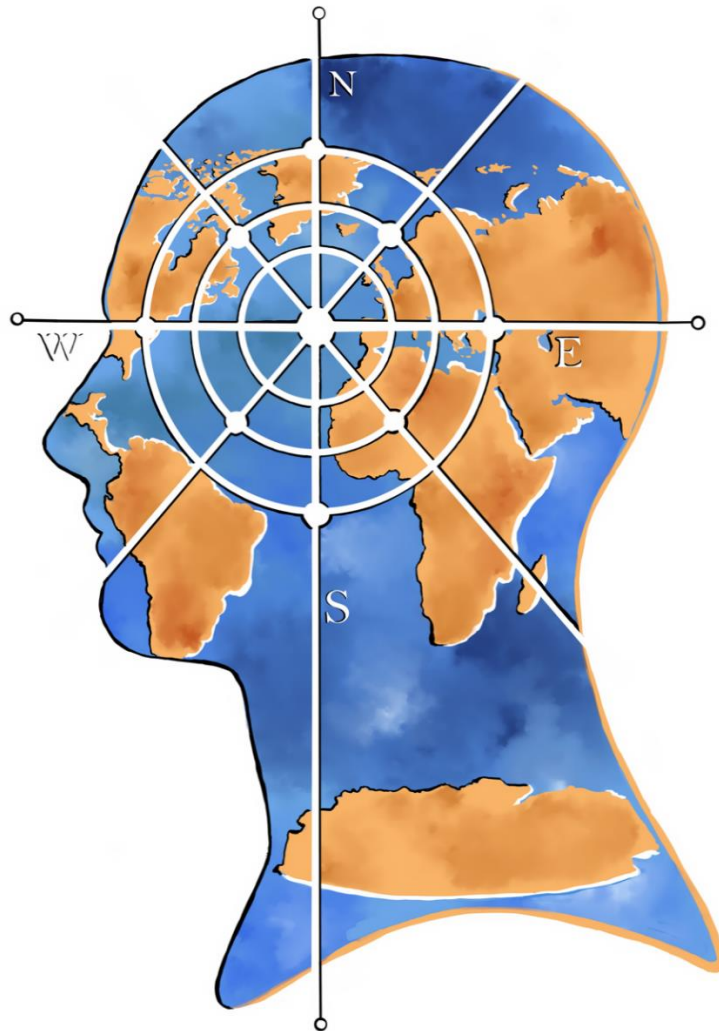


# JOURNAL *of* EUROPEAN *and* AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

AN INTERNATIONAL PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL



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**Research Institute for European and American Studies - RIEAS**  
**Department of Security and Intelligence Studies - Coastal Carolina University**

# JOURNAL *of* EUROPEAN *and* AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

AN INTERNATIONAL PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

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# JOURNAL of EUROPEAN and AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

*An international peer-reviewed journal*

Sponsored by the **Research Institute for European and American Studies – RIEAS**

*Under the editorial direction of the*

**Department of Security and Intelligence Studies – Coastal Carolina University**

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The *Journal of European and American Intelligence Studies (JEAIS, formerly the Journal of Mediterranean and Balkan Intelligence – JMBI)* is published by the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS) under the editorial direction of the Department of Security and Intelligence Studies at Coastal Carolina University. It is an international academic-led scholarly publication that focuses on the field of intelligence and related areas of study and practice, such as terrorism and counterterrorism, domestic and international security, geopolitics, and international relations. The journal's rationale is driven by the global nature of security challenges, where we are called more than ever to communicate and work collaboratively to solve our common problems. Thus, the *JEAIS* aspires to promote an international dialogue between diverse perspectives and experiences, based on original research on the broader European and American practice and study of intelligence. The *JEAIS* is an all-inclusive academic platform that allows accomplished and emerging scholars and practitioners from both the public and private sectors to share their knowledge, ideas and approach to intelligence studies. By crafting each journal issue through a rigorous and highly selective screening process of potential contributors, and an exhaustive review process, the *JEAIS* adheres to its mission, which is three-fold: (a) to provide an equal opportunity for academics and practitioners of intelligence to discuss and challenge established and emerging ideas; (b) to address existent knowledge gaps by advancing new knowledge; and (c) to shape the evolution of intelligence scholarship beyond traditional communities of research.

## Editorial Offices

**John M. Nomikos**, Founding/Honorary Editor: PO Box 427, 17402 Alimos, Greece.

E-mail: [secretary@rieas.gr](mailto:secretary@rieas.gr) | Tel: +30-210-991-1214 | RIEAS: [www.rieas.gr](http://www.rieas.gr).

**Joseph Fitsanakis**, Managing Editor: Department of Intelligence and Security Studies, Coastal Carolina University, PO Box 261954, Conway, SC 29528-6054, United States

E-mail: [jfitsanak@coastal.edu](mailto:jfitsanak@coastal.edu) | Tel: +1-843-349-6618 | CCU: [www.coastal.edu](http://www.coastal.edu).

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# Editor's Note

## Joseph Fitsanakis

Professor, Department of Intelligence and Security Studies, Coastal Carolina University

Broadly defined, intelligence is the collection and analysis of information that can improve decision-making. With this simple yet effective definition in mind, and guided by its transnational mission, the *Journal of European and American Intelligence Studies (JEAIS)* is pleased to present this, its ninth publication (volume 5, issue 1). It consists of five carefully selected studies that present the reader with useful information on pressing issues and topics of regional or global significance.

In his article entitled “Alliances and Conflicts Among Jihadist Groups in West Africa,” Marco Fais provides a meticulous examination of the intricate mosaic of jihadist militancy in what is an increasingly volatile region. Fais, an analyst with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), focuses on a number of broad phenomena that are shaping the outlook and operations of militant jihadist groups in West Africa. These include an ongoing convergence between previously disparate groups, which in turn facilitates their territorial expansion. Confusingly, this is taking place against a background of constant conflict between jihadist groups and government forces, but also between—and even within—jihadist groups themselves. As some groups are converging, others are fragmenting. Meanwhile, the leading jihadist groups in the region are beginning to pursue goals for regional domination, and even trying to emulate the state-building efforts of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria during 2015-2017. The author concludes his analysis with a set of timely recommendations for intelligence and security agencies in West Africa and beyond.

