Middle East Africa Research Institute

Tracking Terrorism Trends in Africa

Executive summary

This report seeks to provide a consideration of the rapidly evolving threat posed by Jihadi terrorism in Africa. The threat has over the past decade rapidly accelerated its reach and alarmingly intensified its lethality in virtually every expanse of the African continent over the past decade (2013-2023)[1]. Jihadist terrorism has emerged as a significant, ever-evolving threat in Sub-Saharan Africa, posing significant challenges to regional stability, security, and development. Whilst we are covering this most recent period, it needs to also be acknowledged that Islamist terrorism has long historical roots in Africa. For instance, in Nigeria, historical precedents to Boko Haram go all the way back to 1802=1804 when religious leader and ethnic Fulani herder, Uthman dan Fody, declared his jihad to "purify" Islam.

This report seeks to provide a brief, yet comprehensive and overarching study to understand the dynamics of Jihadist terrorism in various regions of the continent at present. By examining major groups, their affiliations, operational strategies, targets, goals, organizational structures, international links, frequency of attacks, profile and nature of those targeted and underlying drivers. This report most significantly seeks to

[1] We are still in the early part of 2024.

provide valuable insights for policymakers, security agencies, and scholars. The report also provides some concise policy recommendations vis-a-vis the specter of the continued threat posed by Jihadi terrorism in Africa and potential responses required from the continent to mitigate, stem and ultimately eradicate the threat posed by Jihadi terrorism on the African continent in the near future.

The main objectives of this policy brief are:

- To analyze the major Jihadi groups operating in Sub-Saharan Africa in their respective regions
- To examine the affiliations of these groups and external sources of support for these groups
- To investigate the victims of Jihadi terrorism and their demographics.
- To understand the goals and motivations driving Jihadi groups in Africa in their respective regional strongholds
- To explore the organizational structures and operational tactics employed by jihadi groups
- To assess the frequency and patterns of terrorist attacks in different regions
- To determine factors contributing to the effectiveness of Jihadi groups and
- To investigate broader socio-political, economic, and ideological drivers of terrorism in African countries.

Each of the abovementioned objectives will briefly be dealt with in the respective regional discussions of jihadi terrorism in Africa.

This report consulted several sources examining the emergence and manifestation of jihadi terrorism in Africa, including academic publications, research reports produced by reputable academic think-thanks engaged in the study and analysis of terrorism and

extremism in Africa and globally, as well as from media outlets, that have extensively reported on terrorism in Africa generally.

Some of the most salient expected outcomes this policy brief seeks to provide is a contribution to the understanding of Jihadi terrorism dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa as well the identification of key factors contributing to the strength and resilience of Jihadi groups. The focus on the genesis, motivation and behavior of jihadi groups in their respective regions is considered to be a salient conduit through which a greater understanding of jihadi terrorism dynamics in Africa is likely to be developed. Significantly the policy brief will also attempt to provide insights into potential strategies for countering Jihadi terrorism and promoting regional security, while also seeking to make a contribution to academic literature and policy discourse on terrorism in Africa.

Prior to delving deeper into this critically important objectives, this policy brief will seek to provide an overview of terrorism on the African continent generally.

A Brief Overview of Terrorism in Africa

A defining feature of terrorism has been the utilization of violence to instill fear or intimidation by causing or threatening to cause serious injury or death to civilian populations or symbolic targets to gain wider visibility. One of the salient objectives is to coerce political or social change. Terrorism is usually viewed as a form of political violence that is designed to influence broader political behavior and advance a set of political or social objectives. (Emerson & Solomon 2018).

Within the U.S. government there is no single uniform definition, but variations across departments and agencies. According to the U.S. Department of Defense terrorism can be defined as:

"The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological" (U.S. Department of Defense 2008).

According to Hoffman (2006) "terrorism is ineluctably political in aims and motives, violent—or, equally important, threatens violence, designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target, conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia), and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity."

The next section will briefly seek to discuss the nature and scope of jihadi terrorism in Africa as part of attempts to address the salient objectives set out at the start of this report.

The Nature and Scope of Jihadi Terrorism in Africa

Since the devastating September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the fight against international jihadi terrorism across the world has continued indefinitely with no clear end in sight. Even the most remote and neglected corners of the earth have become caught up in the fight.

The African continent has become a critically important hub of jihadi terrorism, which has fundamentally altered the continent's security landscape. Several areas of the continent have become the new foci of African and international efforts to combat the rising tide of international jihadist and extremist violence (Emerson & Solomon 2018). Many African states have subsequently become overburdened and threaten to become overwhelmed by the scourge of jihadi terrorism amidst efforts to deal with multiple other security threats as well. This lack of state and institutional capacity is at times further overshadowed by an African wariness and lack of political will over what some see as an imported problem. Their fear is that the continent is once again becoming a battlefield for an ideological clash of civilizations not of Africa's own making (Emerson & Solomon 2018).

Terrorism, however, is certainly not new to Africa. It has been a part of the political and security dynamic of the continent from the decolonization struggle to the Cold War and beyond, but it has been primarily driven by distinct domestic political factors and inwardly focused.

What has changed in the post-September 11th world for Africa is the apparent melding of domestic and international terrorism in a deadly cocktail of wider regional and even international destabilization. Most disturbing of all is the emergence of the continent as an incubator of violent international extremism itself, with the growing possibility that it may become an exporter of international terrorism to the world in the coming decades as other jihadi theatres beholden to the global Islamic State begin to wane or disintegrate as part of global counter-terrorism operations.

The use of terror as a tactic in African conflicts has been around for more than half a century and has deep historical roots in Africa, but prior to the August 1998 terrorist bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam that killed 224 people and injured more than 5,000 the continent was not widely considered a hotbed of international terrorism. Even with these high-profile attacks, the terrorist threat in Africa was generally seen as isolated, narrowly focused, and rooted in domestic problems that rarely transcended international borders. But all this would begin to change in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and the launching of the American-led war on terror. With its vast ungoverned spaces and uncontrolled borders, weak and corrupt governments, and impoverished and alienated populations, Africa had come to be seen by many-especially by the United States and its Western allies-as a fertile breeding ground for international jihadist-inspired terrorism (Emerson & Solomon 2018).

Without a doubt the growth of radical Islamist terrorism since the early 1990s has been one of the most disturbing trends. It now poses one of the biggest, and more direct, threats to African peace and stability. African governments, regional and sub-regional

organizations and the international community have subsequently given high priority to address this scourge. In Africa today there are numerous home-grown radical Islamist groups with varying degrees of organization, structure, and activism that engage in and/or facilitate a new and highly potent form of terrorism.

At one end of the spectrum are highly visible and violent groups that are either linked directly to global jihadist movements, like al-Qaeda or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS or the Islamic State), or share their violent extremist agenda (Emerson & Solomon 2018). At the other end of the spectrum are a wide variety of Islamist groups (such as national Muslim Brotherhood movements) and Islamic charities that are actively promoting a fundamentalist political agenda, but have generally rejected violence. Although they do not directly engage in terrorist activity, some counter-terrorism experts believe some of these groups function as recruiting nodes for some of the more militant, extremist groups mentioned above. These, so-called "conveyor belt" organizations, are widespread across the continent.

The Meteoric Ascendancy of Jihadi Terror in Africa

Jihadi terrorism in Africa has rapidly proliferated and mutated over the course of the past few volatile years. Bacon and Warner (2021) offer a sobering prognosis of the threat facing the African continent post-September 11. They observe that:

"Twenty years after 9/11, jihadi violence on the African continent has experienced a meteoric rise, putting African civilians, African states, as well as U.S. and especially partner interests on the continent in far greater danger than before September 11th. Despite the efforts to minimize jihadi violence, 20 years after 9/11, the African continent is the new leading epicenter of jihadi terrorism in the world today. Alarmingly, the jihadi threat in Africa has not merely worsened: it has reached historically unprecedented levels

at the same time that the United States and its partners' appetite to counter it has waned, creating a perfect storm for the situation to further deteriorate" (Bacon & Warner 2021).

The ongoing instability in several African countries across multiple regions has served as an incubator for rising levels of radicalism and extremist violence as old and new Islamists groups compete for power and influence.

Bacon and Warner (2021) observe that the prevalence of jihadi violence on the African continent has spiked dramatically in the 20 years since the Global War on Terror began. Africa had significantly been exposed to jihadism during the 1990s. Sudan hosted Osama bin Laden from 1991 to 1996, where he lived after his fallout with the Saudi royal family. Egyptian jihadis, most notably Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Ladin's future deputy and successor, joined bin Laden in Sudan to launch a campaign against Egypt (Bacon & Warner 2021). Al-Qaeda had trained Somali militants in the early 1990s and encouraged them to target the U.S. presence during Operation Restore Hope, the U.S.-led and U.N.-backed humanitarian-focused security mission in 1992-1993.

As noted earlier most devastatingly in 1998, Al-Qaeda orchestrated dual bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salam, Tanzania, collectively killing 224 (of which 12 were Americans). Algeria was the site of a bloody campaign by jihadis against the state throughout the 1990s. There was a relative downturn by the end of the 1990s.

Nearly 20 years later jihadi violence in Africa has rapidly proliferated, particularly in the past decade. Islamist extremists-notably those affiliated with al Qaeda and the Islamic State-have been responsible for unleashing an unprecedented wave of deadly and brutal violence across the continent in the past few years.

Nearly all the high-profile terrorist attacks in recent years can be traced to Islamist extremists: The Kampala bombings in July 2010; the hostage taking at the Amenas, Algeria gas plant in January 2013; the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya;

numerous deadly suicide bombing across northern Nigeria from 2013 onward; the public beheading of Egyptian Christians in Sirte, Libya in February 2015; the April 2015 massacre at Garissa College in northeast Kenya; the attack on foreign tourists in Sousse, Tunisia in June 2015; and the spate of car bombings in Mogadishu in 2016 (Emerson & Solomon 2018).

Even more worrisome has been the meteoric rise of Islamic State affiliates across North Africa and Nigeria in 2015 and the mimicking in Africa of brutal ISIS tactics used in Syria and Iraq.

Domestically-rooted or sub-state terrorism remains the most prevalent form of African terrorism, yet international terrorism-one that threatens the global political and economic order-on the continent is clearly on the rise and gaining in prominence.

As noted earlier, it is not simply the increase and spread of imported international terrorism in Africa that is potentially frightening, but rather the melding of domestic and international terrorism that had been underway in some parts of Africa. Earlier forms of terrorism on the continent, as noted, was the outgrowth of domestically-driven conflicts by groups seeking to redress perceived injustices or gain access to political and/or economic power. Unlike international terrorism, domestic terror groups are not seeking a fundamental reordering of their societies (let alone the global order), but are pursuing narrowly defined domestic objectives. What was emerging in Africa, however, was a convergence or “complex mixture and intermingling” of terrorism, either because of shared objectives, a common enemy or the potential for building synergetic relationships (Emerson & Solomon 2018).

This convergence posed the most serious terrorism challenge to key sub-regions of the continent. It had been one of the central drivers of conflict in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya,

northern Nigeria and Somalia, where domestic terrorist groups publicly realigned themselves with al Qaeda's and the Islamic State's internationalist agenda.

Moreover, AQIM, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab, along with other smaller affiliates of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have not only been responsible for the majority of terrorist attacks and deaths across the continent, but they also threatened the continued functioning and stability of national governments. Prior to its military setbacks in 2015, for instance, Boko Haram was on the verge of eviscerating the Nigerian central government's authority in an area the size of Belgium. And even after its loss of territory, the group remains a powerful force to be reckoned with in the future. Likewise, the anarchical situations in Libya and Somalia are likely to never be fully resolved until the threat to security and stability from the Islamic State and al-Shabaab is addressed (Emerson & Solomon 2018).

As noted earlier, the convergence and melding of domestic Jihadi terrorist groups with international groups has been a major feature of Jihadi terrorism on the African continent. The reconstitution of large, umbrella terrorist organizations into multiple smaller, more tightknit, and ideologically-driven groups has also been witnessed on the African continent of late. Both these trends significantly impacted upon the nature of Jihadi terrorism in Africa.

According to the IISS (2023) jihadist insurrections in Sub-Saharan Africa have been evolving. These events have become much more localized, building on local grievances and becoming more intertwined with community and ethnic conflicts. The IISS (in its assessment of the changing nature of Sub-Saharan Jihadism) contends that the international dimension of jihadism has practically disappeared in the region and connections between insurgent groups remain limited to some sub-regional collaborations. Jihadist groups' increasing involvement in local conflicts and the protector

role that they play for various communities have made them resilient and more popular than the government in some places (IISS 2023).

The next section will briefly present some statistics that reflect upon the increasing scope and lethality of jihadi terrorism in Africa. In particular this section aims to explore the pattern and frequency of attacks that have taken place on the continent.

Sobering Statistics: The Increasing Scope and Lethality of Jihadi Terror in Africa

Africa now has the overall notorious reputation of being the greatest global generator of jihadi violence. Statistics released in the year 2021 painted a worrying picture of the upward trajectory of jihadi terrorism in an increasingly volatile African theatre of operations.

According to figures released by the ACLED, 4,958 violent attacks were perpetrated by African jihadi actors in the year 2020 (Bacon & Warner 2021). In the last decade alone, jihadi violence on the continent has increased dramatically. According to the ACLED the 4,958 violent events in 2020 stand in stark contrast to the “only” 288 violent jihadi events that were perpetrated in 2009 (Bacon & Warner 2021). A rise in attacks has also led to a concurrent rise in deaths. African jihadi groups were responsible for an estimated 13,059 deaths in 2020 alone.

Militant Islamist violence occurred primarily across five major zones/theaters of instability: the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel, Egypt, Somalia, and Mozambique. Quite alarmingly nearly 22 African countries-nearly half of the continent-now faces violence from jihadi groups. This is a staggering reality confronting the international community as well the African Union, primarily tasked with the maintenance of peace and security on the continent.

In January 2021 the Africa Center for Strategic Studies reported that there was a 43% increase in militant Islamist group violence in Africa in 2020. The 4,958 reported events

linked to these groups represented a record level of violence, continuing an upward pattern seen since 2016 according to the Center (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2021).

In particular in July 2021 the African Center for Strategic Studies observed that violence by African Islamist groups exhibited “an unprecedented, record-setting level of violence” (Bacon & Warner 2021). The U.N. team charged with monitoring the global jihadi threat found that during the first half of 2021, the African continent was the world region most afflicted by jihadi terrorism, with the greatest number of global casualties caused by U.N.-designated jihadi groups (Bacon & Warner 2021). This was seen as a striking development.

