create opportunities for the Nigerian government to negotiate with former YIM, Ansaru or Kano-based militants, whose current efforts to maintain dialogue are irrelevant as long as Shekau is opposed to reconciliation. Boko Haram’s informing on rival factions to security forces and negotiations with the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments over hostages suggest, however, that Boko Haram is not as “faceless” as the Nigerian government portrays, and that it is possible to communicate with Boko Haram’s leaders.

This leadership analysis also leads to the conclusion that Ansaru, with its most recent operations in Niger, Cameroon and possibly Central African Republic, now functions like an “external operations unit” in its self-declared area of operations in “Black Africa” in a way that separates Ansaru from Boko Haram in Borno and avoids conflict with the group.<sup>74</sup> The organizational structures of Boko Haram and Ansaru are permeable, which will allow mid-level militants to operate with Boko Haram, Ansaru and MUJAO as long as they do not run afoul of Shekau.<sup>75</sup> The regionalization of Boko Haram and Ansaru, with hostage-takings of wealthy individuals and weapons smuggling in Nigeria and Cameroon, also risks creating a multi-million dollar “terrorism economy” in the southern Sahel that fuels corruption and raises tensions between neighboring countries and the region’s Muslims and Christians.

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74 For an analysis of possible Ansaru operations in Central African Republic, see Jacob Zenn, “Northern Cameroon Under Threat from Boko Haram and Séléka Militants,” *Terrorism Monitor* 12:1 (2014).

75 See the case of Mummodu Abu Fatima, for example.

## Recent Highlights in Political Violence

January 1, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle near a passenger bus carrying Shi’a pilgrims in Quetta, killing at least three people. – *TheNewsInternational*, January 1; *Dawn*, January 1

January 2, 2014 (IRAQ): According to media reports, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant took control of more than half of Falluja and parts of Ramadi. – *AFP*, January 2

January 2, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed 16 people near a car dealership in Balad Ruz, Diyala Province. – *CNN*, January 2

January 2, 2014 (LEBANON): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed at least four people in southern Beirut, where Lebanese Hizb Allah has strong support. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant reportedly claimed responsibility. – *Daily Star*, January 2; *Daily Star*, January 4

January 3, 2014 (IRAQ): The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) destroyed the Falluja police headquarters and mayor’s office, and then declared that the city, which is located in Anbar Province, was part of their new Islamic state. According to Reuters, “disgruntled tribesmen have sided with the insurgents to fight against the [Iraqi] government.” ISIL militants have also taken over parts of Ramadi. – *New York Times*, January 3; *Reuters*, January 6

January 4, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A car bomb exploded at the gate of a joint NATO-Afghan military base in Nangarhar Province. After the explosion, Taliban militants attacked the facility. Five Taliban militants and one NATO soldier were killed during the firefight. – *RFE/RL*, January 4

January 5, 2014 (SPAIN): Spanish authorities arrested a suspected Islamist militant at Malaga airport in southern Spain. The suspect, Abdeluahid Sadik Mohamed, had just arrived in Spain after allegedly fighting for the Islamic State of Iraq

and the Levant in Syria. Authorities described Mohamed as a Spanish national born in Ceuta. – *CNN, January 5*

January 5, 2014 (IRAQ): Two car bombs killed at least nine people in the mainly Shi`a Shaab district in Baghdad. – *al-Arabiya, January 5*

January 6, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives outside a government school for boys in Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The blast killed a teenage student. The Pakistani Taliban have blown up hundreds of schools in Pakistan, saying that they spread secular education. – *Dawn, January 6*

January 6, 2014 (SYRIA): Syrian rebel groups fought each other for control of the provincial capital Raqqa. A coalition of rebel groups attempted to unseat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from the city. According to a local media activist interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times*, “the fighting was pitting other Islamist groups including Ahrar al-Sham, the Islamic Front, and al-Nusra Front” against the ISIL. A Reuters report suggested that “dozens of Syrian members of the [ISIL] had switched sides, joining other Sunni Islamist factions which have taken advantage of a local backlash against the ISIL and the foreign al-Qa`ida jihadists prominent among its leaders.” On January 7, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qa`ida affiliate, called for a cease-fire, and the establishment of an Islamic court to settle disputes. – *Los Angeles Times, January 7; Reuters, January 6; New York Times, January 7*

January 6, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked a security checkpoint in Ghazni Province, killing three police officers. – *AP, January 6*

January 6, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A senior Afghan Taliban leader was killed by his own security guards near Quetta, Baluchistan Province. According to Voice of America, the killing of Mullah Salim was just the latest incident of Afghan Taliban leaders dying under “mysterious circumstances” in Pakistan, fueling “suspicion of an organized campaign of assassination against Taliban

leaders.” Afghan Taliban sources told the *Wall Street Journal* that they suspected Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security was behind the attacks. – *Voice of America, January 10*

January 7, 2014 (YEMEN): A car bomb seriously wounded a Yemeni intelligence officer in Aden. – *AFP, January 7*