Monica den Boer, a Professor of Military Policing Operations at the Netherlands Defence Academy, transitions our attention to criminal and terrorist activity in the European security space. In her article entitled “The Crime-Terrorism Nexus in Europe: Time to Break the Security Silos,” den Boer points out that the European Union has made significant strides in the areas of combatting organized crime and countering terrorism in recent years. Yet, she cautions that the intersection between organized crime and terrorism remains relatively unexplored. She asks whether this is because of the absence of empirical evidence, and



points to the existence of information silos that appear to be preventing the collation of intelligence that could shed more light to the unexplored nexus between organized crime and terrorism. Given the ongoing growth of interoperability in the European Union security context, den Boer proposes an urgent re-examination of this critical nexus, which, in her view, could lead to major improvements in terrorism prevention.

In our third article, a multinational team of experts based in the Philippines, the United Kingdom and Australia, shed light on yet another pressing concern relating to terrorism—namely its financing aspects. Amparo Pamela Fabe, Christian Kaunert, Sylvia Laksmi and Joan Andrea Toledo concentrate on the Philippine financial technology (fintech) sector, which—as they point out—is Asia’s second-largest, next only to Indonesia’s. In their article entitled “Safeguarding the Philippine FinTech Sector from Terrorism Financing,” the authors argue that the Philippine fintech ecosystem can generate a host of useful lessons on how to promote the digitization of financial services, while at the same time preventing their use for terrorist financing purposes. This is easier said than done, however, which is why the authors push for a series of practical recommendations. These include implementing a carefully customized legal framework, which will be monitored by a politically independent oversight authority. To achieve this, technical training for law enforcement, judicial and prosecutorial staff will be critical, as will be the establishment of expanding public-private partnerships, the authors conclude.

The article selection in our present issue includes a guest appearance by John Nomikos, Founding Editor of *JEAIS*, who revisits a major theme of his research—namely the need for reforming the Greek intelligence services. Along with his co-author, Anthony Ioannidis, Assistant Professor of Management at the Athens University of Economics and Business, Nomikos outlines the present-day challenges faced by the Greek National Intelligence Service (NIS, or *Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion*, EYP, in short NIS-EYP). The authors summarize the recent evolution of the organization, focusing especially on the periodic reforms that have shaped its current institutional form. They argue, however, that these reforms have led to chronic imbalances in the NIS-EYP, which must be corrected if the agency is to break away from its over-bureaucratization, its endemic factionalism and, ultimately, its inability to provide timely and actionable intelligence support to civilian decision-makers.

Our final author provides us with a rare glimpse into the foreign intelligence service of what is often referred to as the world’s oldest democracy—namely India. Through her exploration of Indian-based open sources, the author, Raagini Shekher Sharma, Senior Analyst at the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS), traces the evolution of the Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW)—India’s equivalent to the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency. Her analysis touches on the R&AW’s operational successes and failures, which have traced India’s turbulent history since 1968, when the

spy agency was established. The reader is left with a basic understanding of the R&AW's mission and operational capabilities, as seen through a number of known operations conducted by it. Given the secrecy that characterizes the R&AW, this article can serve as a useful departure point for Asia-focused intelligence researchers.

The *JEAIS* editorial team thanks our authors for adding their informed voices to yet another well-timed and insightful issue of this publication. True to its founding mission, *JEAIS* remains responsive to its readership, whose members are encouraged to contact the editorial team with comments, suggestions and criticism about our content.



# Alliances and Conflicts Among Jihadist Groups in West Africa

**Marco Fais**

Analyst, International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

## ***Abstract***

*The four main phenomena that are shaping the Sahel jihadist landscape are: (a) conflict; (b) fragmentation; (c) convergence; and (d) expansion. The Islamic State West African province (ISWAP), operating mainly near Lake Chad, has a tendency to fragment. At the same time, it is increasingly showing signs of rapprochement with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which may result in their unification. Meanwhile, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, are converging. The two groups often support each other in their operations. It seems that JNIM intends to expand its reach beyond the G5 Sahel borders—particularly in Senegal. Ansar al Dine is looking into expansion within the Sahel. In particular, it is infiltrating the religious establishment in the Malian capital Bamako, with the intention of taking it over. In 2020, JNIM and ISGS, after a period of relative peace, entered into an existential conflict. In 2020 and early 2021, the two groups met in battle hundreds of times, suffering significant losses. Following the logic of threat assessment, and in light of possible talks between the G5 Sahel countries and rebel groups, it would be preferable if JNIM had the upper hand on ISGS, given their openness to dialogue with institutions, versus the absolute rejection displayed by ISGS. Further, it would be preferable if these groups would fragment, rather than form coalitions. By increasing their membership through mergers, these groups are able to establish territorial continuity over larger swaths of land and increase their mobility; while by fragmenting, they lose their ability to carry out large-scale attacks. Fragmentation also adds attrition and infighting in groups that end up spending energy and resources to fight each other, rather than attack civilians, institutions or the military.*

## The Sahelian Terrorist Groups and Insurgency Landscape

The terrorism phenomenon in the Sahel is very convoluted. The current jihadi narrative leverages local grievances and local political rivalries. Strategic alliances among jihadi groups are formed on a regular basis, but they are never permanent, which adds complexity. Some members of the groups have chosen to permeate deep into the social fabric of local society by marrying local women, thus stepping foot into the local tribal system. The jihadi propaganda is tuned to exacerbating political divisions and is sometimes a tool for dividing and weakening local competing groups.<sup>1</sup>

In Mali alone, there are about 15 non-state armed actors, including self-defense militia, separatists, and jihadi groups, apart from organized crime groups and bandits. The objectives of each group are almost invariably at odds with those of all other groups. Depending on the period and area in question, they either compete, fight, or cooperate with each other, with fighters frequently switching groups.<sup>2</sup>

The current dynamics in the Sahel are the fruit of evolution and adaptation of jihadi groups to local realities. The original relocation in the early 2000s of the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC)<sup>3</sup> to Northern Mali happened because they had no better choice,<sup>4</sup> after being pushed out of Algeria. Later developments, including the expansion of the terrorist threat to Burkina Faso,<sup>5</sup> were premeditated moves. The links between Algeria and militants operating in the Sahel persisted during the rise of the groups in north and central Mali, after their retreat following the French intervention. This continued as late as in October 2020, when negotiations were made to free hostages held by the militants —the so-called, Malian hostages.