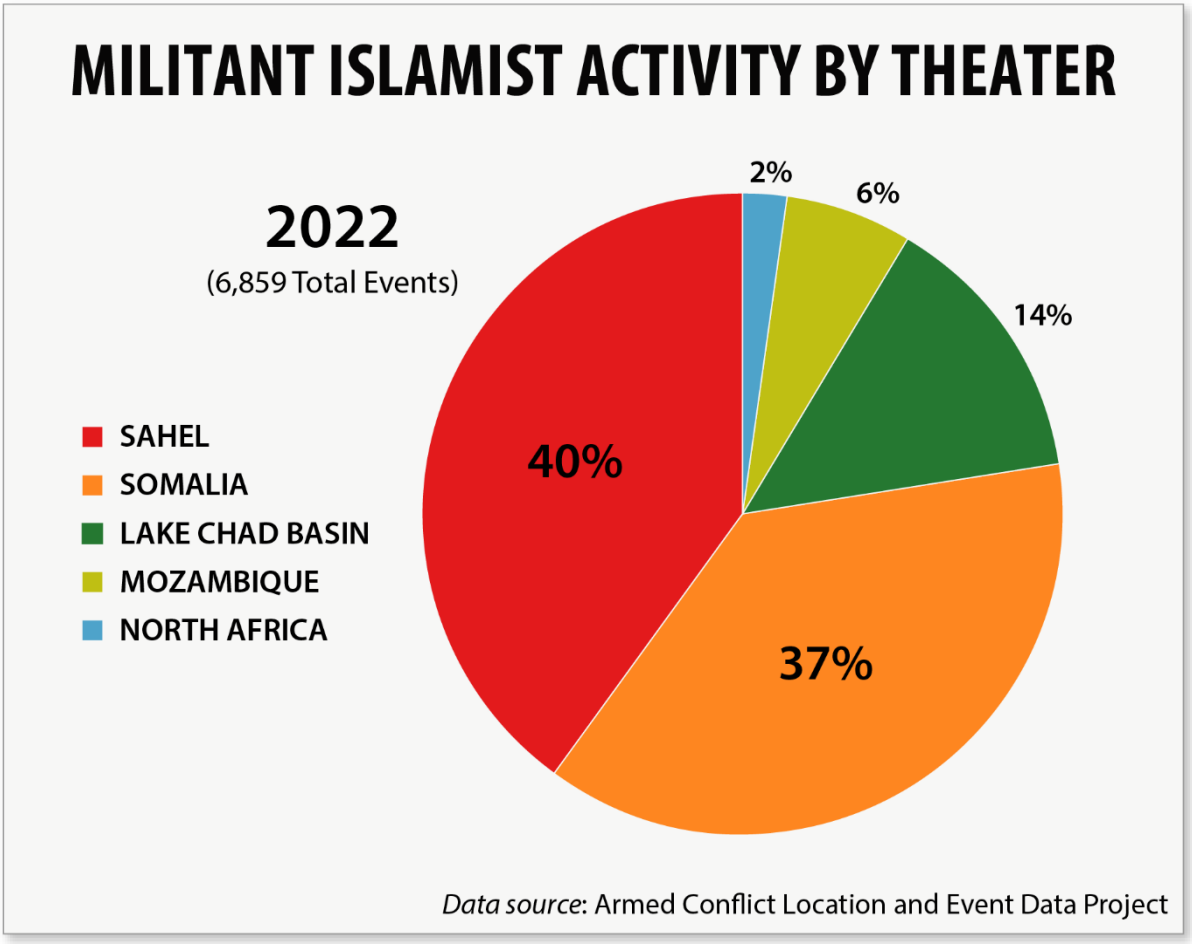
Consequently the African continent has presented itself as a highly lucrative center in which jihadi terrorism has been able to thrive and survive largely unimpeded.

In the 16 June 2022 edition of its *Al-Naba* publication, IS declared Africa the land of Hijra and Jihad and called on its members to relocate to African countries. Analysts have observed the growing involvement of IS and al-Qaeda in the affairs of their African affiliates. The prevailing belief is that the continent is the next stronghold for an ‘Islamic Caliphate’ (ISS Lake Chad Basin Project 2022).

Indeed, militant Islamist violence in Africa set new records for violent events and fatalities in 2022. There were 6,859 episodes of violence involving militant Islamist groups in Africa in 2022, a 22% increase from 2021. Fatalities linked to these events increased to an estimated 19,109 deaths (Siegle & Williams 2023). This was a 48% increase.

This rapid spike in violence was further marked by a 68% increase in fatalities involving civilians, highlighting the heavy costs suffered by non-combatants. This figure was deemed to be quite significant as it indicates that these militant groups are not focused on

winning hearts and minds so much as intimidating local populations into compliance (Siegle & Williams 2023).



According to recent statistics released by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies the African continent suffered a nearly four-fold increase in reported violent events linked to militant Islamist groups over the past decade (from 1,812 events in 2014 to 6,756 events in 2023) (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023b).

The African Union (AU) consequently faces one of its biggest challenges since its inception. Indeed, the very safety, security and stability of multiple member states now hangs in the balance. In several instances too many African states now teeter on the precipice of becoming indefinite jihadi terrorist strongholds and enclaves. Many of these states are also facing the risk of implosion in the face of the terrorist onslaught.

In its May 2022 Declaration on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes of Government, the African Union (AU) acknowledged that:

"The resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government; the expanding threat of terrorism and violent extremism across the Continent, including the influx of foreign terrorist fighters, private military companies and mercenaries, the proliferation of armed groups, as well as transnational organized crime, negatively impact the peace, security, stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of some Member States." (AU 2022).

Furthermore, Africa continues to face structural challenges in adequately addressing the root causes of terrorism, violent extremism, and unconstitutional changes of government (AU 2022).

In its Communique of the 1182nd of the PSC held on 27 October 2023, on the Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Counter-Terrorism in Africa, the Peace and Security Council expressed its:

"Deep concern towards the growing threat to peace, security, and stability in Africa posed by the spread of terrorism and violent extremism throughout the Continent, which is undermining AU efforts to silence the guns in Africa by 2030, and derailing the progress towards the realization of the aspirations of AU Agenda 2063" (African Union 2023).

The Peace and Security Council further noted its deep concern with the sustained financing of terrorism activities, in particular the growing linkages between terrorism and transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking, illicit exploitation and trade of

mineral and natural resources, as well as illicit financial flows with debilitating impact on the national economies of the Member States (African Union 2023).

The Council also reiterated its call on all Member States to refrain from inciting, instigating, organizing, facilitating, participating in financing-or-encouraging terrorist activities. The Council also encouraged member states to take necessary measures to ensure that their respective territories are not used as terrorist sanctuaries (African Union 2023).

The PSC further called for "expediting the establishment the AU Ministerial Committee on Counter-Terrorism and the operationalization of the African Counter-Terrorism Coordination Task Force (A2CTF), under the office of the AU Special Representative for Counterterrorism Cooperation, to improve the Commission's Internal coordination in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism (PVE), with a view of providing a holistic and coordinated response to the scourge" (African Union 2023). The alarming (and continued) increase in the frequency and intensity of terrorism across virtually the entire continent as reflected in multiple statistics is cause for grave concern.

Following this brief introductory Africa overview, the report will now proceed to provide an assessment of the current dynamics of Jihadi terrorism in each of the respective regions of the African continent. This will include a brief analysis of the major Jihadi groups operating in each of the key regions of Sub-Saharan Africa as well as their affiliations and external sources of support. This will include a consideration of the central goals and motivations driving Jihadi groups in each region of the African continent as well as organizational structures and operational tactics employed by Jihadi groups in their respective regional strongholds. An additional objective is an investigation of the frequency and patterns of attacks in these different regions and the primary targets and victims of Jihadi terrorism in each of the respective regions. Another critical area of examination is a determination of factors contributing towards the effectiveness of Jihadi

groups and an investigation of broader socio-political, economic, and ideological drivers of terrorism in African countries/regions of the African continent.

The sections to follow will present a brief overview of the dynamics of jihadi terrorism in North Africa.

North Africa: The (Erstwhile) Hub of Jihadi Terrorism

In the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings, North Africa (Libya and Tunisia in particular) became a flashpoint for large-scale jihadi mobilization. Yet more than a decade later, both countries and the region, in general, are relatively more stable-at least with regard to jihadism-in contrast to the growing strength of the jihadi movement in sub-Saharan Africa (Zelin 2023).

As noted by Fruganti (2023):

"Over the last few years, consecutive counterterrorism operations, the enforcement of strict national anti-terrorism legislations, and the implementation of successful deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes have largely abated the threat posed by jihadist groups in MENA countries, particularly in North Africa" (Fruganti 2023).

The Sahel progressively emerged as the new epicenter of jihadi terrorism over the last decade, with deaths in this area accounting for 43% of the global total in 2022 (a 7% increase compared to 2021). The fatalities from terrorism in the MENA however had fallen by 42% in the last three years and by 32% in 2022 (Fruganti 2023).

According to Fruganti (2023) the impact of terrorism has varied considerably within the MENA. North Africa had witnessed a steady decline in extremist violence. The number of violent attacks associated with militant Islamist activity in this region is now down to pre-Islamic State (IS) levels. The 276 casualties linked to jihadist terrorism in North Africa in

2022 represent a 14-fold decrease from the 4,000 deaths that occurred in the area in 2015, when the Islamic State was at its height (Fruganti 2023).

Following the overthrow of former Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and the brutal killing of Libyan leader Muammar Al-Qadhafi, Ansar al-Sharia groups, which were fronts for Al-Qaeda, were established in Tunisia and Libya. The Algerian-based Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) attempted to take advantage of the altered regional political and security environment. The Algerian state however continued to degrade its capabilities. The organization ended up becoming of greater relevance instead to the insurgency in Mali in the subsequent decade (Zelin 2023).

In the years after the uprisings, Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL) and Tunisia (AST) focused on a da'wa (proselytization)- first approach, emphasizing outreach, social service and proto-governance (Zelin 2023). ASL also took part in insurgent activity against its enemies. The ability to recruit and train in the Libyan case, established new and lucrative opportunities for jihadism to expand in the region. In Syria, where the Al-Qaeda branch Jabhat al-Nusra and later Islamic State (IS) took hold, it provided for the large-scale mobilization of foreign fighters. This explains why Tunisia, in particular, had such an unprecedented and large-scale mobilization to Syria from 2012-2017 (Zelin 2023).

Both groups operating in Libya and Tunisia respectively were involved in attacks against American interests. The violent nature of their ideologies and their desire to sow fear and unrest as a means of bringing about their own version of an Islamic State led to a confrontation with the United States (Zelin 2023). The devastating Benghazi consulate attack and the lesser-known attack on the US Embassy in Tunis in September 2012 were notable examples of this. The result of this was an increased effort to crack down on both organizations and, as a consequence of local pressures, a rise in the number of fighters going into Syria (Zelin 2023).

The Libyan and Tunisian fighters who had been deployed to Syria were called back to establish the Caliphate in Libya. The Islamic State would ultimately control a swath of territory in north-central Libya for approximately two years (Zelin 2023). Tunisians had also been provided with a platform from which to plan and execute large-scale external operations in their own country. The most notable of these attacks were the Bardo Museum attack (March 2015) and the Sousse Beach attack in June 2015 (Zelin 2023). In response to the growth of IS locally in Libya and its terrorism campaign next door in Tunisia, the US and its coalition of allies targeted IS in Libya and ejected its territory by December 2016. It has yet to recover, even though a pocket of individuals remain in central Libya in the Sebha region.

As a resulted of focused and determined counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts, the level of violence in Tunisia began to decrease to the point where it became of little concern to the average Tunisian by 2019 (Zelin 2023).

The Islamic State also attempted to expand its reach into Algeria, creating an official branch known as Wilayat al-Jaza'ir (the Algerian province). The group's first operation was the kidnapping and beheading of a French tourist. Subsequent actions by Algerian security forces were able to undermine and thwart IS and render it a non-factor locally. IS would claim 13 attacks in Algeria between 2014 and 2020, with its last attack recorded in mid-February 2020 (Zelin 2023).

In Zelin's estimation, the jihadist movement in North Africa in 2023 finds itself in quite a dire state in comparison to the broader movement. Al-Qaeda is deemed to no longer be an active presence in the region. Leaders of the group continue to release propaganda, specifically attempting to take advantage of the Hirak movement in Algeria. AQIM however has not claimed an attack in Algeria since February 2018. AQIM's branch in Tunisia, Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi (KUBN), also had not claimed an attack since April 2019 (Zelin 2023). The Islamic State's activities have also subsided in the region. Apart from the few

high-profile attacks and low-level terrorism campaign in Algeria from 2014 to 2020, the situation is deemed to be just as dire in Libya and Tunisia, which were once reliable strongholds for the movement (Zelin 2023).

Following the territorial disintegration of IS in Libya (ISL) in December 2016, the group went underground and was relatively inactive in 2017, partly due to U.S. airstrikes against its camps outside Sirte. ISL claimed responsibility for just four attacks that year – two in Sirte, and once each in Misrata and Ajdabiya (Zelin 2023). The tempo of attacks increased in February 2018, when ISL sought to emerge from the shadows and renew its insurgency. The group conducted attacks in many locales through December of that year. The momentum was halted in December 2018 when the Libyan National Army (LNA) discovered an ISL base near the oasis town of Ghadduwah. Further bases were discovered in mid-June 2019 (Zelin 2023).

Since then, ISL activity has been extremely limited. Actual military operations between 2020 and 2022 have been deemed to be minimal and inconsequential. All attacks have been relatively low impact- seen primarily as attempts to stay relevant (Zelin 2023). In Libya, jihadist groups have continued to face several challenges following successive strikes against their positions, especially in the southernmost region of Fezzan, where the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda (reportedly present there with 100 and 300 members, respectively) are still active, albeit dramatically downsized compared to the past decade (Fruganti 2023).

Following IS's failed attempt to take over the city of Ben Gardane near the border with Libya in March 2016, the Tunisian government slowly degraded the group's capabilities in Tunisia. Consequently, IS has not claimed an attack in Tunisia since February 2021. Overall, the number of terrorism attacks, whether KUBN, IS, or lone-actor-inspired attacks, peaked in Tunisia in 2017 with 47 attacks before declining to just 4 attacks in 2022. None of the four attacks were attributed to any group, illustrating how insignificant

a problem it has become today, compared to the more acute jihadi campaign of 2012-2019 (Zelin 2023). Continued economic, social, health, climate and other problems, could however lead to a renewed effort by jihadi elements within Tunisia to become more active anew (Zelin 2023).

Over the past decade, Sinai has served as the base from which Islamist militants wage their insurgency against the Egyptian government (Al-Anani 2022). The terrorist attacks have mainly targeted security forces, including military convoys, checkpoints, and facilities, and have mostly taken place in the cities of northern Sinai, in particular al-Arish, Sheikh Zuweid, and Rafah. SP's activities have moved to the western part of North Sinai, notably to the city of Bir al-Abd. In November 2017 the city witnessed one of the deadliest extremist attacks in Egypt's history when SP militants stormed the al-Rawda Mosque, injuring 128 people and killing more than 300, including 27 children (Al-Anani 2022).