January 9, 2014 (UNITED STATES): According to the *New York Times*, “Islamic extremist groups in Syria with ties to al-Qa`ida are trying to identify, recruit and train Americans and other Westerners who have traveled there to get them to carry out attacks when they return home...” Citing intelligence and counterterrorism officials, the newspaper said that “at least 70 Americans have either traveled to Syria, or tried to, since the civil war started three years ago.” – *New York Times, January 9*

January 9, 2014 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives among Iraqi army recruits in Baghdad, killing 22 of them. – *Reuters, January 9; New York Times, January 9*

January 9, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A bomb tore through the convoy of one of Pakistan’s most well-known police commanders, Chaudhry Mohammad Aslam, the head of the criminal investigation department (CID), in Karachi. He was killed in the blast. Aslam built a reputation for “fearless anti-terrorism operations” in Karachi, and he had survived a number of assassination attempts in the past. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility. – *The Nation, January 10*

January 9, 2014 (SYRIA): A car bomb killed approximately 18 people near a school in Hama Province. Most of the dead were reportedly women and children. – *Los Angeles Times, January 9*

January 9, 2014 (SOMALIA): The Kenyan military said that they launched an airstrike against a meeting of al-Shabab fighters in Somalia’s Gedo area, killing at least 30 of them. – *Voice of America, January 10*

January 11, 2014 (SOMALIA): U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) announced that a handful of American

military advisers arrived in Somalia in October 2013 and became fully operational in December. According to AFRICOM, “fewer than five” U.S. advisers are part of a “military coordination cell in Somalia to provide planning and advisory support to the African Union Mission in Somalia and Somali security forces to increase their capabilities and promote peace and security throughout Somalia and the region.” – *Deutsche Welle, January 11*

January 12, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a bicycle detonated explosives next to a police bus in Kabul, killing a policeman and a civilian. – *Daily Star, January 12*

January 12, 2014 (IRAQ): Gunmen attacked the Abu Ghurayb army base west of Baghdad and then fled into a nearby area. At least eight civilians were killed. – *CNN, January 12*

January 12, 2014 (SYRIA): The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant reportedly executed dozens of rival Islamists during the last two days and recaptured territory it had lost to them in Raqqa Province. – *Reuters, January 13*

January 13, 2014 (BELGIUM): Belgium Foreign Minister Didier Reynders said that “more than 200” people from Belgium have traveled to fight in Syria. “Most have joined the most extremist groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant,” he said. Of the 200, more than 20 have been killed there. – *AFP, January 13*

January 13, 2014 (TURKEY): Turkey reportedly arrested a number of suspected terrorists during raids in several Turkish provinces. Turkish authorities said that top members of al-Qa`ida are among those arrested. – *UPI, January 14*

January 14, 2014 (NIGERIA): A bomb exploded and killed an estimated 43 people in Maiduguri, Borno State. – *ThisDayLive, January 14; al-Jazira, January 14; Vanguard, January 16*

January 16, 2014 (YEMEN): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants executed three simultaneous attacks on Yemeni army positions in Bayda Province. Ten Yemeni soldiers were killed. – *AFP, January 16*

January 16, 2014 (LEBANON): A car bomb exploded in Hermel, close to the Syrian border, killing five people. Hermel is a mostly Shi'a town, and many of its residents are closely allied with Lebanese Hizb Allah. - *Los Angeles Times, January 16*

January 17, 2014 (RUSSIA): A grenade exploded on the second floor of a restaurant in Dagestan. When police arrived, a car bomb detonated. At least five people were injured. It was not immediately clear whether Muslim separatists or criminal elements were responsible. - *CNN, January 17*

January 17, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A Taliban suicide bomber detonated explosives at the fortified entrance of the Taverna du Liban restaurant in Kabul. After the explosion, two other militants entered the restaurant and opened fire. The attack killed 21 people, including 13 foreigners. According to Agence France-Presse, "among the dead were three Americans, two British citizens, two Canadians, the International Monetary Fund head of mission, and the restaurant's Lebanese owner, who was killed as he tried to fire back at the attackers." The incident marked the deadliest attack on foreign civilians since the U.S.-led intervention in 2001. - *AFP, January 18*

January 17, 2014 (SYRIA): Abu Khalid al-Suri, a top figure in the rebel group Ahrar al-Sham, announced in an internet posting that he considers himself a member of al-Qa`ida. His statement criticized the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, saying that the jihadist group was not al-Qa`ida's representative in Syria and that it was not doing the work of Usama bin Ladin or other al-Qa`ida leaders. - *McClatchy Newspapers, January 17*

January 17, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Taliban gunmen on motorcycles killed three men working for a private television station in Karachi. - *TheNewsInternational, January 17*

January 19, 2014 (IRAQ): The Iraqi military began a major operation on Ramadi city to expel militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), who took partial control of the city on January 1. Ramadi is the capital of Anbar Province. ISIL militants also

control the nearby city of Falluja. - *al-Jazira, January 19; Reuters, January 18*