Rizkan Ahsan, known as Abu Al-Dahdah, was arrested in Algeria in December 2020 and found in possession of €80,000 in cash. These were a part of the ransom paid to free the Malian hostages. In the first week of January 2020, thanks to the revelations of Ahsan, the Algerian army liquidated six terrorists, arrested twelve more, and seized scores of explosives, as well as light and heavy weapons. The elimination of these terrorists coincided with an important event that occurred in the Sahel. That was the pledge of a new al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) emir Abu Obeida Youssef Al-Annabi, who is of Algerian origin.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stefano Marcuzzi and Jason Pack, "Terrorist and Armed Groups in the Fezzan-Sahel Region: Recruitment and Communication Tactics", *NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence* (December 2020) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/terrorist-and-armed-groups-fezzan-sahel-region-recruitment-and-communication-tactics>

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Boeke, "al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism, insurgency, or organized crime?" (August 05, 2016) accessed January 10, 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2016.1208280>

<sup>3</sup> "The Organization of Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb", *United Nation Security Council* (May 07, 2020) accessed January 29, 2021 [https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq\\_sanctions\\_list/summaries/entity/the-organization-of-al-qaida-in-the-islamic](https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/the-organization-of-al-qaida-in-the-islamic)

<sup>4</sup> Amanda Rohde, "International Response to Crises in Mali, the Central African Republic and South Sudan: Finding the Pattern" (2015) last accessed December 23, 2021 <http://othes.univie.ac.at/38069/1/rohde.amanda.master.thesis.final.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Mahamoudou Savadogo, "Comment s'explique la prolifération des groupes extrémistes au Burkina Faso?", *The Conversation* (September 6, 2019) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://theconversation.com/comment-sexplique-la-proliferation-des-groupes-extremistes-au-burkina-faso-122566>

<sup>6</sup> الجزائر- يونس بورنان "Seizing the missile system in eastern Algeria "Abu Dahdah" exposes the hideout", *Al Ain* (January 07, 2021) accessed December 23, 2021 <https://al-ain.com/article/algeria-eliminate-terrorists-qaida-missile-system>

## Mergers and Splits

From the perspective of costs in human lives, it would be more propitious if armed groups would fight each other, rather than coalesce into bigger groups and attack civilians, the military, or representatives of the state and its institutions. By merging, groups unify swaths of territory that were previously separate, thus ensuring that safe corridors exist between disparate locations. The groups therefore become more resilient and are able to execute larger scale attacks. They also exponentially increase their tactical capacity by sharing intelligence, logistics, and technical skills.<sup>7</sup> If they do not join efforts, their capabilities remain substantial, but confined to individual groups.

For certain regions of the Sahel, there are clear understandings on which group prevails over others.<sup>8</sup> In other regions, however, the extent to which local armed groups are the most influential, is not well defined.<sup>9</sup> These are areas where alliances are more conducive to advantages for all groups, and other areas where the conflict of interests is exacerbated. The latter is where clashes among groups are most probable. The situation may become even more complicated, should a fourth or fifth group enter into competition for power in the same region against the three main groups already present. In the Lake Chad basin, Boko Haram is the fourth force to be reckoned with by AQIM, by *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM), and by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Boko Haram, however, is not a unified entity, having gone through schism that resulted in the creation of two groups, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP),<sup>10</sup> headed by Abu Musab al-Barnawi,<sup>11</sup> and *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-jihad*, referred to as Boko Haram proper, headed by Abubakar Shekau.<sup>12</sup> It is believed that at the time the two organizations split, ISWAP had about 3,500 fighters and Boko Haram had about 1,000.<sup>13</sup>

The main antagonism in the Sahel is the one between the ISGS and AQIM. The ISGS is currently headed by Adnan Abu-Walid al-Sahrawi,<sup>14</sup> the AQIM is headed by Yazid

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<sup>7</sup> "Les groupes armés changent de stratégie dans le Sahel", *Deutsche Welle* (February 05, 2021) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://amp-dw-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/amp.dw.com/fr/les-groupes-armés-changent-de-stratégie-dans-le-sahel/a-56473547>

<sup>8</sup> "Sahel – a new battlefield between IS and al-Qaeda?", *The Africa Report* (June 04, 2020) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://www.theafricareport.com/29184/sahel-a-new-battlefield-between-is-and-al-qaeda/>

<sup>9</sup> Clionadh Raleigh, Héni Nsaibia and Caitriona Dowd, "The Sahel Crisis Since 2012", *African Affairs*, 120/478, 123–143 (August 26, 2020) Accessed February 3, 2021 <https://watermark.silverchair.com/adaa022.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> "Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)", *United Nations Security Council* (no date) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/islamic-state-west-africa-province-iswap-0>

<sup>11</sup> Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "Are we witnessing the birth of an African Islamic State?", *The Spectator* (January 14, 2021) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/are-we-witnessing-the-birth-of-an-african-islamic-state->

<sup>12</sup> Fonteh Akum and Malik Samuel, "Understanding the dangerous journey from Boko Haram to rehabilitation", *Institute for Security Studies* (May 04, 2020) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/understanding-the-dangerous-journey-from-boko-haram-to-rehabilitation>

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Ghalib Abdul Aziz Al-Zamil, "Challenges of Terrorism in G5 Sahel", *Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition* (July 16, 2020) accessed January 12, 2021 <https://www.imctc.org/UploadedImages/637307444764488053.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> "Adnan al-Sahrawi", *Counter Extremism Project* (2021) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/adnan-al-sahrawi>