Since pledging allegiance to IS in November 2014, SP has intensified its attacks against the Egyptian military and police (Al-Anani 2022). Over the past decade, the Egyptian military has conducted several counterinsurgency operations in the Sinai Peninsula in order to eliminate Islamist militants. However, these operations have met with very little success, which raises several questions about the viability of the government's strategy, as well as its ability to maintain security and stability in Sinai.

The Egyptian government subsequently undertook a major security crackdown in the Sinai Peninsula. Additionally the government's public investments and infrastructure policies in the Sinai Peninsula over the last few years, diminished the presence of the local branch of the Islamic State, also known as *Wilayat Sinai or Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis* (ABM). According to UN estimates, the group, which is composed of around a thousand fighters – has remained active and resilient throughout 2022, its main targets being native communities and Egyptian security forces (Fruganti 2023). The latest violent clashes between the Egyptian army and ABM in 2022 occurred in areas near the Suez Canal,

indicative of the effort that the organisation is making to expand its activities in Egypt beyond north-east Sinai towards new strategic regions. Since 2013, more than 3,000 people have been killed and more than 12,000 wounded in terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula (Fruganti 2023).

Overall, Egypt saw a decrease in terrorist activity in 2022. The nation continued apace with military and social development campaigns in North Sinai. North Sinai is where a degraded ISIS-Sinai Province (ISIS-SP) targeted security forces, pro-government Bedouin groups, and civilians. ISIS-SP struck near the Suez Canal four times, including the first terrorist attack on Egyptian soil west of the canal since 2019 (U.S. Department of State 2022). At least 95 terrorist incidents were recorded in the Sinai Peninsula, with roughly 260 casualties, in 2022. ISIS-SP claimed responsibility for most of the attacks.

The attacks by extremists were carried out utilizing several strategies and methods, including small arms, IEDs, kidnappings, killings, complex assaults, ambushes, and targeted assassinations. There was a significant decrease in the number, frequency, and severity of IEDs and sniper attacks, and fewer complex operations with large-scale casualties against Egyptian security forces. Opportunistic attacks led to most security force casualties. While most attacks occurred in northeast Sinai, there were four attacks near the Suez Canal, including one attack west of the canal (U.S. Department of State 2022).

In May 2022, at least 16 Egyptian troops were killed in two separate attacks in the Sinai Peninsula. The attacks were carried out by Wilayat Sinai or Sinai Province (SP), Egypt's branch of the so-called Islamic State (IS), which has been actively conducting attacks on the Egyptian military over the past 8 years. According to Al-Anani (2022) the May strikes were the deadliest in recent years, following constant assertions an assurances by the Egyptian government that it had defeated terrorism in Sinai. However, the adoption of

SP's recent aggressive posture raised many questions about the group's military capabilities and tactics, and whether Egypt is on the verge of a new wave of attacks. Concerns have also been raised vis-a-vis the viability and effectiveness of Egypt's counterinsurgency strategy (Al-Anani 2022).

Despite the decrease in the frequency of attacks in recent years, Islamist militants remain active, and pose a serious threat to Egypt's security in Sinai. The attack on May 7 was among the deadliest conducted against the Egyptian military in the past two years. Furthermore it targeted a civilian facility. Islamist militants tend to target military and security facilities and personnel, and generally eschew civilian targets in order to avoid backlash from local residents (Al-Anani 2022). However, their newer targeting of civilians and non-military governmental facilities constitutes a dangerous development in their tactics going forward. The threat of attacks on Egypt's mainland should not be ruled out either in the near future. Islamist militants have developed their strategies, capacities, and tactics in their fight against Egypt's military and security forces, as well as against civilians who collaborate with the Egyptian Army (Al-Anani 2022).

Apart from continued attacks in Sinai, North Africa overall has continued to see a marked decline in militant activity in 2022. Continuing a downward trend observed since 2015, militant Islamist activity and related fatalities in North Africa dropped more than 75% over the past year. This equates to 51 violent events and 78 fatalities. The theater now contributes just 1% of militant Islamist activity and less than 1% of the related fatalities (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023b).

Violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in the North African region dropped by 98% over the past year (2023). There were only 4 reported events in 2023. In recent years, the violent extremist threat in North Africa has been primarily focused within Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The dramatic change in 2023, therefore, reflects a drop in

militant Islamist violent incidents in Sinai, from 156 in 2022 to just one. The last attack by the Islamic State in Sinai, which was on the Egyptian military, was in February 2023 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2024). Despite the historic decline in violent extremist events in this region, the United Nations and others believe that both the Islamic State in Libya and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb remain firmly embedded in the southern part of Libya and pose an ongoing threat.

One of the areas which bears monitoring is the ongoing civil war in Sudan and whether this would provide the space there to regroup and what the potential spillover effects are into neighbouring states. Historically, in Sudan, two forces have always been dominant: the military and the Islamists.

The Sahel: The New Hotbed and Pressure Cooker of Jihadi Terrorism in Africa

The Sahel/Saharan theatre has traditionally been shaped by deep political, socioeconomic and security connections binding Maghreb states to Sahelian actors. Largely consisting of terrorist groups that have proved quick to capitalize on local issues (including ethnic tensions, climate-related challenges, and lack of public services) to attract recruits, the Sahelo-Saharan strip has not only become a hotbed of jihadist activities in recent years, but it is also poised to turn into an export hub of the terrorist threat towards peripheral areas (Fruganti 2023). Regional statistics paint a sobering and alarming picture of the threat facing the Sahel.

Violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel-Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger-have surged nearly sevenfold since 2017 (Eizenga & Williams 2020). With more than 1,000 violent episodes reported in the past year, the Sahel experienced the largest increase in violent extremist activity of any region in Africa during this period. According to Eizenga & Williams (2020) with nearly 8,000 fatalities, millions of people

displaced, government officials and traditional leaders targeted, thousands of schools closed, and economic activity severely curtailed, the Sahel had been left reeling from the surge of attacks.

The 1,170 violent events recorded in the Sahel (specifically Mali, Burkina Faso, and western Niger) in 2020 represented a 44% increase over the previous year. This continues an uninterrupted rise in violence involving militant Islamist groups in the region since 2015 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2021).[2]

In January 2022 the Africa Center for Strategic Studies reported a near doubling in violence linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel in 2021 (from 1,180 to 2,005 events). The massive increase in violence highlights the rapidly escalating security threat in this region. This surge was the most significant change in any of the theaters of militant Islamist group violence in Africa according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2022).

The 2,005 violent events observed in the Sahel (specifically Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger) in 2021 represented a staggering 70% increase over the previous year. This continues an uninterrupted escalation of violence involving militant Islamist groups in the region since 2015. This heightened violence does not bode well for the security of governments and civilians in the region over the long term. While having originated and still largely centered in Mali, the propensity of this violence has now shifted to Burkina Faso, which accounts for 58% of all events in the Sahel (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2022).

[2] Two groups, the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) and the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS) account for nearly all of these attacks. FLM is part of a consortium of groups with ties to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb known as Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).

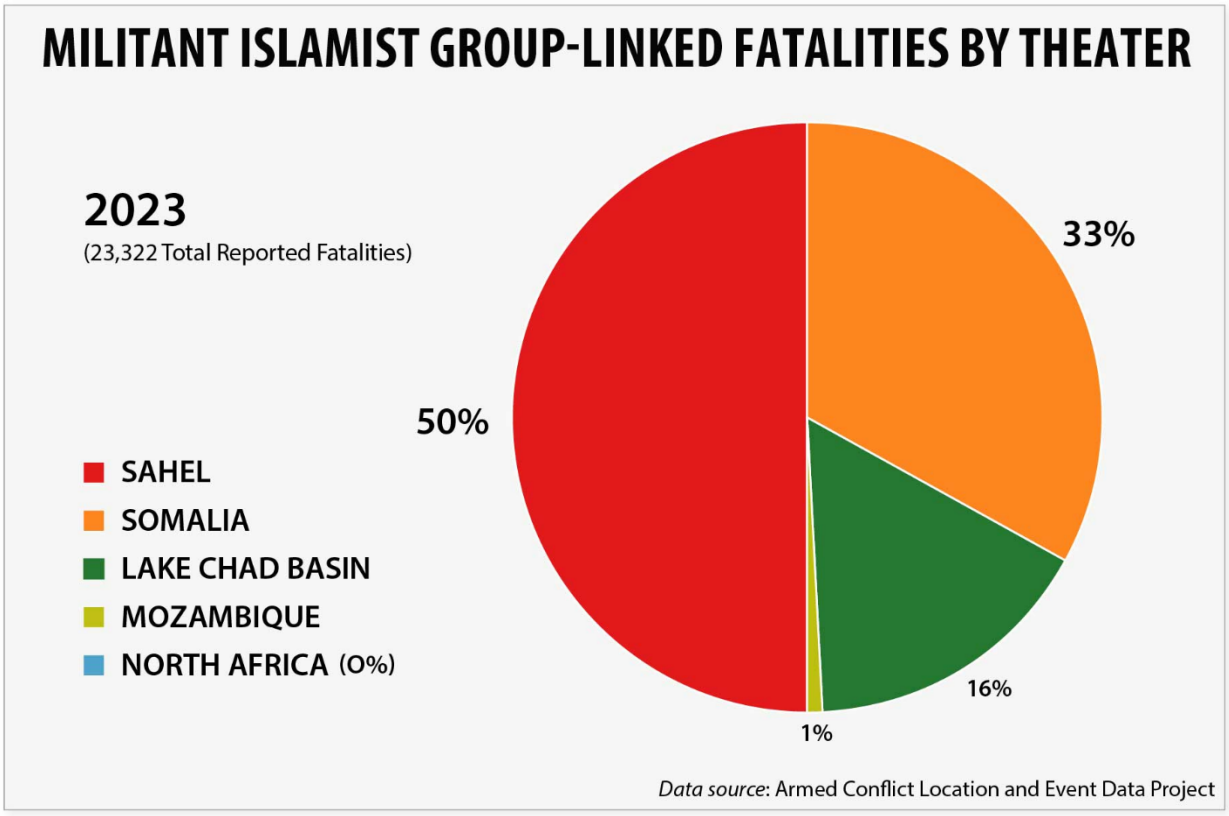
The estimated 4,839 fatalities linked to these violent events in the Sahel in 2021 were 17% higher than the previous year. This follows a 57% increase reported in 2020. There are now more fatalities linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel than any other region in Africa (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2022).

The Sahel has also quite worryingly seen a rapid escalation in militant Islamist group violence against civilians in recent years. In 2017, attacks on civilians comprised one-fifth of all acts of violence in the Sahel theater (38 out of 187 recorded violent events). That number reached 42% in 2021 (833 out of 2,005) (Boukhars 2022). This makes the Sahel the region with the highest level of militant Islamist violence targeting civilians across the continent, comprising 60% of all such violence against civilians in Africa (Boukhars 2022).

The Sahel—specifically Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—experienced the most rapid expansion of militant Islamist violence of any region over the past year (2022). It accounted for 7,899 deaths, more than 40% of the continental total of fatalities (Siegle & Williams 2023).

The first seven months of 2023 saw at least 7,800 civilian deaths, a significant increase from 2022, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (Center for Preventive Action 2024).

Extremist violence has rapidly spiraled out of control across the Sahel. The Sahel now accounts for a staggering 40% of all violent activity by militant Islamist groups in Africa, more than any other region in Africa (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023). Fatalities in the Sahel also amounted to 50% of all militant Islamist-linked fatalities reported on the continent in 2023 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2024).



Spanning the area from Senegal to Eritrea, situated between the Sahara to the north and the African tropics to the south, the Sahel region has long faced severe, complex security and humanitarian crises (Center for Preventive Action 2024). Various political, socio-economic and ideological drivers of terrorism and extremism have contributed towards the grave insecurity that has befallen the Sahel.

A History of Violence

Since gaining independence in the 1960s, many countries in the Sahel have experienced violent extremism due to a combination of weak and illegitimate governance, economic decline, and the exacerbating effects of climate change. Violence,

conflict, and crime have surged over the last decade, transcending national borders and posing significant challenges to countries both in and outside the region (Centre for Preventive Action 2024).

The epicenters of violence and humanitarian disaster are in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad Basin subregions. Liptako-Gourma is in the central Sahel, in the borderlands of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Current instability is associated with the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011, which led to the proliferation of weapons and armed fighters in the region.

The influx of extremists into northern Mali also reignited the dormant Tuareg rebellion in 2012. Liptako-Gourma has since become a hotbed for violent extremism in the Sahel. Notable attacks targeting the Radisson Blu Hotel in Mali, the Splendid Hotel in Burkina Faso, and L'Etoule du Sud Hotel in Ivory Coast in 2015 and 2016 demonstrated the initial extent of the Islamist threat that the Sahel and West Africa is facing (Center for Preventive Action 2024).

The Sahel has been plagued by several groups operating in the region, most notably the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and JNIM.

The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)

In September 2016, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) surfaced in Burkina Faso, launching its first major attack on a border post near the Burkinabe city of Markoye. ISGS has also emerged as one of the most dangerous militant groups in the region. ISGS was linked to 26% of all events and 42% of all fatalities associated with militant Islamist groups in the Sahel in 2018 (Le Roux 2019).

ISGS is estimated to have a core of 100 fighters but draws on a network of informants and logistics among sympathetic villagers. In total, it may number between 300-425 members, including supporters from Niger and Burkina Faso. As opposed to other militant

Islamist groups active in the Sahel, ISGS does not appear to have developed a cohesive, ideologically-driven narrative. Rather than winning people over and gaining their moral support or establishing a home base, ISGS has focused instead on stretching the battlefield (Le Roux 2019). ISGS has exploited grievances of marginalized communities to recruit, especially (though not exclusively) among young Fulani men. Lack of economic opportunities, a sense of diminished social status, and the need for protection against cattle theft all apparently influence the decision to join ISGS (Le Roux 2019).

ISGS often targets government representatives in its attacks. In 2018, ISGS claimed responsibility for the killing of the mayor of Koutougou commune because he was working "with Burkina's armed forces, for the crusaders." Starting in 2018, ISGS has also repeatedly targeted schools, with devastating effect (Le Roux 2019). Over 1,100 schools have been shut down in Burkina Faso after threats, attacks, and the murders of teachers and administrators. ISGS is now linked to nearly 30% of all militant Islamist attacks in Burkina Faso, sharply contributing to the escalating Islamist insurgency in the country (Le Roux 2019).