January 19, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A car bomb exploded inside a military base in Bannu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing 20 paramilitary troops. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility. - *AP, January 20*

January 19, 2014 (UNITED KINGDOM): According to the *Telegraph*, a defector from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant said that Western foreign fighters in Syria were being trained as jihadists, and then encouraged to return home to conduct domestic terrorist attacks. The newspaper reported that "recruits from Britain, Europe and the U.S. were being indoctrinated in extremist anti-Western ideology, trained in how to make and detonate car bombs and suicide vests and sent home to start new terror cells." - *Telegraph, January 19*

January 20, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives near Pakistan's main military headquarters in Rawalpindi, killing 13 people. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility. - *AP, January 20*

January 21, 2014 (LEBANON): A suicide bomber killed at least four people in a pro-Hizb Allah area of southern Beirut. A group calling itself Jabhat al-Nusra in Lebanon claimed responsibility for the attack. - *Bloomberg, January 21; al-Jazira, January 21*

January 22, 2014 (ISRAEL): Israeli authorities announced that they arrested three Palestinians for alleged involvement in an al-Qa`ida plot to conduct terrorist attacks in Israel. The group reportedly planned to deploy a suicide bomber against the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, as well as a separate attack against the International Convention Center in Jerusalem. - *Haaretz, January 22; Fox News, January 23*

January 22, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded near a police van in Charsadda District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing at least seven people. - *al-Jazira, January 22*

January 22, 2014 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen attacked Pakistani police escorting a Spanish cyclist who was trying to cycle around the world. The cyclist had just arrived from Iran into Pakistan's Baluchistan Province when the incident occurred. The gunmen killed six police officers and wounded the cyclist. - *AP, January 21*

January 22, 2014 (LIBYA): A car bomb killed three people in Benghazi. Two of the dead were members of the Libyan special forces. - *UPI, January 22*

January 23, 2014 (SYRIA): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new audio message, calling on rebels in Syria to stop fighting each other. - *Reuters, January 23*

January 23, 2014 (PAKISTAN): A bomb exploded in a vehicle at an auto repair shop in the suburbs of Peshawar, killing at least six people. - *Los Angeles Times, January 23*

January 24, 2014 (EGYPT): A series of bombs targeted police in Cairo, killing at least 10 people. In one incident, a car bomb exploded outside Cairo's police headquarters, killing three policemen. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis claimed responsibility. - *Reuters, January 24; Washington Post, January 24*

January 24, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber attempted to assassinate Mohammad Ismail Khan, a vice presidential candidate. The bomber, who was said to be in his 70s, detonated his explosives next to Khan's car in Herat City, but Khan was not injured. - *al-Jazira, January 24*

January 25, 2014 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri issued a new audio statement calling on Muslims in Egypt not to fight their Christian compatriots. He said that Muslims should instead focus on opposing Egypt's military-backed leaders. Al-Zawahiri said, "We must not seek war with the Christians and thus give the West an excuse to blame Muslims, as has happened before." - *AP, January 25*

January 26, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives close to a bus carrying soldiers in Kabul, killing at least four people. - *BBC, January 25*

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

January 26, 2014 (SOMALIA): The U.S. military conducted an airstrike against a "senior leader" affiliated with al-Qa`ida and al-Shabab in southern Somalia. According to officials speaking to the Associated Press, the strike appears to have killed the militant. Sources in Somalia later told Voice of America that the strike also nearly hit Ahmed Godane, al-Shabab's leader. - *CNN, January 26; Los Angeles Times, January 26; Voice of America, January 29*

January 27, 2014 (SYRIA): Syrian activists and an Iraqi intelligence official announced that a senior leader in the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was killed in a dispute with rival rebel factions earlier in January. He was identified as Haji Bakr. - *AP, January 27*

January 27, 2014 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber from Jabhat al-Nusra detonated explosives at an army checkpoint in the Syrian defense minister's hometown in Hama Province. The attack killed 13 soldiers. The bomber was reportedly a Saudi foreign fighter. - *Reuters, January 28*

January 29, 2014 (GLOBAL): U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper warned that Jabhat al-Nusra "does have aspirations for attacks on the [U.S.] homeland." Clapper said that the group is training a growing number of foreign fighters from Europe and the Middle East. Some of these militant camps are training people "to go back to their countries and conduct terrorist acts..." - *AP, January 29; Guardian, January 29*

January 30, 2014 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Department of Justice said that it would seek the death penalty against Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the individual accused of bombing the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013. The terrorist attack killed three people. - *New York Times, January 30*

January 30, 2014 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden vehicle into a police security tower in Nangarhar Province, killing at least two police officers. - *CNN, January 30*

January 30, 2014 (IRAQ): Gunmen attacked a government building in the heart of Baghdad, killing two people. According to one report, police shot and killed four of the fighters, while two others blew themselves up. - *CNN, January 30*