Mebarek, a 51-year-old Algerian and a jihad veteran,<sup>15</sup> while JNIM is headed by Iyad Ag Ghali.<sup>16</sup> JNIM has absorbed the Macina Liberation Front (FLM), also known as Katiba Macina,<sup>17</sup> headed by Amadou Kouffa.<sup>18</sup> However, FLM still exists, and agencies report incidents involving this group as the responsibility of FLM and not of JNIM.<sup>19</sup> The genesis of this coalition can be explained if we consider that it was formed in a period in which the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) grip on Syria and Iraq was on a descending phase. From this perspective, JNIM may have been founded in anticipation of, and to counterbalance, the migration of ISIS to the African continent.<sup>20</sup>

There has been a certain flow of combatants from one group to another. Some members of Ansaroul Islam, a local Burkinabe jihadist group founded with the help of al-Qaeda in Mali, terminated its affiliation with al-Qaeda and joined the ranks of ISGS.<sup>21</sup> Al-Sahrawi's area of operation is the tri-border region between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.<sup>22</sup> This is where some of the most gruesome attacks took place between 2019 and 2020. This group killed 54 Malian soldiers in I-n-Delimane, Mali,<sup>23</sup> 71 Nigerien soldiers in Inatés, Niger,<sup>24</sup> and 89 Nigerien soldiers in Chinégodar, Niger.<sup>25</sup> Prior to declaring his allegiance to ISIS-ISIL in 2016, Al-Sahrawi was the leader of *Tawhid wal-Jihad* in West Africa,<sup>26</sup> and is known to have cooperated with AQIM.<sup>27</sup>

According to Al-Sahrawi, the weakness of JNIM stems, among other causes, from the existence of too many groups and commanders, which never really followed al-Qaeda core instructions. He also explains that, by consenting to negotiate with the authorities,

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<sup>15</sup> Dalia Ghanem and Djallil Lounnas, "The last emir?: AQIM's decline in the Sahel", *Middle East Institute* (December 07, 2020) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://www.mei.edu/publications/last-emir-aqims-decline-sahel>

<sup>16</sup> "Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel", *European Council on Foreign Relations* (no date) accessed January 29, 2021 [https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel\\_mapping/jnim](https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping/jnim)

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Eizenga and Wendy Williams, "Le puzzle formé par le JNIM et les groupes islamistes militants au Sahel – Bulletin de la Sécurité Africaine N 38", *Africa Centre* (December 15, 2020) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASB-38-FR.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> "Au Mali, le jihadiste Amadou Kouffa sous la pression de l'État islamique au grand Sahara", *Jeune Afrique* (February 21, 2020) last accessed December 23, 2021 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/899684/politique/au-mali-le-jihadiste-amadou-kouffa-sous-la-pression-de-letat-islamique-au-grand-sahara/>

<sup>19</sup> "Incident 31 (Mali)- Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la Plateforme pour la Coopération en Matière de Sécurité (PCMS) du G5 SAHEL", (June 5, 2020)

<sup>20</sup> Zainab Mustafa, "Motives for Use of Drugs and Terrorist Groups in Africa", *Arab Centre for Research and Studies* (March 31, 2019) last accessed December 23, 2021 <http://www.acrseg.org/41160>

<sup>21</sup> Caleb Weiss, "Analysis: Islamic State official critiques al-Qaeda in the Sahel", *FDD Long War Journal* (November 13, 2020) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/11/analysis-islamic-state-official-critiques-al-qaeda-in-the-sahel.php>

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Roger, "Tracking Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, West Africa's most wanted jihadist", *The Africa Report* (February 12, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.theafricareport.com/23345/tracking-abu-walid-al-sahrawi-west-africas-most-wanted-jihadist/>

<sup>23</sup> "Militants kill 54 in attack on Mali army post, ISIS claims responsibility", *NBC* (November 03, 2019) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/militants-kill-54-attack-mali-army-post-claims-responsibility-n1075721>

<sup>24</sup> Laurel Wamsley, "71 Soldiers Killed In Attack On Army Camp In Niger", *NPR* (December 12, 2019) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/12/787415274/71-soldiers-killed-in-attack-on-army-camp-in-niger>

<sup>25</sup> "Worst jihadist attack kills 89 soldiers", *World Today* (January 13, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.world-today-news.com/worst-jihadist-attack-kills-89-soldiers/>

<sup>26</sup> Hamdy Hassan, "The Making of a Mobile Caliphate State in the African Sahel", in S. Ratuva (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity*, (2019) accessed January 29, 2021 [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2898-5\\_158](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2898-5_158)

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Islamic State in Greater Sahara Sets Sights on Burkina Faso", *The Jamestown Foundation* (December 03, 2020) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://jamestown.org/program/briefs-dec-3/>

JNIM lost its jihadist credentials.<sup>28</sup> In the period 2013 to 2019, there was the risk of the emergence of a federated Sahelian terrorism. There was a certain tendency among some armed groups to coalesce, unite their efforts, and coordinate actions against the French military and other armed forces on the ground. In no other part of the world have ISIS and al-Qaeda coordinated their actions like they did in the Sahel.<sup>29</sup>

### *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen*

JNIM is the largest jihadi group in the Sahara. It was officially formed in 2017 by the merger of *Ansar Dine*, *Al-Mourabitoun*, and AQIM.<sup>30</sup> The coalition that resulted from this merger would later absorb the MLF, an *Ansar al-Dine* affiliate in central Mali,<sup>31</sup> thus reinforcing JNIM's local credentials and expanding its territorial influence. By absorbing groups under its umbrella, JNIM became more and more intrinsic to local society, turning progressively endogenous, not only in Mali but also in Burkina Faso, where preachers such as Malam Dicko were very active in proselytizing for the jihad. In the norther regions of Burkina Faso, JNIM acts with a well-defined modus operandi, which comprises kidnappings, attacks against symbols of the state, ambushing military targets, and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks.<sup>32</sup> Dicko, the former imam of Sorum, on the border with Mali, gained a large following by preaching an anti-establishment speech through two local radio shows that he hosted.<sup>33</sup>