The year 2020 had been described as being the deadliest year of militant Islamist violence in the Sahel, with an estimated 4,250 fatalities, an increase of 60% from 2019. Significantly, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) was linked to more than half of these deaths. ISGS's violent activity has surged across the borderlands of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, an area known locally as Liptako-Gourma. The projected 524 violent events it is linked to in 2020 are more than double the figure from 2019 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2020). Forty-two administrative districts (cercles in Mali, provinces in Burkina Faso, and départements in Niger) reported violent events attributed to ISGS in 2020.

Another group that has operated with devastating effect in the Sahel is the JNIM.

The Ascendancy of JNIM

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Support Group for Islam and Muslims, or JNIM) is a Salafi-jihadist group and the Sahelian branch of the transnational al-Qaeda organization. The armed group's immediate parent organization is the Algeria-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), whose roots emanate from the Algerian civil war of the 1990s (ACLED 2023c). JNIM's origins dates back more than two decades to the founding of AQIM and its predecessor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and their entrenchment in the Sahara and Sahel. Since then, the Sahelian insurgency has continued to evolve through splits, mergers, and group and alliance formations, with JNIM emerging from the March 2017 merger of Ansar Dine, AQIM's Sahara region, al-Murabitun, and Katiba Macina. Each of these groups shares a common ideology and strategic objectives, but has exhibited distinct profiles and characteristics (ACLED 2023c). The group announced its merger in a video in which JNIM's new emir, Iyad Ag Ghali, appeared alongside leaders from the other constituent militant groups, and pledged allegiance to the emirs of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Qaeda (AQ), and the Taliban (CISAC 2018a).

In announcing the group's creation, JNIM emir Iyad Ag Ghaly stated the group's intention to "stand in front of the occupying Crusader enemy". JNIM seeks to replace established state authority with a conservative interpretation of Islamic law (Thompson 2021).

JNIM developed a strategic blueprint that includes a combination of guerrilla warfare, strategic use of violence, governance and population control, economic warfare, and media and propaganda operations (ACLED 2023c).

JNIM is the most active armed actor in the Sahel regional conflict. Its influence and reach extend across much of the central Sahel and into the West African littoral states, having expanded from the group's traditional strongholds in northern and central Mali to the

western and southern parts of Mali, most of Burkina Faso, parts of Niger, and the northernmost areas of Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Togo. At present it is also perceived to be the most lethal actor in the region (Rosengren 2023). Clashes with rivalling groups such as the Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Russian Wagner Group show no signs of limiting or containing the organisation's operational capability (Rosengren 2023).

It began in central Mali with the emergence of Katiba Macina in early 2015, which has since become JNIM's largest and most active subgroup, encompassing several of JNIM's most active military regions. The birth of Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso in late 2016 — subsequently incorporated into JNIM — facilitated the group's continued expansion in Burkina Faso, which from the north of the country spread to southwestern Niger and eastern Burkina Faso between 2017 and 2018 (ACLED 2023c). In the second half of 2018, JNIM further expanded its operations in southwestern Burkina Faso. This multistage geographic expansion has seen JNIM's power base and driving force gradually shift to central Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso (ACLED 2023c).

JNIM's military operations focus on a wide range of adversaries, including international, regional, and local forces, as well as various non-state armed groups, including pro-government militias and rival jihadist militants such as the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel). JNIM has developed a diverse array of violent tactics as part of its warfare efforts, employing targeted assassinations, kidnappings, complex attacks, and large-scale military campaigns. One of the hallmarks of JNIM's violent tactics is the use of remote violence, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs), land mines, rockets, and mortar fire (ACLED 2023c). JNIM has also carried out increasing numbers of mass atrocities against communities it perceives as close to pro-government militias or IS Sahel.

The group also deploys an array of nonviolent tactics to advance its objectives. These include various forms of resourcing and financing to sustain its activities like engaging in

artisanal mining, livestock theft, fundraising, collection and extortion of zakat (or alms), looting and taxation of goods, and tapping into licit and illicit supply chains. JNIM has also sought to position itself as a competing governance actor, control the population, and impose its vision of insurgent order (ACLED 2023c). In areas under the group's control or influence, it regulates social behavior by imposing dress codes, gender segregation, and other rules it considers in accordance with its interpretation of Islam.

Violent events attributed to Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) comprise more than 64% of all episodes linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel since 2017. The Macina Liberation Front (FLM) has been by far the most active of JNIM's component groups, operating from its stronghold in central Mali and expanding into northern and other parts of Burkina Faso (Eizenga & Williams 2020). The pace of attacks has increased. The first four months of 2019 saw a monthly average of 32 violent events attributed to JNIM in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger compared with 41 average monthly events over the same period in 2020 and 59 in 2021—representing a 43% and 84% increase over 2019 levels, respectively. These figures likely underestimate the increases in violence linked to JNIM, due to the number of attacks that go unclaimed (Thompson 2021).

Ambiguity over the current status of AQIM Sahara and al Mourabitoun, meanwhile, underscores a key function of JNIM. By presenting a united front, the JNIM coalition obscures the many setbacks that each of these groups has experienced, providing the illusion of cohesion, command and control, and unassailability (Eizenga & Williams 2020). Although JNIM presents itself as a united front for Salafist jihad in the Sahel, there are four distinct areas of operation, driven by local dynamics, shaping the actions of JNIM's component groups. These four distinct areas of operation include Northern Mali (Ansar Dine), Central Mali and Northern Burkina Faso (Amadou Koufa, FLM, and its affiliates (including Katiba Serma), Eastern Burkina Faso and Niger Borderlands (specific groups

responsible unknown) and Southwestern Burkina Faso (possibly FLM fighters) (Eizenga & Williams 2020).

JNIM's warfare focuses primarily on fighting international and local government forces in countries where the group is active. It portrays itself as a vanguard against foreign invaders and an alternative to local governments, which it describes as corrupt, secular, and anti-Islamic 'puppet regimes' of the West (ACLED 2023c). At the same time, JNIM was engaged in conflict with IS Sahel — an additional layer of violent dynamics in the continuously transformed Sahel conflict.

In September 2023, JNIM's latest attacks targeted the Bamba military camp near Gao (successfully seizing it) as well as a boat traveling along the Niger River near Timbuktu. This heightened the collective sense of siege in the two towns. Altogether, in just the three days of insurgent warfare that surrounded these attacks, JNIM killed approximately 120 people in Gao and Timbuktu (Zenn 2023b). JNIM's threats to Gao and Timbuktu are also straining the Malian army at a time when JNIM's rival, Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), is also seeking to capture Menaka, a nearby city that lies along the border with Niger (Zenn 2023). The group continues to implement its signature blockades in areas it controls throughout the Sahel in order to extract concessions from civilians. Concessions include, for example, demands that the local population does not cooperate with Russia's Wagner Group or local civilian defense forces (Zenn 2023b). As the security environment deteriorates amid coups and growing instability throughout West Africa—alongside the recent French withdrawal—JNIM and ISGS are likely to be optimistic about their ability to lay siege to additional towns in Mali and neighboring countries.

Permissive Conditions Facilitating the Expansion of Terror in The Sahel

The rapid expansion of violent extremism in the Sahel has been attributed to several salient factors. This includes persistently weak governance, characterized by corruption,

democratic regression, severe legitimacy deficits and human rights violations. Many countries in the Sahel have also worryingly experienced successive unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs). Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger experienced a combined 25 successful military coups between 1960 and 2022 (Centre for Preventive Action 2024a). The region indeed suffers from a massive coup epidemic, which has significantly weakened state capacity to effectively counter jihadi terrorism. The death of Chadian President Idriss Déby on April 20, 2021, also created a profound leadership vacuum in regional counterterrorism efforts (Center for Preventive Action 2024a).

A July 26 2023 coup d'etat in Niger, the ninth attempted overthrow of a West African government in the last three years, dealt a significant blow to counterterrorism and stabilization efforts in the Sahel. Niger's government prevented a coup attempt in March 2021, two days before President-elect Mohamed Bazoum assumed office, but the most recent coup attempt succeeded in unseating him. Despite pressure from ECOWAS, including sanctions and the threat of military intervention, the coup leaders have refused to cede power and declared a new government (Center for Preventive Action 2024a).

Mali's military government also pulled out of the G5 Sahel-greatly diminishing the organization's counterterrorism capacity. The coups have hampered the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, too. The fallout between France and the military junta leading the country led to the withdrawal of the French Barkhane force fighting jihadist groups.

The reliance on military responses in attempts to eliminate the scourge of extremism in the Sahel has been pronounced. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)-comprised of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria—was activated in 2014 to respond to the threat of Boko Haram, organized crime, and banditry in the Lake Chad Basin. In February 2017, France and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5) countries—Burkina Faso, Chad,

Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—announced the creation of the G5 Sahel Force, a five-thousand-troop-strong counterterrorism force aimed at fighting militant groups with an expanded mandate to cross borders in the Sahel region (Center for Preventive Action 2024a).

The concerted campaign against militants (which perhaps has seen an overrelliance on military responses) has instead caused the spread of militancy to countries across the Sahel. France's growing unpopularity in its former colonies, also led French President Emmanuel Macron to formally announce that Operation Barkhane would end in the first quarter of 2022. In February 2022, France and its European allies comprising Task Force Takuba also announced their intent to withdraw all troops from Mali, ending their nearly decade-long intervention (Center for Preventive Action 2024a).

Violent extremists exploited the resulting security vacuum with heightened attacks across the Sahel. The first six months of 2022 saw a dramatic increase in attacks, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma area and spilling into coastal West Africa (Centre for Preventive Action 2024a).

From Burkina Faso, militant Islamist groups have increasingly targeted littoral countries to the south including Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Togo. Benin has experienced nine attacks attributed to militant Islamist groups in its borderlands since December 2021. Two of these were sophisticated operations involving improvised explosive devices on the Beninois side of the W-Arly-Pendjari park complex (Parc W) (Brottem 2022). The violent events in Benin have mirrored the first ever militant Islamist attack in neighboring Togo and at least 14 related incidents in Côte d'Ivoire. These attacks are likely linked to the Macina Liberation Front (FLM), the most active element of a consortium of militant groups known as Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) (Brottem 2022).

Militant Islamist violence in the Sahel has also been spreading geographically. From a locus in northern Mali, the propensity of violent events has shifted to the more populated regions of central and southern Mali. This includes the capital, Bamako, which has seen attacks on an increasingly regular basis after years of relative insulation. Militant Islamist violence has similarly spread rapidly into northern, western, and eastern Burkina Faso. Today, Burkina Faso experiences more violent events than any other country in the Sahel (Siegle & Williams 2023).

Once seen as highly unlikely, there is now a real chance that Bamako and Ouagadougou—the capital cities of Mali and Burkina Faso—could fall, fragmenting what little semblance of coherent state structures remain. Both countries have struggled with a breakdown in governance and an acceleration of militant Islamist violence following coups starting in 2020 (Siegle & Williams 2023).

Burkina Faso experienced 67% of the militant Islamist-related fatalities in the Sahel (7,762). This is more than double the number of deaths recorded in 2022. This is the third year in a row Burkina Faso has experienced the most extremist violence in the region. Militant Islamist groups, primarily Ansaroul Islam and other JNIM entities, have laid siege on at least 36 Burkinabe towns and now control more than half the country's territory (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2024). Estimates suggest that there are more than 330,000 refugees and 2.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. There are over 2 million IDPs in Burkina Faso alone.

Beyond the Sahel, West Africa has also been wracked with persistent insecurity and instability orchestrated by jihadist groups. The section to follow will briefly examine the most prominent jihadi groups operating in West Africa. This will include a brief consideration of the external sources of support for these groups. Additionally there will

also be a brief consideration of the goals and motivations of these groups in the region, as well as their operational strategy and tactics employed. This will also include an assessment of the patterns of the attacks in the region and the victims of these attacks.

West Africa's Persistent Woes with Jihadi Terror

The West African region has consistently faced major security threats and challenges posed by Jihadi terrorism. The most acute of these challenges has been posed by Boko Haram in Nigeria. More than 35,000 people are estimated to have been killed as a result of Boko Haram attacks between 2009 and 2020. Their tactics include suicide bombings, abductions, torture, rape, forced marriages and the recruitment of child soldiers, as well as attacks that are directed against government infrastructure, traditional and religious leaders and civilians (Global Centre for The Responsibility to Protect 2024).

Boko Haram formed in 2002 when Mohammed Yusuf, a well-known preacher and proselytizer of the Izala sect of Islam in the Maiduguri region of Nigeria, began to radicalize his discourse to reject all secular aspects of Nigerian society.

In 2002, Yusuf opened a religious complex with an Islamic school in Maiduguri, Nigeria, which attracted students from poor Muslim families across the country. Yusuf reportedly used the school to convert and recruit future jihadis. Boko Haram expanded into Yobe state, where it set up another base, nicknamed "Afghanistan," near the Nigeria-Niger border in 2003 (CISAC 2018b).

From 2002-2003, a group of Yusuf's students formed a community near Kanama, Nigeria in order to adhere to Yusuf's teachings and live outside secular society. Members of this group, dubbed Al Sunna Wal Jamma (Followers of the Prophet's Teachings) were the first followers of Yusuf to instigate violence against the Nigerian government. This sect

was quashed by the Nigerian government in 2003. In response Boko Haram conducted its first attack, occupying a police station and raising the Afghan Taliban flag.

Before 2009, the group was less politically focused, seeking to separate themselves from secular society. With the Yusuf's death and increased conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, Boko Haram came to seek the overthrow of the Nigerian government and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate (CISAC 2018b)

Open conflict erupted in July 2009 following a violent clash between Boko Haram members and the police, when militants refused to adhere to a law requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets. This incident incited violent uprisings in Bauchi and quickly spread to Borno, Yobe, and Kano. Nigerian military forces killed over 700 in suppressing the uprisings and capturing Yusuf. Security forces later killed Yusuf, claiming that he had tried to escape.

After suffering severe losses in 2009, Boko Haram regrouped in 2010 under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's second-in-command. The frequency, lethality, and sophistication of Boko Haram's attacks increased dramatically under Shekau, allegedly as a result of increased cooperation with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). To protest the election of Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from southern Nigeria, Boko Haram carried out a series of bombings during Jonathan's presidential inauguration in May 2011. The escalation of violence continued throughout the year, including an attack on the Abuja UN building in August, Boko Haram's first foreign target. President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the areas of Yobe, Borno, Plateau, and Niger later that year.(CISAC 2018b).

As Boko Haram grew increasingly violent, tensions grew between Mamman Nur, a leader of an independent faction within Boko Haram, and Shekau. In January 2012, members who opposed killing Muslims split off from Boko Haram to form Ansaru. Although Ansaru

was originally composed of militants who supported Nur's leadership over Shekau's, Nur's role is unknown. Ansaru conducted numerous attacks against foreigners in northern Nigeria and its neighbors between 2013 and 2014. Ansaru stopped its attacks around 2014 (CISAC 2018b).

Boko Haram became notorious when it kidnapped over 300 young girls from a secular school in Chibok, Nigeria, in April 2014. In January 2015, Boko Haram unleashed a massive assault on the villages of Baga and Doron Baga in Borno State and claimed control over the area (CISAC 2018b). According to the Council on Foreign Relations, by August 2015 more than 16,000 people had been killed and 2.5 million people displaced because of Boko Haram violence.

In response to the threat, the African Union (AU) endorsed a military coalition to contain and degrade Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria; they changed the mandate of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to encompass counter-terrorist operations and increased its funding (CISAC 2018b). Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Benin pledged troops for the 7,500-strong Multinational Joint Task Force. The coalition aimed to protect the Nigerian border and the Lake Chad region but not participate in the conflict within Nigeria. The force deployed on March 6, 2015, and the offensive against Boko Haram began with Chadian and Nigerian airstrikes that drove the organization out of a dozen towns in Northern Nigeria. As a result of Chadian participation in the MNJTF, Boko Haram began targeting the Chad basin region, torching homes and kidnapping villagers before being pushed back by the Chadian military.

On February 7, 2015, Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced that national elections would be postponed for six weeks in order for security forces to launch an offensive to regain territory controlled by Boko Haram. Estimates suggested that Boko Haram controlled about 20,000 square miles of territory in northeastern Nigeria. Attacks on civilians continued, including across borders in both

Chad and Cameroon. On March 28, the Nigerian Election Day, Boko Haram killed 41 people in an attempt to keep voters from the polls but millions still voted (CISAC 2018b).

In early March 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in an audio message posted online, featuring Shekau. Reportedly, Boko Haram militants were traveling to train at IS military camps at that time. When IS accepted the pledge in late March, it referred to Boko Haram as the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), a name that subsequently appeared on social media accounts linked to IS. IS also encouraged Muslims to join Boko Haram and other West African militant groups.

Despite being pushed out of its stronghold, Boko Haram continued operations, often employing suicide bombers to attack civilian, police, and government targets throughout Nigeria. In March 2016, militants from Boko Haram were reportedly fighting for IS in Libya (CISAC 2018b).

In August 2016, leadership struggles led to a split within Boko Haram, pitting the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) against Jama'atu Ahl al-Sunnah lil-Dawa wal-Jihad (JAS) (as Boko Haram is officially known).

The Ascendancy of ISWAP

The Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) made it clear that it had adopted a posture less hostile to Muslim civilians. ISWAP materials highlighted the ways in which the new faction sought to distinguish itself from Shekau's. They portrayed Shekau as acting brutally, in violation of Islamic doctrine, and using methods that alienated the Lake Chad basin's inhabitants and thus undermined support for Islamist militancy in the region.

They were especially critical of Shekau for treating Muslims living outside Boko Haram territory as infidels and thus fair game for attack. Shekau was notorious for the brutality he sanctioned in subduing the civilians in JAS's path. From bases in the Sambisa forest, he oversaw a campaign of sectarian predation in the Lake Chad basin. Labelling residents

as infidels (though most are Muslims), JAS fighters plundered villages and towns and massacred the residents. The organisation also enlisted women and girls as suicide bombers (International Crisis Group 2023).

These tactics contributed to a split in Boko Haram's ranks. In 2016, partly because they viewed the group's atrocities against civilians as counterproductive, a group of militants broke away from Shekau. They set up camp on the banks and islands of Lake Chad, in the north of Nigeria's Borno state, and secured the recognition of the Islamic State, becoming the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The breakaway faction began competing with Shekau's JAS for dominance in the region (International Crisis Group 2023).

Since the killing of JAS's leader Abubakar Shekau in 2021, ISWAP consolidated its success, forcing JAS on the defensive. An ISWAP-led attack on Sambisa forest, long known as JAS's base, in 2021 culminated in the death of Shekau. In May 2021, ISWAP set out to reunify/merge the jihadist forces, launching an offensive in JAS's stronghold in the Sambisa forest. The ISWAP fighters hunted Shekau down. When offered a chance to surrender, he detonated his suicide vest (International Crisis Group 2023).

In Borno state, the group is reported to generate significant financial resources from taxation while also running prison and court systems. ISWAP has also recently claimed attacks beyond its stronghold in the North-East, expanding its operational presence to the North-West and the North Central regions, including the federal capital territory (ACLED 2023).

The jihadists groups have engaged in direct conflict with each other, with ISWAP trying to consolidate the gains it hoped it would draw from eliminating its rival's leader. The continuation of a "jihadist civil war" poses considerable security threats. Due to the intra-jihadist conflict, the Lake Chad basin remains highly dangerous, with many displaced

people prevented from returning to their homes (International Crisis Group 2023). JAS launched devastating attacks against ISWAP in 2022; one such attack killed 33 wives of ISWAP militants in Sambisa. Between February and March 2023, ISWAP launched reprisals that killed no fewer than 200 JAS fighters, women and children in parts of Borno (Iyorah 2023).

On the battlefield, ISWAP remained dominant. It took over the Sambisa forest, adding to the rural areas it controls in northern Borno, notably the southern shores of Lake Chad and the Alagarno forest on the Yobe state boundary. JAS is now perceived as being a much weaker force, but it is hardly defeated (International Crisis Group 2023).

West Africa has been acutely affected by extremist violence, which also saw an increasing geographical expansion in operations by the various groups operating in the region.

According to Jihad Analytics, half the attacks claimed by IS since the beginning of 2022 were carried out in 10 African countries. Among them were Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – the four Boko Haram-affected countries of the Lake Chad Basin (ISS Lake Chad Basin Project 2022). Boko Haram factions are also expanding operations beyond the region. For a long time, the eight primary target areas of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin were North and Far North (Cameroon), Lac and Hadjer-Lamis (Chad), Diffa (Niger), and Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (Nigeria). However in 2022 the scope has expanded, particularly with the establishment of Ansaru and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) cells in other parts of Nigeria (ISS Lake Chad Basin Project 2022).

In 2022, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continued to operate and control territory in the North-East and across the Lake Chad Basin, despite suffering setbacks

from the military's counterinsurgency campaign and grappling with ongoing infighting with the Group for the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad (JAS), Boko Haram's original name. Alongside another violent jihadist organization, Ansaru, ISWAP has also allegedly been active in the North-West, where dozens of bandit groups continued to engage in deadly raids, kidnappings for ransom, and other violent criminal activities (ACLED 2023).

ISWAP Tactics and Operational Strategies

ISIS–West Africa (ISIS-WA) employs ambushes, military-style assaults, roadside bombs, kidnappings, and targeted killings. The group focuses most of its attacks on regional military targets and civilian defense forces but also frequently attacks government personnel and infrastructure, foreign aid workers, Christians, and other civilians whom it perceives as working against the group or opposing its interpretation of Islamic law. ISIS–West Africa equips its fighters with small arms, light and heavy machine guns, vehicle-mounted weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, mines, rockets, and improvised explosive devices (DNI 2023).

ISIS-WA generally concentrated its attacks on government and security forces and expanded efforts to implement shadow governance structures. Whereas JAS continued to stage raids to capture civilians and plunder their resources, terrorize crowded markets and mosques with suicide bombings, and conduct mass killings and abductions at roadblocks, ISWAP focused primarily on military targets as well as, to a lesser extent, civilian targets associated in one way or another with the state, such as local officials, chiefs, vigilantes and suspected informers. While ISWAP, like JAS, would sometimes direct suicide bombers at military targets, unlike JAS, it did not send women or children on these suicide missions, and it does not attack civilian targets. ISWAP has benefited by cultivating the economic strength and favour of communities in its territory through the provision of a semblance of justice and governance that was otherwise lacking

(International Crisis Group 2019). This includes the provision of essential services vis-a-vis security provision and economic services to local populations via the creation of a proto-state.

Unable to prevent a nationwide escalation of violence, the government has often resorted to the use of force to defeat insurgents and stop the violence. Yet, the proliferation of self-defense militias, militarization of local communities, and widespread human rights abuses at the hands of the security forces have contributed to alienate local populations, making them vulnerable to recruitment into militant or criminal organizations and nurturing armed mobilization along religious and ethnic lines (ACLED 2023).

If ISWAP and JAS mend relations, merge or find ways to coexist the potential jihadist threat could significantly increase and metastasize across Nigeria's North-East.

The Worrying Re-Emergence of Ansaru

Another worrying development is Ansaru's re-emergence in Nigeria. For much of the past decade, Ansaru has largely been an outlier on the terrorism threat landscape. But the group is making a comeback in Nigeria – and is more dangerous than ever according to analysis provided by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS Regional Office for West Africa 2022).

Ansaru claims to defend the interests of Islam in communities where its presence has largely been contained. It was formed in 2012 as a breakaway Boko Haram faction after a disagreement between 'moderates' and 'hardliners'. Ansaru was led initially by commanders who disagreed with the late Abubakar Shekarau's ultra-takfir – an approach that justifies the killings of other Muslims deemed to be unbelievers. The group reappeared in 2019 as an Al-Qaeda franchise in Nigeria after years underground, absorbing former JAS fighters who fled the northeast due to offensives in the Lake Chad

area by a multinational force comprising Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria (Iyorah 2023).

There are three worrying signs of Ansaru's resurgence: its increased links to abductions and banditry, its connections to other violent extremist groups, and the ability to win over local communities with its 'hearts and minds' campaign (ISS Regional Office for West Africa 2022). Ansaru is especially active in Nigeria's North-West and North-Central zones, where banditry and abductions have risen dramatically in recent years. The group is believed to have provided weapons and other support to bandits behind attacks in the North-West (ISS Regional Office for West Africa 2022). According to ISS analysis beyond Nigeria, the wider Sahel region is at risk of Ansaru's symbolic loyalty to more violent extremist groups.

At the start of 2022, Ansaru reconfirmed its allegiance to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Ansaru reflects AQIM's expansion into Nigeria through members who trained with AQIM and formed Ansaru's militant wing. Key to Ansaru's success is its delivery of essential public services against the backdrop of state failure in rural communities. For example, the group protects rural residents against bandits (ISS Regional Office for West Africa 2022).

Despite apparent animosity the possibility of greater cooperation amongst jihadist groups in West Africa cannot be ruled out in the near future. There is the growing possibility of mergers or alliances of convenience involving the three prominent violent extremist groups in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, namely ISWAP, Ansaru and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS). JAS had reportedly reached out to IS leading the global terror organization to nudge its most successful affiliate, ISWAP, towards an alliance with JAS. A merger could see a consolidation of fighters and resources. The

move to expand and consolidate operations is forging unlikely ties not only between terrorist groups but between them and organised criminals[3] (ISS Lake Chad Basin Project 2022).

As of late 2023 the jihadist infighting continued to rage on. The jihadists have been battling for some time, but their struggle intensified a great deal following the killing of Boko Haram's original chieftain, Abubakar Shekau, in May 2021.

As the most prominent "province" (*wilaya*) of Islamic State (IS) outside the Middle East, ISWAP's persistence ensures IS's vision of a global "caliphate" endures despite IS's setbacks in the Middle East and elsewhere (Zenn 2023). ISWAP's forays into southern Nigeria, where it has sporadically conducted attacks on Christians and soldiers at checkpoints since 2022, exemplifies how ISWAP will unlikely be content to permanently remain "only" in control of parts of northeastern Nigeria (Zenn 2023).

The resilience of Boko Haram should also not be underestimated either.

The Lake Chad Basin region also experienced the resurgence of Boko Haram in 2022. Since 2017, Boko Haram had been declining in its relative threat vis-à-vis the breakaway Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA). However, over the past year, Boko Haram was linked to a 57% increase in violent events and a 70% jump in fatalities (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023).

[3] Two examples are the kidnapping of train passengers in Kaduna, Nigeria, in March 2022 and the jailbreak leading to the escape of prisoners affiliated with Boko Haram in Abuja, Nigeria, in July 2022. The former involved a collaboration between JAS and criminal gangs referred to as bandits. The latter brought together two Boko Haram factions, Ansaru and ISWAP.

Another critical regional theatre for the increasing threat posed by jihadi terrorism has been Central Africa – a region already torn apart by war, instability and grave insecurity since the outbreak of 'Africa's First World War' in 1998.

The section to follow will seek to analyze the major Jihadi groups operating in Central Africa. This will most notably include an examination of the affiliation with and external sources of support for the groups operative in this unstable region. As with previous sections, this will include a brief consideration of the targets of terrorism and attempts to ascertain the primary goals and motivation driving groups in Central Africa. Additionally an assessment of the organizational structure and operational tactics employed by the most active group will be undertaken as well as the salient drivers of terrorism in the region.

Central Africa: A New Front for Jihadi Terrorism

On April 18, 2019, the Islamic State shocked many observers around the world when it claimed its first attack in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), perpetrated by a group known locally as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

The ADF's transformation that ultimately led to its pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State commenced around 2015. The group's foundations for both jihadism and opportunistic alliances started years earlier. Despite its secular name and historical ties to non-Muslim communities and armed groups, the ADF has always had a stated militant Islamist agenda, which, like this group's politico-military efforts, has become increasingly extreme over time (Weiss, O'Farrell, Candland, & Poole 2023).

Between 2007 and 2010, the ADF lived in relative peace with the local communities in eastern Congo. However, between 2010 and 2011, the ADF began targeting local civilians in an attempt to prevent them from collaborating with the Congolese military which had launched a major offensive against the group in 2010. Following further

Congolese military pressure against the ADF in July 2013 and again in 2014, the group began retaliating against civilians en masse. The 2014 military offensive against the ADF inflicted major casualties and also forced ADF leader Jamil Mukulu to flee from Congo. A year later, Mukulu was arrested in Tanzania and extradited to Uganda, leading to one of his senior deputies, Musa Baluku, becoming the new leader (Weiss, O'Farrell, Candland, & Poole 2023:22).

Under Baluku, the ADF attempted to reassert itself by participating in a vicious series of massacres in late 2014 and 2015, reportedly alongside other armed groups and with the complicity of some Congolese military officers. Though the ADF managed to survive, the group's fortunes had waned, and former ADF members recount that by 2017, morale in the group was incredibly low (Weiss, O'Farrell, Candland, & Poole 2023:22).

By 2017, ADF operations were in decline, with only one recorded ADF-caused fatality in the first eight months of the year. It is within this context that Baluku began to look for funding elsewhere to keep the ADF alive.

Under the leadership of Musa Baluku, the ADF became more outwardly facing, whereas previously the group had maintained a strict, secretive modus operandi.