In 2016, when JNIM was yet to emerge as the new coalition, AQIM was gaining strength, increasing the frequency of its attacks, after recovering from the effects of the 2013 French intervention, mission, known as Operation SERVVAL.<sup>34</sup> After this period of expansion, JNIM acquired a position of dominance and was able to dictate its terms for joining the coalition. The alliances that have been made by JNIM are not only with armed groups. The propensity to unify and gain new allies extends to the various ethnicities that are present in the Sahel. The Malian and French armies and international contingents were their common targets.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Alex Thurston, "Quick Notes on Abu al-Walid al-Sahrawi's Interview with al-Naba'", *Sahel Blog* (November 13, 2020) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://sahelblog.wordpress.com/2020/11/13/quick-notes-on-abu-al-walid-al-sahrawis-interview-with-al-naba/>

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Ghalib Abdul Aziz Al-Zamil, *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> "Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) Group Profile", *Constellis* (February 2018) accessed January 15, 2021 [https://constellis-production-tmp.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/file/112/CONSTELLIS\\_CONFIDENTIAL\\_JNIM\\_Group\\_Profile\\_February\\_2019.pdf](https://constellis-production-tmp.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/file/112/CONSTELLIS_CONFIDENTIAL_JNIM_Group_Profile_February_2019.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> "Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's jihadists", *International Crisis Group* (May 28, 2019) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1166796/download>

<sup>32</sup> Mahamoudou Savadogo, *ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> Pauline Le Roux, "Ansarul Islam: The Rise and Decline of a Militant Islamist Group in the Sahel. Spotlight", *African Center for Strategic Studies* (July 29, 2019) accessed February 2, 2021 <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/ansarul-islam-the-rise-and-decline-of-a-militant-islamist-group-in-the-sahel/>

<sup>34</sup> Dr Michael Barak, "Signs of a Change in Strategy for AQIM", *International Institute for Counter Terrorism* (May 01, 2016) Last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://ict.org.il/signs-of-a-change-in-strategy-for-aqim/>

<sup>35</sup> "Dr Michael Barak, *ibid*.



JNIM may increasingly attract foreign fighters and defectors of other groups, especially from ISGS, if it continues to score successes.<sup>36</sup> The current JNIM leader is Iyad Ag Ghali. He is an Ifoghas. Ifoghas have always been able to create tensions between tribes, using strategic alliances to place their enemy in a minority position when needed.<sup>37</sup> Ghali has repeatedly attempted to form groups in Mali since 2011, when he founded *Ansar Dine*, after failing to become the head of Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA).<sup>38</sup> In the same year, the *Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, or MUJAO), was also founded by Ahmed el-Tilemsi,<sup>39</sup> defining itself as an offshoot of al-Qaeda. The birth of these three organizations in the same year is significant, because, in the nine-month period between April 2012 and January 2013, Mali was partitioned.<sup>40</sup> The jihadists ousted the MNLA from the north of Mali. The three groups took control of the northern Malian regions.<sup>41</sup> *Ansar Dine* took control of Timbuktu, AQIM took control of Kidal,<sup>42</sup> and MUJAO took control of Gao.<sup>43</sup> A few months later, in 2013, the French Operation Serval, supported by the Malian army, repelled the insurgents further north, after a series of battles and airstrikes.<sup>44</sup>

In 2020, the situation changed completely. AQIM controlled the center and the north of Mali, as well as the border between Mali and Mauritania. The tri-border area between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, is shared between ISGS and AQIM. Both ISGS and AQIM have influence in Burkina Faso. The Malian sector is mainly under the control of JNIM, and the Nigerien sector is under the control of ISGS.<sup>45</sup> Between 2 and 20 January 2021, during an operation codenamed ECLIPSE, the French contingent of Operation BARKHANE eliminated at least 20 militants belonging to both groups in the

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<sup>36</sup> Claire Zutterling, "Note d'Analyse – Monitoring de la Stabilité Régionale Dans le Bassin Sahélien et en Afrique de l'Ouest – octobre à décembre 2020", *Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité* (January 14, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://grip.org/monitoring-afrique-octobre-decembre-2021/>

<sup>37</sup> Dr. Mike McGovern, "Understanding Conflict Drivers and Resilience Factors in the Sahel: Desk Study", (2013) Accessed January 11, 2021 <https://sahelresearch.africa.ufl.edu/files/USAID-USSOCOM-Sahel-Desk-Study-7-Jun-13.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> "Ansar Dine", Mapping Militants, *Stanford* (August 08, 2016) last accessed December 24, 2021 [http://stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print\\_view/437](http://stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print_view/437)

<sup>39</sup> "Major jihadist leader killed in Mali, French army says", *France 24* (December 11, 2014) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://www.france24.com/en/20141211-major-jihadistst-leader-killed-mali-french-army>

<sup>40</sup> "Dr. Mike McGovern, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Lebovich, "AQIM and Its Allies in Mali", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (February 05, 2013) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/aqim-and-its-allies-mali>

<sup>42</sup> Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, Bruce Whitehouse, Dida Badi, Lotte Pelckmans, Nadia Belalimat, Bruce Hall and Wolfram Lacher, "One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali Extended Editors Cut", *Centre International de Recherche sur l'Environnement et le Développement* (June 09, 2013) last accessed December 24, 2021 [http://www2.centre-cired.fr/IMG/pdf/Lecocq\\_Mann\\_Et\\_Al\\_-\\_One\\_Hippo\\_8\\_Blind\\_Analysts\\_Editors\\_Cut\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www2.centre-cired.fr/IMG/pdf/Lecocq_Mann_Et_Al_-_One_Hippo_8_Blind_Analysts_Editors_Cut_1_.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Francesco Strazzari, "Azawad and the rights of passage: the role of illicit trade in the logic of armed group formation in northern Mali", *NOREF* (January 2015) accessed January 29, 2021 [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Strazzari\\_NOREF\\_Clingendael\\_Mali\\_Azawad\\_Dec2014.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Strazzari_NOREF_Clingendael_Mali_Azawad_Dec2014.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> "France in Mali: A year of hunting jihadists in West Africa", *France 24* (January 11, 2014) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.france24.com/en/20140111-france-mali-military-intervention-operation-serval-anniversary-timeline>

<sup>45</sup> Wassim Nasr, "Les djihadistes ne sont pas des mecs en claquettes, ils réfléchissent", *Bruxelles 2 Pro* (January 12, 2021) accessed January 22, 2021 <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/2021/01/les-djihadistes-ne-sont-pas-des-mecs-en-claquettes-ils-reflechissent-wassim-nasr/>

tri-border area, and about 80 militants in central Mali.<sup>46</sup> In November 2020, JNIM lost Bah Ag Moussa, one of its historic figures, thought to be its military chief. He was eliminated during a chase and firefight with the French army, during which his son was also killed.<sup>47</sup>

In 2022, JNIM is likely to attack more frequently targets around the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, especially in Burkina Faso and Niger. In 2020, JNIM attacks spread southward in Burkina Faso and, partially, Niger. They targeted mainly the military, police, mining, and humanitarian workers, in northern, eastern, and central Burkina Faso, many involving IED followed by small-arms assaults.<sup>48</sup> A ceasefire following negotiations between JNIM and the governments of Mali and Burkina Faso is unlikely in 2022.<sup>49</sup> It is probable that JNIM may intensify its attacks to improve its negotiating position.<sup>50</sup>

### **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)**

ISGS was formed in 2015 by the leader of MUJAO. The group is active in the tri-border region,<sup>51</sup> with particular emphasis on the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions in the west, and Diffa in the southwest.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, ISGS is present in the east of Burkina Faso, where it carries out complex and violent attacks, and is well established along the border between Niger and Burkina Faso. ISGS also assists with logistics and technical assistance other affiliated smaller groups that are present in its areas of influence.<sup>53</sup> ISGS' geographic reach is of 800 km along the eastern Mali and western Niger border and about 600 km southward in Burkina Faso's eastern border with Niger. ISGS carried out 90 percent of its attacks within 100 km from one of these borders.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the efforts made by ISGS to become embedded in the Sahel as a legitimate jihadist organization, it has failed to win support of local tribes such as the Fulani,<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "French and Malian troops kill 100 jihadis in offensive in the Sahel", *Euronews* (January 27, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.euronews.com/2021/01/27/french-and-malian-troops-kill-100-jihadis-in-offensive-in-the-sahel>

<sup>47</sup> "Mali : Ba Ag Moussa neutralisé par l'opération Barkhane", *Deutsche Welle* (November 13, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.dw.com/fr/mali-ba-ag-moussa-neutralisé-par-loperation-barkhane/a-55584953>

<sup>48</sup> Jihane Boudiaf, "Africa conflict series: Sahel", *IHS Markit* (December 22, 2020) accessed January 12, 2021 <https://ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/africa-conflict-series-sahel.html>

<sup>49</sup> Servan Ahougnon, "Iyad Ag Ghali, l'homme vers qui se tournent tous les regards au Mali" *Agence Ecofin* (February 7, 2020) accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.agenceecofin.com/gestion-publique/0702-73615-iyad-ag-ghali-l-homme-vers-qui-se-tournent-tous-les-regards-au-mali>

<sup>50</sup> Jihane Boudiaf, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Fabien Offner, "Shifting relationships, growing threats: Who's who of insurgent groups in the Sahel", *The New Humanitarian* (February 19, 2018) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2018/02/19/shifting-relationships-growing-threats-who-s-who-insurgent-groups-sahel>

<sup>52</sup> Jihane Boudiaf, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> "Mahamoudou Savadogo, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Pauline Le Roux, "Exploiting Borders in the Sahel: The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara", *Africa Centre for Strategic Studies* (June 10, 2019) accessed February 5, 2021 <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/exploiting-borders-sahel-islamic-state-in-the-greater-sahara-isgs/>

<sup>55</sup> "Le terrorisme en Afrique du Nord et au Sahel", *Government of Canada* (March 28, 2018) accessed January 14, 2021 <https://www.canada.ca/fr/service-enseignement-securite/organisation/publications/le-terrorisme-en-afrique-du-nord-et->

although some Fulani have joined ISGS. The other jihadi groups see the ISGS as an organization that does not intend to negotiate with anybody —thus, as a force to be reckoned with, but with which an alliance is improbable unless the allying group is also an ISIS affiliate. The leader of the ISGS is a former member of the Polisario Front of Morocco, and the majority of their ranks consist of Malians and Nigeriens.<sup>56</sup>

In the territories under its influence, ISGS extorts the *zakat*, a sort of community tax. Up until the first half of 2020, *zakat* was demanded once a year but, after the first half of 2020, in certain areas, it has been demanded three times a year. This could be a sign that the ISGS had either a contingent shortage of funds, or that it has increased its ranks disproportionately compared to available financial resources, and has thus become unable to pay fighters' salaries. On 2 January 2021, about 100 ISGS jihadis stormed the villages of Tchoma Bangou and Zarouma Dareye, Niger, and massacred 100 people, mostly men and boys. They burned granaries and households and displaced more than 10,500 people in a single day. The reason for this attack was that the inhabitants of these two villages refused to pay *zakat* for the third time. The villagers organized a militia to resist ISGS, but it was to no avail. This massacre was a message sent to other communities that may be thinking to resist the demands of ISGS.<sup>57</sup> In 2018, ISGS was linked to 26 percent of all terrorist events that occurred that year in the Sahel, and 42 percent of all deaths caused by these attacks.<sup>58</sup>

### **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**

AQIM does not call foreign fighters for jihad in the Sahel. Fighters from European countries do not consider the whole of the Sahel as an attractive destination, because of its inhospitable environment and lack of services, amenities and infrastructure.<sup>59</sup> According to AQIM, foreign fighters are those who originate from different parts of the Sahel. The cadre is mostly made of Arabs, Tuaregs, and Algerians. They do not appear to have Europeans in their ranks.<sup>60</sup> In June 2020, AQIM lost its leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel, who had engaged in Sahelian jihad for the previous twenty years, including fights against the French army.<sup>61</sup> AQIM, enjoys strong support by local disadvantaged ethnic groups through its proxy of *Ansar Dine*. AQIM acts as intermediary for these groups in the struggle for representation to obtain formal and informal power.