In 2016, the group-by then rebranded as Madinat Tauheed wau Muwahideen (MTM), or "City of Monotheism and Monotheists" – began rudimentary propaganda efforts that put itself more in line with the rhetoric of the global jihadi movement (Weiss, O'Farrell, Candland, & Poole 2023:23). This included a 2017 video featuring one of its senior foreign leaders known as "Jundi," or Tanzanian Ahmed Muhamood, calling on people to join the "Islamic State in Congo." This video is the earliest public evidence of the group's relationship with the Islamic State.

Baluku decided to pledge *bay'ah* [allegiance] to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his proclaimed global caliphate. In November 2017, the ADF received its first confirmed financial transfer

from the Islamic State via a Kenyan-based financier (Weiss, Candland, O' Farrell & Poole 2023b). In 2019 the Islamic State officially announced the creation of ISCAP, one of the newest of its so-called provinces. Baluku officially adopted the name The Islamic State's Central African Province (ISCAP), re-pledged the group' allegiance to each of the Islamic State's new caliphs, and the group's rank-and-file adopted the Islamic State identity and openly kill in its name.

The Islamic State has provided funds, notoriety, and, reportedly, training to help its Central Africa Province reach new levels of violence (Weiss, Candland, O' Farrell & Poole 2023b). The funding to ISCAP enabled it to grow rapidly in the DRC's North Kivu Province.

In April 2019, the Islamic State began publicly claiming attacks inside Congo on behalf of the ADF (Weiss, O' Farell, Candland, & Poole 2023: 23).

The decision for this shift was largely financially driven, given the ADF's dwindling financial resources.

Islamic State financial networks have been critically important towards securing funding for ISCAP operations. Both the Islamic State Somalia Province and Islamic State-loyal cells in South Africa have generated income through localized tactics and schemes, such as extortion or robberies, which are then pooled together to help support ISCAP and, to some extent, the Islamic State's Mozambique Province (Weiss, O' Farrell, Candland, & Poole 2023:26). The pooling of these funds and its subsequent laundering and facilitation are overseen by Islamic State Somalia (ISS) and its Al-Karrar office. Formed in late 2015 as an Islamic State-loyal splinter faction from al-Qaeda's al-Shabaab and led by a former al-Shabaab commander, Abdul Qadir Mu'min, the Islamic State in Somalia has played a critically important role in this regional funding relationship. It acts as the command hub for much of this financial network and is both the source of much of the regional network's

financial resources and the proverbial “glue” that binds these affiliates together (Weiss, ‘O Farell, Candland, & Poole 2023:26).

Islamic State central designated the ISS as the “command center” coordinating “affiliates operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, and for loose networks and sympathizers of these affiliates.” By September 2020, ISS was facilitating the movements of “trainers, tactical strategists, and financial support” from Islamic State central to ISCAP and Islamic State-Mozambique, and by July 2021, these activities were named as being the purview of ISS’s Al-Karrar Office (Weiss, ‘O Farell, Candland, & Poole 2023:26).

Cells in South Africa loyal to the Islamic State constitute another important hub in the financing of both ISCAP and the Islamic State in Mozambique. While not formally organized as one of the Islamic State’s so-called “provinces,” the cells in South Africa play an outsized role in the group’s revenue generation and coordination for central, eastern, and southern Africa, as well as local revenue generation for the Islamic State elsewhere. In regard to local revenue generation inside South Africa, the activities of the Islamic State-loyal cells have predominantly been criminal in nature. The alleged Durban-based Islamic State cell led by Farhad Hoomer was reportedly involved in kidnapping-for ransom and extortion rackets in both Durban and the town of Kliprivier. Hoomer’s plots to raise funds for the Islamic State were later confirmed by the United States (US) Treasury Department when it sanctioned Hoomer and three other South Africa-based individuals in March 2022 for terrorism financing (Weiss, ‘O Farell, Candland, & Poole 2023:28).

According to Weiss et al (2023) two of these individuals also utilized criminal activities to raise funds: Siraaj Miller trained Islamic State-loyal individuals to commit robberies in and near Cape Town to raise money for the jihadist group in 2018, and Abdella Hussein

Abadigga reportedly extorted members of two of his mosques for these fundraising efforts.

Other sources have additionally confirmed the interconnected nature between ISCAP, Islamic State Somalia, and Islamic State cells in South Africa. For example, the US Treasury Department reported that Abadigga coordinated his extortion efforts with the leadership of the ISS, in particular Bilal al Sudani, a Sudanese member of the group. Moreover, individuals linked to ISCAP have worked with South Africa-based Islamic State cells. Two former ISCAP members describe traveling to South Africa – one in 2018, the other in 2021– to receive military training and religious indoctrination (Weiss, Candland, O'Farrell, & Poole 2023:27).

According to Weiss et al (2023:28) the most important role played by Islamic State-loyal cells in South Africa appears to be that of middlemen, consolidating funds from those provinces and support networks that are primarily focused on generating revenue, and transferring the money to the provinces that are mainly financing recipients. Money generated by the Islamic State in both Somalia and South Africa is therefore often pooled inside South Africa and subsequently laundered across East Africa through an intricate network that finances the Islamic State's activities in the DRC, Uganda, Tanzania, and Mozambique. Much of the money flowing to ISCAP has been sent to Uganda, where ISCAP's networks receive the funds to use locally or smuggle across the border into Congo.[4] ISCAP has also exploited opportunities in gold and timber to raise funds internally. Kidnapping-for-ransom is another, slightly more lucrative, fundraising

[4] Key nodes in this network include Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa; funds are moved through these nodes to ISCAP and to the Islamic State in Mozambique. In the case of this network, which operated from 2019 to late 2020, much of the money was sent through hawala networks under the auspices of Heeryo Trading Enterprise, a Somalia- and South Africa-based company. Registered in Johannesburg and with operations in Mogadishu, Heeryo facilitated the movement of hundreds of thousands of dollars from Somalia to South Africa, as well as transfers from South Africa to Kenya for further distribution. For an extensive discussion of these networks see Weiss, 'O Farell, Candland & Poole 2023, Fatal Transaction: The Funding Behind the Islamic State's Central African Province.

approach ISCAP has taken in recent years. Kidnappings-for-ransom represent a return to ISCAP's past as the ADF (Weiss, 'O Farell, Candland & Poole 2023:28).

Consequently, Islamic State money has assisted towards facilitating the funding of the series of attempted and successful improvised explosive device (IED) blasts and suicide bombings in Uganda, Congo, and Rwanda from at least August 2021 to the end of 2022.

Civilians have largely borne the brunt of ISCAP's terror campaign. Between 2017 and 2022, ISCAP's area of operations inside eastern DRC has more than quadrupled, while the number of civilian casualties as a result of ISCAP attacks rose from 61 in 2017 to 1,198 in 2022, a more than 1800% increase (Weiss, 'O Farell, Candland & Poole 2023: 42). Between November 2017 and December 2022, ISCAP's average monthly death toll rose to 63 civilians killed per month, which amounts to a more than 270% increase in lethality.

In March 2021, ISCAP ideologues began to sensitize its members internally to suicide attacks, a tactic it had never before used. ISCAP went on to carry out its first suicide bombing in June 2021 in Beni town, DRC. Since then, it has successfully used the tactic at least six more times, including the triple suicide bombing on November 16, 2021, in Kampala, Uganda, and an attack on a military bar in Goma, DRC in April 2022 (Weiss, Candland O' Farrell, & Poole 2023b).

Its attempted suicide bombing in Pader, Uganda, in August 2021, was ISCAP's first confirmed operation outside DRC since 2007. The attempted bombings in Rwanda in summer 2021, the Kampala bombings that November, and the Goma bombing in April 2022 demonstrated in quick succession that ISCAP had not only gained the ability to carry our urban attacks far from its traditional area of operations but that it was motivated to expand its reach to become a regional terror threat (Weiss, Candland, O' Farrell, Poole 2023b).

Since 2021, the DRC and Uganda have worked together under Operation Shuja to confront ISCAP through a series of bombings and ground assaults. That operation has included a commitment to share intelligence about ISCAP. With the United Nations' MONUSCO peacekeeping mission in the DRC set to end in December 2024, observers expect ISCAP activity to accelerate over the next 12 months (ADF 2024).

On January 15, 2023, ISCAP carried out its most successful bombing yet, killing 14 and wounding 76 in a church in Kasindi, a border town in eastern Congo. Two months later, the group went on a murderous spree, killing over 100 people in a week, possibly in retaliation for the killing of one of its senior commanders (Weiss, Candland, O' Farrell, Poole 2023b).

The ADF's integration into the Islamic State has thus positioned the group to become the regional hub for training, indoctrination, and combat experience, which can then be exported to Congo's neighbors across Central and East Africa in Weiss, Candland, O' Farrell and Poole's view.

Two events however appear to be putting ISCAP's finances of shaky ground: the recent collapse of IS operations in Mozambique and al-Shabaab's repeated losses in Somalia (ADF 2024).

In the Horn of Africa Al-Shabaab has continued to reign as the premier terror group in the region.

Al-Shabaab: A Consistent and Potent Force in Somalia and East Africa

Al-Shabaab has remained a strong and resurgent force in the execution of jihadi terrorism in the East African region. Al-Shabaab is among al-Qaeda's most operationally capable affiliates, boasting as many as 7,000 militants (The Soufan Center 2022). Al-Shabaab in Somali also remains one of al-Qaeda's strongest and most successful affiliates.

The terrorist organization continues to exploit the Somalian government's limited state capacity and the country's dire humanitarian crises to launch indiscriminate attacks against government forces, foreign peacekeepers, and civilians. One of the central goals of Al-Shabaab is to destroy the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), rid their country of foreign forces, and establish a "Greater Somalia," joining all ethnic Somalis across East Africa under strict Islamic rule (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin, or al-Shabaab ("The Youth"), originated in the late 1980s when Somalis who had joined the Afghan mujahideen in the war against Russia returned home. The returned Somali fighters established a Salafi militant organization al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) during this time. Shortly thereafter, Somalia descended into civil war, culminating in the collapse of the Somali state in 1992. AIAI later dissolved and a group of its younger, hardline recruits joined forces with an alliance of sharia courts in south-central Somalia known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), serving as its enforcement wing (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

Despite the establishment of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in October 2004 in Kenya, the ICU gained control of Mogadishu in June 2006. At the request of the TFG, Ethiopia invaded Somalia and ousted the ICU from the capital in December (Gettleman 2006). The invasion and subsequent two-year occupation by Ethiopian forces fueled public resentment and triggered the formal establishment of al-Shabaab and its ongoing insurgency (Wise 2011).

Between 2006 and 2008, al-Shabaab asserted control over most of southern Somalia and grew its forces into the thousands. Throughout 2008 and 2009 it transformed into a dominant politico-military force in Somalia and managed to establish de-facto state authority in most of the southern and central areas of the country (Skjelderup 2020:1174).

In 2007, the United Nations approved the creation of a regional peacekeeping force, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), to protect the recently re-established TFG in Mogadishu. The introduction of foreign forces from across East Africa galvanized al-Shabaab to expand its operations beyond Somalia. On July 11, 2010, al-Shabaab launched its first foreign attack in Kampala, Uganda, killing 76 people in a series of suicide bombings (Wonacott & Bariyo 2010).

The terrorist group reached its apex in 2011 when it controlled parts of the capital city of Mogadishu and the vital port of Kismayo. However, the group's success proved short-lived as AMISOM and TFG forces were able to push al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu and several other urban centers in August (Gettleman & Ibrahim 2011; Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

Al-Shabaab's operations have in particular proven to be extremely lethal. In an attempt to revitalize its insurgency, al-Shabaab in April 2013 announced the launch of a four-day siege of the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya that killed sixty-seven people, the deadliest terrorist attack in Kenya in over fifteen years (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

In March 2014, al-Shabaab killed one foreign national and injured several others in a nightclub attack in Djibouti, the first suicide bombing in the country's history. In 2015, al-Shabaab killed 148 people at Garissa University College in Kenya after taking 700 students hostage during a 15-hour siege. In October 2017, twin truck bombings in Mogadishu widely believed to be perpetrated by al-Shabaab killed more than 500 people (Rehbein & Nor 2017). Five years later, over 100 more were killed at the same location (Sheikh & Hassani 2022). Between 2019 and 2020, al-Shabaab carried out a series of attacks in Mogadishu and northern Kenya, including an attack on a Kenyan military base housing U.S. forces that killed three U.S. servicemembers (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

The death toll for AU forces has been high with over 3,500 deaths incurred since the mission began in 2007. The inability to exact meaningful control of al-Shabaab and prospect of further casualties caused AMISOM forces to remain in their bases, conducting few offensive operations since 2016 (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

AMISOM has sought to drawdown its presence in Somalia and transfer primary security authority to Somali forces. AMISOM remained in place until April 2022, when it was replaced with the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). With around eighteen thousand troops, ATMIS serves as an extension of AMISOM and is not due to fully depart until the end of 2024. As of June 2023, 2,000 ATMIS forces have departed Somalia and the control of several military bases and key locations has been handed to Somali security forces (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

Since its inception, al-Shabaab has capitalized on the weakness of Somalia's central government to seize control of large swaths of ungoverned territory. It has proven to be one of the most potent jihadi terrorist organizations on the African continent.

In late 2022 President Mohamud launched a "total war" against al-Shabaab. The first phase began in August 2022, with the military rallying behind clan-based militias in central Somalia. The first phase of the offensive, launched in August 2022, concentrated on uprooting al-Shabaab's gains in central Somalia, particularly the regions of Hirshabelle and Galmudug. The new offensive's key attribute was providing support to local clans that were rebelling against al-Shabaab. (Center for Preventive Action 2024b). During this first phase, the federal government relied on the support of several clan militias, including the Abgal, Habar Gedir, and Hawadle sub-clans. Alliances with clans were critical to the government's initial success in dislodging the militants from their strongholds in central Somalia (ACLED 2023d).

Though the government offensive has weakened al-Shabaab's hold on territory, it has not stopped the group's attacks. In 2022, there was a 41% increase in al-Shabaab violence targeting civilians.

The most striking trend in Somalia over the past year (2022) was the 133% increase in the level of fatalities linked to militant Islamist group violence, primarily al Shabaab. There were 6,225 reported deaths tied to al Shabaab in 2022, an increase from 2,606 the previous year. This is a record level of fatalities and exceeds the total of 2020 and 2021 combined (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023). The Somalia theater was also marked by a 34% increase in IED attacks in the past year and a doubling in the fatalities resulting from IEDs. The UN reported that 613 civilians were killed and 948 injured in 2022, the majority from IEDs laid by al Shabaab.