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au-sahel-la-menace-regionale-se-repand-elle/chapitre-4-evolution-de-la-lutte-contre-le-djihadisme-en-afrique-du-nord-et-au-sahel.html

<sup>56</sup> Wassim Nasr, *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Mollie Zapata, "Recent Attack in Niger Suggests Increased Risk for Mass Killing", *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (January 28, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/niger-at-risk-for-mass-killing>

<sup>58</sup> Beatriz de León Cobo, "La estrategia global de los grupos yihadistas del Sahel", *Observatorio Internacional de Estudios Sobre Terrorismo* (January 15, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://observatorioterrorismo.com/actividades/la-estrategia-global-de-los-grupos-yihadistas-del-sahel/>

<sup>59</sup> "Wassim Nasr, *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Tally Helfont, "The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays", *Program on National Security at the Foreign Policy Research Institute* (April 2011) last accessed December 24, 2021 [https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ForeignFightersProblem\\_Noonan.pdf](https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ForeignFightersProblem_Noonan.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Christophe Châtelot, "Mali : de la cause touareg au djihadisme, le parcours de Bah Ag Moussa, tué par « Barkhane »", *Le Monde* (November 13, 2020) [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/11/13/mali-de-la-cause-touareg-au-djihadisme-le-parcours-de-bah-ag-moussa-tue-par-barkhane\\_6059640\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/11/13/mali-de-la-cause-touareg-au-djihadisme-le-parcours-de-bah-ag-moussa-tue-par-barkhane_6059640_3212.html)

As in the case of other jihadistst groups, AQIM suffered important losses following the French intervention in 2013 and 2014, and was forced to withdraw from the cities it had conquered. However, the French intervention did not result in the elimination of the group. Following the French intervention, AQIM is thought to have become more resilient, to have changed its strategies, improved its security, and to have progressively increased the number of its attacks.<sup>62</sup> For the remaining part of the decade, proselytization, intermarriage, and a variety of alliances with tribes and other jihadistst groups, have strengthened AQIM in northern Mali and the broader region.<sup>63</sup>

Before arriving in the Sahel, AQIM's areas of operation tended to be near major cities where they executed sporadic large-scale attacks. When AQIM moved to the Sahel, they started using low-level terrorist tactics. Most attacks have targeted peripheral urban areas that are distant from government outposts, which show a preference for weaker targets than at earlier stages.<sup>64</sup> At the beginning of the Malian crisis, AQIM was considered the best funded of all al-Qaeda franchises globally; it was able to fund other terrorist groups' activities.<sup>65</sup> AQIM includes *Al-Mourabitoun*. This branch of the organization is confined to the tri-border area. Most of its attacks are against border police stations. In 2016 it attempted and failed to storm a prison in Niamey, Niger.<sup>66</sup>

### **Macina Liberation Front - *Katiba Macina* (FLM)**

*Katiba Macina* is a minor component of the jihadi movement in the Sahel. Nevertheless, it has taken a strategic position in support of major groups like JNIM and AQIM, with which it is associated.<sup>67</sup> *Katiba Macina* controls parts of the Niger Delta, the Seno region in Burkina Faso, and shares control with *Ansar Dine* of the Valley of the Snake, between the Koulikoro and Kayes regions of Mali.<sup>68</sup> *Katiba Macina* was formed in 2015 in the Mopti region, Mali. Beginning in 2020, it settled also in the Kayes region, western Mali. This move may be a sign that they have expansionist ambitions in southwestern Africa, particularly Senegal. The group's strength is between 150 and 300 militants.<sup>69</sup> Because of its relatively small membership, it may act together with other groups. When acting alone, it relies on a combination of hit-and-run attacks, IED attacks, and ambushes, mainly against military personnel.

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<sup>62</sup> "Le terrorisme en Afrique du Nord et au Sahel", *Government of Canada* (March 28, 2018) accessed January 14, 2021 <https://www.canada.ca/fr/service-renseignement-securite/organisation/publications/le-terrorisme-en-afrique-du-nord-et-au-sahel-la-menace-regionale-se-repand-elle/chapitre-4-evolution-de-la-lutte-contre-le-djihadisme-en-afrique-du-nord-et-au-sahel.html>

<sup>63</sup> "The Growing Crisis in Africa's Sahel Region", *U.S. Government Publishing Office* (May 21, 2013) accessed January 12, 2021 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg81167/html/CHRG-113hhrg81167.htm>

<sup>64</sup> Mobido Goita, "West Africa's Growing Terrorist Threat: Confronting AQIM's Sahelian Strategy", *Africa Centre for Strategic Studies* (February 2011) accessed January 12, 2021 [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133688/AfricaBriefFinal\\_11.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133688/AfricaBriefFinal_11.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Government Publishing Office, *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Dr. Ghalib Abdul Aziz Al-Zamil, *ibid.*)

<sup>67</sup> "United Nations Security Council Consolidated List", *United Nations Security Council* (January 29/01, 2021) accessed February 5, 2021 <https://fiu.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Consolidatedlist29012021.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Beatriz de León Cobo, *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Theo Locherer, "Conflict Moves West in Mali, Towards the Senegalese Border", *Global Risk Insights* (January 12, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://globalriskinsights.com/2021/01/conflict-moves-west-in-mali-towards-the-senegalese-border/>

In January 2021, *Katiba Macina* continued its efforts to destabilize Burkina Faso. Similarly, in 2022, the activities of the group are expected to follow the trends of the second half of 2020, in Kayes, near the Mali-Senegal border, where the number of attacks doubled in 2020 compared to 2019, and in the Sikasso region, near the border with Ivory Coast.<sup>70</sup>

### Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

ISWAP has been going through a reshuffling of leadership since its inception. The current leader is Abu Dawud, who, in January 2021, replaced Amir Abba-Gana, also known as Ba Lawan or Lawan Abubakar.<sup>71</sup> In turn, in 2020, Ba Lawan had replaced Abu Abdullah Ibn Umar al-Barnawi, also known as Ba Idrisa.<sup>72</sup> In 2019, Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi, at the time the leader of the movement, has been replaced by Abu Abdullahi Ibn Umar al-barnawi. The old leader was detained after he was made to abdicate. He was not killed because ISWAP's new leadership was wary that this would have caused discontent and defections among his followers, potentially leading to the creation of a further splinter organization.<sup>73</sup> It is possible that Boko Haram/ISWAP will go into further diversification, and probably fragmentation in 2022 and beyond, making the organization weaker. This is the exact opposite of what JNIM is trying to do, by creating new opportunities for mergers of its smaller ancillary groups.