Further extremist attacks persisted, despite government's counter-insurgency drive, as a suicide bomber killed more than twenty Somali soldiers and injured sixty more in an attack on the military academy in Mogadishu on July 25,2023 (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

Fleeing from government forces, some al-Shabaab fighters reportedly started to move northward, where political instability in Puntland and Somaliland could provide an opportunity for al-Shabaab to expand its presence (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

Al-Shabaab has proven capable of stalling the government's progress in the offensive. Despite losing key territory in Hirshabelle and Galmudug during the first phase of the offensive, al-Shabaab had since the beginning of 2023 managed to regroup, conduct retaliatory attacks, and attempt to reclaim lost territory (Muibu 2024).

Al-Shabaab has continued to exact a high toll on AU forces, such as the attack it launched on June 6, 2023 that killed fifty-four Ugandan peacekeepers at an AU base in Somalia.

Al-Shabaab has also kept up attacks across East Africa, including numerous incursions into the border regions of Kenya and Ethiopia (Centre for Preventive Action 2024b).

On August 6, 2023, one year after President Mohamud declared total war against al-Shabaab, Somali forces announced the launch of the campaign's second phase focused on uprooting the militants from its southern strongholds (ACLED 2023d). President Mohamud, announced the government's plans to liberate the country from al-Shabaab or diminish its influence to only small pockets of the country within five months (Reuters 2023).

In an effort to finally push al-Shabaab completely out of central Somalia, the federal government announced the start of the 'second phase' of the counter-insurgency campaign, codenamed Operation Black Lion, in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states (ACLED 2023d). President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud relocated the command center of the counter-insurgency campaign from Mogadishu to Dhuusamareeb, Galmudug's regional capital. The second phase continued to focus on the central states of Hirshabelle and Galmudug, and the government has once again turned to local militias for their support.

As part of the operation, security forces have been targeting al-Shabaab's main command centers in central Somalia after they failed to dislodge the militants from Hirshabelle and Galmudug states during the first phase of the counter-insurgency offensive and the expansion to Galmudug state. In this initial stage, security forces regained control of over 100 locations and strongholds previously under al-Shabaab's control in the two states (ACLED 2023d). Al-Shabaab, however, regained lost territories as political disputes delayed the campaign's second phase.

The government's campaign has seen limited success. Not one month after the launch of the second phase, al-Shabaab claimed the deaths of 178 soldiers in an attack on a

military base in central Somalia, forcing Somali forces to retreat from several towns and villages captured in months prior (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

Despite setbacks, the Somali government reported in October that 1,650 militants had been killed and 550 more wounded since August. On December 17, a joint U.S.-Somali military operation killed senior al-Shabaab leader Maalim Ayman, who was responsible for several high-profile attacks including the 2020 attack on Kenya's Manda Bay airfield that resulted in the deaths of three U.S. service members (Center for Preventive Action 2024b).

As the Somali government has looked to ramp up efforts to combat al-Shabaab, it has also had to contend with a debilitating natural disaster and a persisting, precarious political situation.

By January 2024-the five-month mark proclaimed by President Mohamud—al-Shabaab remained active and still capable of exerting influence, especially in its southern strongholds. Today, the government is steadfast in its rhetoric about plans to extend its offensive beyond central territories in Hirshabelle and Galmudug and to defeat al-Shabaab in its southern Somalia strongholds by the end of December 2024 (Muibu 2024).

But at the moment, the government's counterinsurgency operations have stalled in the central regions of the country. Despite plans for a second phase of the offensive (Operation Black Lion) in collaboration with the leaders of Somalia's five federal member states as well as neighboring countries Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti, the federal government's ambitious plans to extend its offensive south to al-Shabaab's strongholds in Jubaland and South West State have faced significant delays.

Rather than launching this planned second phase in June 2023 as a lightning advance against al-Shabaab, the government was forced to push back plans for Operation Black Lion in order to focus on central Somalia (Muibu 2024). Plans for "frontline states" Kenya,

Ethiopia, and Djibouti to contribute their forces as part of Operation Black Lion have not materialized and appear to be, at best, on pause without a clear path forward (Muibu 2024).

Al-Shabaab has proven capable of stalling the government's progress in the offensive. Despite losing key territory in Hirshabelle and Galmudug during the first phase of the offensive, al-Shabaab has since the beginning of 2023 managed to regroup, conduct retaliatory attacks, and attempt to reclaim lost territory.

Consequently, great skepticism persists whether Al-Shabaab will definitively be defeated by the end of December 2024. Without support from clan militia and regional forces in the south, it is far from clear that Somali forces will be able to combat and defeat al-Shabaab by December 2024. As of mid-February 2024, al-Shabaab remains entrenched in its strongholds of southern Somalia and still poses a countrywide threat (Muibu 2024).

In March 2024 Al-Shabaab successfully carried out yet another attack in the heart of Mogadishu. Militants managed to gain access to SYL Hotel in the green zone in Mogadishu, after a suicide bomber detonated a Vehicle Born Improvised Explosive Device. The hotel is especially popular amongst members of the Somali parliament and is also in close proximity to Villa Somalia. An unknown number of officials had been killed as the operation was still underway at the time of writing of this report. With its latest operation it is clear that the group remains a potent force to be reckoned with and the possibility remains that it could re-emerge triumphant over Somalia's embattled government.

An Emerging, Restive Province? Southern Africa and Jihadi Terrorism

Southern Africa is yet to fully see the massive “explosion" of jihadi terror on the scale that has been witnessed elsewhere on the continent. Its most prominent and overt manifestation in Southern Africa has been witnessed in Mozambique since 2017.

The group now known as Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) emerged as an armed group in October 2017, known locally both as Ahlu-Sunnah wal Jama’a (ASWJ) for its ideological underpinnings and al-Shabaab for its extensive use of violence.

Al-Shabaab has not been particularly outspoken about the goals of its insurgency, but it has articulated a desire to establish rule by a hardline version of Islamic law in Cabo Delgado. The group’s aims appear to center on undermining and degrading the Mozambican government’s military and political authority (Gartenstein-Ross, Chace-Donahue & Clarke 2021).

Religious and ethnic tensions, alongside poor regional economic conditions, are also reportedly prominent factors motivating the violence. The militants are believed by local leaders and community members to be primarily “disaffected” youth motivated by complex political, economic, and social factors including feelings of marginalization and disagreements with religious authorities in Cabo Delgado. The insurgency’s socio-economic roots were also raised, linked to Cabo Delgado’s perceived “resource curse”, whereby despite abundant natural fossil resources, the local population remains impoverished and does not reap the benefits of their exploitation (Crisis24, 2023).

Decades of government neglect and systematic underinvestment have left Cabo Delgado the poorest province in Mozambique. This has created a widespread sense of resentment and frustration, especially among Mwani and Makua ethnic groups, who blame the dominance of Maconde ethnic business elites and local officials—the ethnic group of President Filipe Nyusi—for the Mwani and Makua’s political and economic exclusion (Boukhars 2022). The discovery of rubies in Montepuez in 2009 and liquid natural gas in

the seabed off Palma in 2010 have exacerbated tensions, as communities who lost access to their fishing grounds or were cleared off their cultivated land in Cabo Delgado are yet to see promises of job opportunities and prosperity materialize. Scores of Mwani and Makua youth eventually joined ASWJ (Boukhars 2022).

ASWJ has been ruthless in its attacks on government facilities, security forces, perceived sympathizers of the dominant political party (the Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frelimo)), and civilians who refuse to comply with its dictates. ASWJ fighters have reportedly singled out Maconde, who are mostly Catholic and believed to be Frelimo backers, for the most brutal attacks, massacring civilians, desecrating their corpses, and burning their villages and towns (Boukhars 2022).

Mozambican armed forces were ill-equipped and poorly trained to handle a militant Islamist insurgency. They responded to ASWJ's brutal acts of violence with their own ruthless tactics that reportedly included the widespread use of torture, extrajudicial executions of civilians suspected of supporting the group, and the mutilation of bodies of presumed ASWJ fighters. This only further increased ASWJ recruitment and violent reprisals against civilians (Boukhars 2022).

Severe feelings of collective discontent among the Northern locals have served as a fertile recruitment basis for the extremist group

Despite its rapid growth up to 2021, it has been one of the Islamic State's (IS) most opaque affiliates. ISM was first recognized far later as a distinct IS province- only in May 2022, having previously been under the broader Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) organization from as early as 2018 (ACLED 2023b).

Parallel to the seeding of the insurgency was the emergence of Mozambique's first liquefied natural gas (LNG) project near Palma town after considerable natural gas resources were discovered offshore in 2010 by the oil company Anadarko. Development

of the LNG project was quick by international standards. By 2014, a decree law was passed to facilitate the project. By 2017, plans were being made to resettle affected communities, with approval of the project's development plan coming in 2018 (ACLED 2023b). In 2019, two years into the insurgency, France's TotalEnergies acquired Anadarko, and announced the project's Final Investment Decision the same year. The fast-developing project would soon become a target of the group locally, the subject of IS rhetoric internationally, and the clearest demonstration of the group's threat to the state.

In terms of the growth period from 2017-2019- the insurgency's early years, the group was marked by a lack of a clear identity. The names 'ASWJ' and 'al-Shabaab' signaled violent jihadist ideology, but public messaging from the militants themselves was rare. An early video statement from January 2018 showed four young men addressing their "Mozambican brothers" and endorsing "Quran as law." (ACLED 2023b).

Nevertheless, the targeting of civilians by insurgents obscured any political objectives. From 2017 until the end of 2018, ISM had been involved in 66 incidents of political violence, of which almost 73% were targeting civilians. Over 80% of those incidents took place in the insurgents' major theatre of operations, that of Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia, and Palma districts, with further activity in Nangade, Pemba, Muidumbe, and Quissanga districts (ACLED 2023b).

At first Islamic State Mozambique's political objectives were not immediately apparent or overt. They first became clearer when formal affiliation of the insurgents with ISCAP was issued through IS media channels in June 2019. The Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP), with the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) operating in DRC, at its center, had formally been acknowledged by IS in 2018 (ACLED 2023b).

The ADF/ISCAP relations with Cabo Delgado's insurgent group predated June 2019 considerably. The United Nations Group of Experts presented evidence of movement

between ADF and Cabo Delgado's insurgent group as early as 2017. The affiliation with IS sharpened the Cabo Delgado insurgents' ideology and would translate into both technical assistance and external financial support (ACLED 2023b).

According to ACLED analysis tactical training was provided as early as 2020. There is also evidence of payments to Mozambique as early as 2020, through the remittance of money that had been raised in Somalia and South Africa and sent to Mozambique and DRC through agents in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda (ACLED 2023b).

The impact of Islamic State support from Somalia became increasingly apparent in 2020 and 2021. This permitted ISM to increase its operations and allowing the insurgency to reach the peak of engagement in political violence events in June 2020.

Insurgents targeted urban centers, seized control of Mocímboa da Praia town in August 2020, for at least a year and twice threatened the LNG project at Palma (ACLED 2023b). Insurgents targeted state institutions such as garrisons, police stations, health centers, and schools. They also regularly targeted neighborhoods dominated by state employees and the homes of prominent figures in the ruling Frelimo party or business people. The shift in operations and targets was seen to be indicative of an increased interest in taking on the state and undermining LNG investment in the region (ACLED 2023b). Between January and November 2020, the group was responsible for over 400 violent incidents that left more than 1,300 people dead (Gartenstein-Ross, Chace-Donahue, & Clarke 2021).

The insurgents' attack on Palma town on 24 March 2021 presented a real threat to the LNG project. Total had to declare force majeure in April 2021 because of the degrading security situation. In response both SADC (SAMIM) and Rwanda intervened in July 2021.

As a reflection of the critical importance of the LNG project to both the Mozambican government and to the insurgents, the RSF deployed in Palma and Mocimboa da Praia

districts. The LNG project itself is situated in Palma district, while the port town Mocímboa da Praia is critical to the project as the commercial center of the province's northern districts. Both districts had been closely targeted by the insurgents from the first day of the conflict. The Rwanda Security Forces (RSF) successfully gained control of both district headquarters by August 2021, less than two months after the initial RSF deployment (ACLED 2023b).

An Institute for Security Studies study -published in 2022- revealed that Mozambican citizens believe that natural resources escalated the terrorism crisis in the country. Asked to make a selection between a range of options, 45% of respondents said the main root cause of the insurgency was the discovery of rubies and natural gas. Another 4% mentioned the bad governance of natural resources. Fewer people thought the availability of illicit arms (13%), economic marginalisation (6%) and elite greed (5%) were the primary causes (Louw-Vaudran 2022).

One of the central conclusions of the 2022 ISS study was that recruitment drives by the militant group Ahlu-Sunnah wal Jama'a (ASWJ), supported by Islamic State in Mozambique, were facilitated by the so-called natural resource curse. It not only increased inequality but raised the stakes in the province (Louw-Vaudran 2022).

By the end of 2022, ISM had been involved in carrying out political violence events in new districts, and 16 of Cabo Delgado's 17 districts overall, as well as parts of Nampula and Niassa provinces (ACLED 2023b).

ISM had exhibited an emerging technical sophistication and tactical ability to withstand the first months of RSF and SAMIM operations. This may have prompted IS to formally recognize its Mozambique affiliate as a separate province in own right. The group officially began operating as 'Islamic State Mozambique Province' in May 2022, identifying itself as such in its communications through IS media channels, as well as in its direct

messaging in Cabo Delgado communities. Like its incorporation into ISCAP, this was done with little fanfare, with IS issuing a claim on 9 May 2022 for an operation in its 'Mozambique Province.' (ACLED 2023b).

The number of violent incidents linked to militant Islamist groups in northern Mozambique increased by 29% in 2022 to 437—a reversal of the 23% drop in 2021 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023). Dislodged from the cities of Palma and Mocimboa da Praia along the coast, smaller groups of militants relocated to more rural districts west and south, preying on villages—committing killings, beheadings, abductions, looting, and the destruction of property.

According to analysts the changes to ISM's tactics and organization did not yield significant gains. What has however been witnessed was a steep decline in operations toward the end of 2022. In 2023, the group was estimated by some to have as few as 300 active fighters, compared to up to 2,500 in 2020. For the first eight months of 2023, ISM was involved in an average of just 11 political violence events per month, compared to an average of 36 per month in 2022 (ACLED 2023b).

In terms of funding, international efforts had been undertaken to disrupt the financing of Islamic State Mozambique. Alarmingly South Africa was named as a major financing hub for ISM. The U.S. designated four 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M) financial facilitators based in South Africa.' Financial sanctions were imposed upon Farhad Hoomer, Siraaj Miller and Abdella Hussein Abadigga for 'playing an increasingly central role in facilitating the transfer of funds from the top of the ISIS hierarchy to branches across Africa' or serving as leaders of ISIS cells in South Africa' (Fabricius 2022). An individual known as Peter Charles Mbaga had allegedly also assisted in transferring funds and equipment from South Africa to ISIS-M and sought to

procure weapons from Mozambique. South Africa's financial system had been considerably exploited towards funding ISIS branches and networks across Africa.

The concern that South Africa already to some extent is operating as an evolving Islamic State Province in Southern Africa in own right poses a significant threat to South Africa's national security and regional security if left unchecked. In November 2022 the U.S. Treasury imposed further sanctions on South African-based brothers Nufael Akbar and Yunus Mohamad Akbar, as well as Mohamad Akbar and Umar Akbar. It noted that they were 'members of an [Islamic State] cell operating in South Africa who have provided technical, financial, or material support' to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) (Fabricius 2022b). November 2022's sanctions included four South Africa-based companies connected to Nufael and Yunus Akbar and four owned or controlled by Hoomer.

In October 2022, the U.S. embassy in Pretoria – quickly followed by several other Western countries' embassies – issued a security alert about a possible terrorist attack in the upmarket Sandton commercial district. The attack didn't happen, though this might have been due to heightened security because of the alert (Fabricius 2022b). South Africa had not suffered any major terrorist attacks over the past few year, but the country remains highly vulnerable to ISIS overtures. Of even greater concern is that the country's financial system provided a critical conduit for funding extremism.

In February 2023, the Financial Action Task Force placed South Africa on a list of countries under increased monitoring, commonly known as the grey list[5], after it failed to

[5] Grey listing refers to a country being placed on a list of countries under increased monitoring by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog. The FATF evaluates each member country's implementation and effectiveness of measures to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism. In its last evaluation, published in October 2021, the task force said South Africa had a strong legal framework against money laundering and terrorism financing. But its implementation had significant shortcomings, including a failure to prosecute criminal cases. The country has either not complied or only partially complied with 20 of the body's recommendations to combat money laundering and terrorism financing.

address all of the shortcomings on preventing money laundering and the financing of terrorism that the task force identified in its 2019 evaluation of the country. The decision has serious implications for the country, more specifically its financial services sector as well as its ability to attract investment.

Overall, in terms of ISM's geographic reach, this has purportedly shown a steady decline. The group still however maintains support from transnational jihadist networks that include longstanding links with armed groups in DRC and valuable support networks in Tanzania. These support structures and tactics may enable the group to continue operating in Macomia for some time (ACLED 2023b). As of July 2023, the insurgency in Mozambique had reportedly killed around 6,700 people and displaced 950,000 more since its inception (Crisis24). As of April 2024, the militants have once again been consolidating territorial gains whilst the Southern African Mission is in the process of withdrawing. More Rwandan forces, however, are entering the Mozambican battle space. What is clear is that the

Government officials and their allies have frequently highlighted the security gains their forces have made in reducing insurgent activity in Mocimboa da Praia and Palma districts and in preventing ASWJ from holding territory in these areas. Well-publicized visits to Palma and Mocimboa da Praia during the early part of 2023 by President Filipe Nyusi, TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanne,and World Bank Vice President Victoria Kwakwa further support the image that the government is creating of an area where security has been largely restored (Columbo 2023).

The Mozambican armed forces, the FADM, have so far proven unsuccessful in preventing the growth of militant cells. The improvement of the situation is likely largely attributable to foreign assistance. This began with the deployment of the SAMIM forces from the

Southern African Development Community (SADC) in July 2021, and the additional support of the Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF) in December 2022 (Crisis24, 2023).

From May 2023 reports emerged that ISM leadership had adopted a new strategy that excludes excessive violence against civilians (Masson 2023). Data released by the non-profit Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) shows a noticeable decline in violence across Cabo Delgado. Comparing the months January to April 2023 with the same period last year (2022), the reported fatalities from organised political violence dropped from roughly 296 to 124. In addition, the reported fatalities from organised violence targeting civilians declined significantly from an estimated 114 to about seven (Masson 2023). “There has clearly been a change in strategy, where we are seeing the insurgents refraining from mass atrocities against civilians,” risk analyst Jasmine Opperman observed in a 2023 Mail & Guardian interview. Opperman added that groups in the Cabo Delgado areas of Macomia, Muidumbe and Mocímboa da Praia were “clearly busy with an outreach in terms of trying to win the hearts and minds of people” (Masson 2023).

At the time of writing reports also suggested that TotalEnergies was also in the process of considering resuming its liquefied natural gas project. Clashes between insurgents and government forces however continued in April 2023 near Mandava and Mapate in the Muidumbe district (Masson 2023).

Militant Islamist violence in northern Mozambique saw a 71% drop over the past year (2023). There were 127 violent events and 260 fatalities reported in 2023.

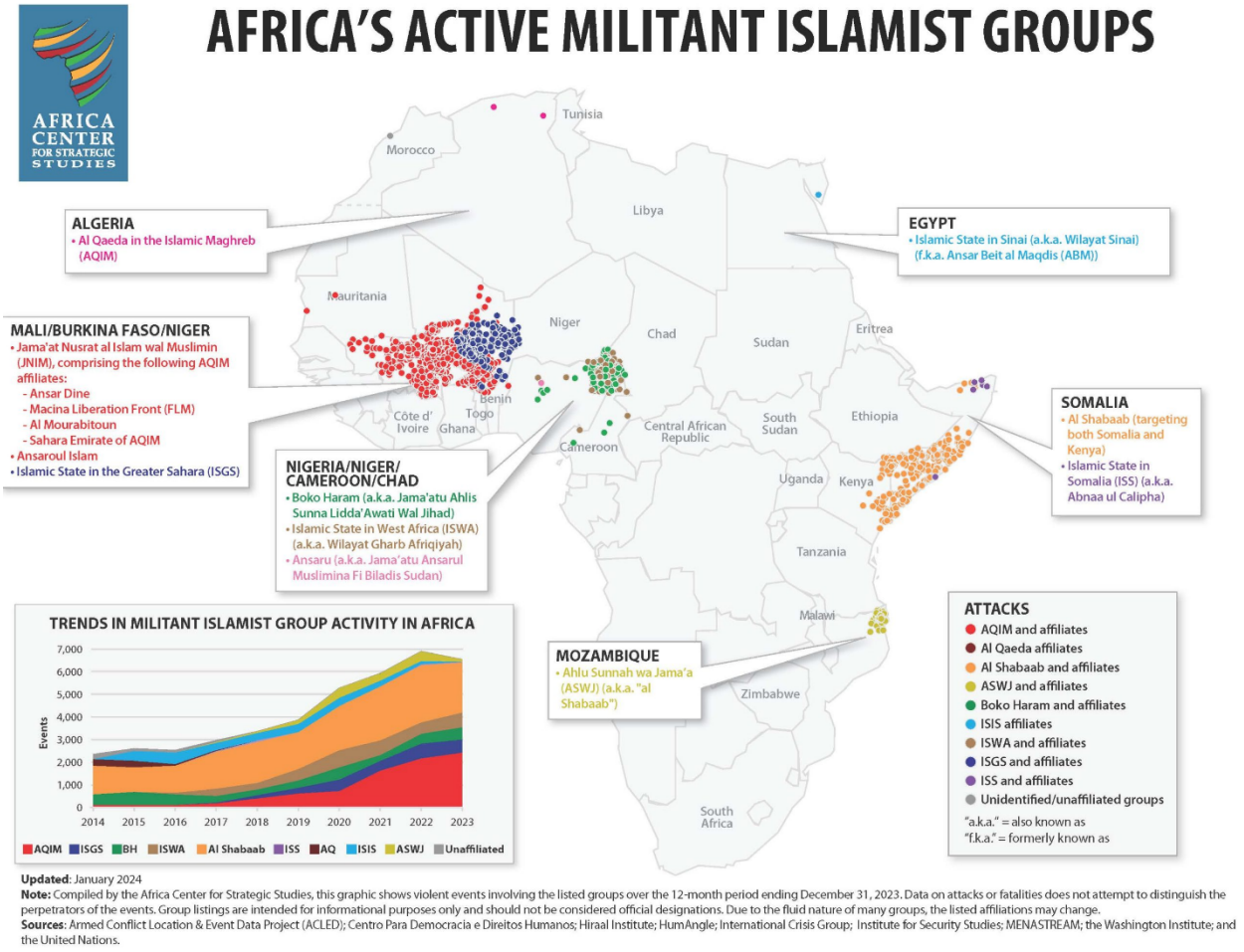
The forces leading counter-insurgency operations were able to regain control of 90% of the insurgents’ territory and drive the surviving militants into rural areas in the northeastern part of Macomia District, where they now operate in small groups without bases, conducting random attacks on civilians (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2024).

According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies the past year has been marked by an 80% decline in violence against civilians. This is a particularly noteworthy development since militant Islamist violence in northern Mozambique had always been distinguished by the extraordinarily high levels of violence against civilians, in some years exceeding 50 percent of all fatalities. In 2023, violence against civilians represented 23% of all fatalities. This comprised of nearly 53 attacks on civilians and 61 related fatalities (compared to 286 and 438, respectively, in 2022) (Africa Center for Strategic Studie 2024).

According to a March 2024 TRACWatch report Saide Bossa has emerged as the de facto leader of Islamic State Mozambique. Under his leadership IS Mozambique has managed to orchestrate a surge in militant activities across Northeastern Mozambique (TRACWatch 2024). Since the beginning of 2024 IS Mozambique had reportedly made considerable advancements, isolating Pemba. They have also managed to position themselves for further expansion. The possibility of the group gaining further ground and recapturing lost ground as 2024 unfolds should not be ruled out either.

In Southern Africa, and despite the worrying developments in Mozambique, South Africa is the country to watch. Like Nigeria in West Africa, South Africa dominates Southern Africa completely. Consequently, what happens in this regional superpower will have a profound impact on its neighbourhood. So, the March 2024 reports that Islamic State continues to receive funds from Johannesburg through robberies and the like is disconcerting to say the least (Cronje, 2024). It suggests the greylisting of South Africa by the FATF was a prudent measure. It also suggest that because of endemic corruption and the lack of political will on the part of Pretoria, South Africa remains a permissive environment in which terrorists and their networks continue to thrive. Indeed, this has a long history with terrorist and their support networks from Al Qaeda to Hamas and Hezbollah as well as the Taliban finding refuge in the country for three decades (Solomon,

2013). There is a real danger that the war in Gaza, which has been inflaming anti-Israel and anti-West sentiment may well create the ideal opportunity for Islamists to exploit.



Conclusion and Preliminary Policy Recommendations

Terrorism in Africa is a reality, but it needs to be carefully viewed in the context of the continent's unique historical development and its manifestation as symptomatic of far

reaching political and socio-economic problems. This is the real security challenge for the 21st century. Too narrow a focus on terrorism alone—and particularly on international terrorism—as the fount of African insecurity would be a serious mistake.

At the heart of the terrorism challenge in Africa is a plethora of other domestic problems, ranging from violent conflict, state failure, endemic poverty, poor governance, and lack of political and socio-economic inclusiveness. Terrorism is more of a symptom of these societal problems than a driver of insecurity itself and unless headway is made against these problems then terrorism will continue to plague the continent. It has become a tool of the weak and disenfranchised to articulate domestic grievances (Emerson & Solomon 2018).

Based on the comprehensive assessment of the jihadi dynamic in Africa it has become abundantly clear that jihadi terrorism had emerged and manifested itself with relative ease on the continent. The prognosis is dire-the continent has proven to be a viable host and jihadi terrorism has now arguably assumed pandemic-like proportions. Indeed a highly "virulent strain" of jihadi terrorism appears to have infected the continent, one that quickly adapted, and rapidly mutated and metastasized into one of Africa's gravest national and regional security threats to date. Overall attempts at developing a definitive cure has remained elusive.

Following an extensive review and assessment of the dynamics of jihadi terrorism in Africa in the five core regions, this section will briefly seek to provide a set of preliminary policy recommendations vis-a-vis addressing the scourge of jihadi terrorism on the African continent. These are however not exhaustive. The recommendations are however intended to initiate further conversation and discussion that could lead to the inclusion of more substantive policy recommendations going forward.

Preliminary Policy Recommendations

Based on the substantive discussion on jihadi terrorism in Africa, the following preliminary policy recommendations are proffered:

1. A critical recommendation is to take heed of the undeniable fact that, ultimately the solution to African terrorism will only be found in promoting broader societal and human security. To be sure, developing stronger counter-terrorism capability is part of the equation, but it must be used judicially and not at the expense—or instead of—other non-military tools that seek first to alter the conditions that breed terrorism and allow it to prosper. African countries need to critically reassess the rapidly changing nature of terrorism and need to strike a balance between the immediate threat posed by terrorism and the longer-term need of building prosperous, secure and stable societies.
2. There is a need to accelerate the development and swift implementation of comprehensive national, regional and continental approaches to address the ongoing threat of terrorism. Decisively eliminating the root causes and all permissive factors that facilitate terrorism's growth and spread is fundamental to this undertaking.
3. Another critical recommendation is that domestic-fueled terrorism and related insurgencies are best dealt with via a combination of selected military pressure and appropriate political-economic incentives. The prioritization of political solutions alongside military and security interventions is fundamental in addressing the jihadi terrorism in Africa decisively. The goal in these situations, as Africans have learnt, is not to try and defeat terrorists militarily, but to remedy the permissive conditions that spawned them in the first instance, and that enabled terrorism and terrorist groups to thrive in the first place.
4. There is a need to prevent militant Islamist groups from exploiting existing communal tensions. The security environments in the Sahel and now also Mozambique could benefit from enhanced government and civil society efforts to

ease ethnic tensions by facilitating ongoing intercommunal dialogues, strengthening dispute resolution mechanisms, and establishing more transparent and equitable land use and property rights rules. Governments aiming to reduce militant violence against civilians should also prioritize the provision of basic social services in marginalized areas to redress some of the systemic inequities and grievances underlying intercommunal tensions.

5. Strengthening political, peace, security and economic governance in African member states is essential to decisively eliminate the threat posed by jihadi terrorism. Rebuilding weak and fragile states into strong and viable states is another critical undertaking to ensure that extremists do not utilize such states to construct enclaves from which they can operate with impunity.
6. The continent should also place greater urgency on the development of strategies to combat the links between terrorism and transnational organized crime. Any robust response by AU member states to the threat posed by terrorism will need to address the growing nexus and convergence of terrorism and conflict, UCGs and transnational organized crime as well.
7. Government financial agencies should more actively and decisively clamp down on funding channels that have provided jihadists with funds to undertake their violent campaigns. These illicit funds recovered should also be rerouted towards African states worst affected by militant attacks in order to aid in reconstruction efforts
8. AU member states should also invest more proactively in economic upliftment programs targeting all segments of society, most notably Africa's youth who often become prime recruits for militant groups due to a lack of viable economic and employment opportunities in their countries
9. Another critical recommendation is for the development and frequent and robust review of the continental counterterrorism framework to ensure that it responds to

the current (and emerging) manifestations of terrorism and violent extremism on the continent.

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