In spring 2018, ISWAP had 3,000-5,000 fighters, about double those of Boko Haram. ISWAP is one of the main targets of the Nigerian air force and of troops from Lake Chad countries.<sup>74</sup> The ISWAP camp of Kwalaram was targeted by airstrikes in January 2020, when Khalifa Umar, a high rank commander, was killed,<sup>75</sup> and in August 2020, when more commanders were killed.<sup>76</sup> Many ISWAP camps around Lake Chad were targeted by airstrikes more than once, and each time ISWAP commanders were killed.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Letter dated 21 January 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council", *UN Security Council* (February 03, 2021) <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2021/68>

<sup>71</sup> Wale Odunsi, "ISWAP: Abba-Gana overthrown in bloody battle, Abu Dawud appointed", *Daily Post* (January 31, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://dailypost.ng/2021/01/31/iswap-abba-gana-overthrown-in-bloody-battle-abu-dawud-appointed/>

<sup>72</sup> Bassim Al-Hussaini, "New ISWAP boss slays five rebel leaders, silences clerical tones", *Premium Times* (March 03, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/379975-new-iswap-boss-slays-five-rebel-leaders-silences-clerical-tones.html>

<sup>73</sup> "Deposed Boko Haram leader detained not killed: sources", *France 24* (March 15, 2019) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.france24.com/en/20190315-deposed-boko-haram-leader-detained-not-killed-sources>

<sup>74</sup> "Islamic State ally stakes out territory around Lake Chad", *Reuters* (April 29, 2018) accessed February 4, 2021 <https://cn.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security-idUSKBN1I0063>

<sup>75</sup> Abdulkareem Haruna, "Multinational forces 'kill top ISWAP commander", *Premium Times* (January 13, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/372344-multinational-forces-kill-top-iswap-commander.html>

<sup>76</sup> David Otto, "Kwalaram Airstrike: More Boko Haram / ISWAP Top Commanders Perish as Nigerian Military Levels jihadistst Operational Camp", *EONS Intelligence* (August 29, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://eonsintelligence.com/details/crime-intelligence-10948010/kwalaram-airstrike-more-boko-haram-iswap-top-commanders-perish-as-nigerian-military-levels-jihadistst-operational-camp-1501528123>

<sup>77</sup> Olarewaju Kola, "Nigerian forces kill 3 top ISWAP ringleaders", *Anadolu Agency* (February 20, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigerian-forces-kill-3-top-iswap-ringleaders/1739798>

The final objective of the Islamic State core is to establish a caliphate in the Sahel.<sup>78</sup> They intend to do this by using their proxies in the Sahel and in the Lake Chad basin. The current geopolitical outlook suggests that the group is very far from realizing this objective. Near Lake Chad, they are trying to replicate what happened in the Middle East. They are trying to impose some kind of administration, to create a professional army, parallel to the national armed forces, and setup security checkpoints.<sup>79</sup>

The move north to Lake Chad basin means that the organization is facing a different reality than the one in the northern states of Nigeria. The strategies and the ideology of the group will be, to a certain extent, influenced by the local culture, especially with the inflow of local recruits, which will bring a system of beliefs that is centered locally. This may cause imbalances between the core ideology of ISIS and the collective ideology of the group, which may be conducive to splits between branches, especially if any of their leaders is a local. Furthermore, the fact that their leadership has changed at least five times in two years, is a sign that it has not yet found a stable course.

What happens in the Lake Chad basin is of fundamental importance for the whole Sahel region. The various terrorist groups will come in contact but, most importantly, this junction will mean that there will be continuity of territory under the pressure of armed groups,<sup>80</sup> from Northern Nigeria up to the northern regions of Mali, and the southern regions of Libya. Other possible motivations for a third Boko Haram splinter group may come from internal turmoil caused by the way long-time members of the group are replaced by decision of the Islamic State core. Some of the former leaders of ISWAP, like Mamman Nur, have been killed by the Islamic State<sup>81</sup>. Others, like Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi, have been detained by other members of ISWAP.

## **Boko Haram**

Boko Haram is among the most violent Islamist groups in Africa. The group has expanded from what once was a localized Nigerian terrorist group to a regional threat. Due to increased military pressure by the Nigerian Army, Boko Haram shifted its center of gravity towards Lake Chad. The group's current areas of operation and safe haven are Lake Chad's islands and waterways, the Sambisa Forest, Nigeria, and the Mandara mountains along the Nigeria-Cameroon border. The group has attracted membership from countries neighboring Nigeria, although there are no reliable estimates of the number of

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<sup>78</sup> "ISIS in Africa: The Caliphate's Next Frontier", *Centre for Global Policy* (May 26, 2020) accessed February 4, 2021 <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-in-africa-the-caliphates-next-frontier/>

<sup>79</sup> Wassim Nasr, *ibid*.

<sup>80</sup> "Boko Haram a revendiqué l'enlèvement de certaines de lycéens", *La Liberté* (December 15, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.laliberte.ch/news-agence/detail/boko-haram-a-revendique-l-enlevement-de-certaines-de-lyceens/588303>

<sup>81</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Ultra-Extremist Side Resurfaces: From the Execution of Mamman Nur to Humanitarian Workers", *The Jamestown Foundation* (October 19, 2018) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://jamestown.org/program/boko-harams-ultra-extremist-side-resurfaces-from-the-execution-of-mamman-nur-to-humanitarian-workers/>

active foreign fighters. It has also had a significant presence in northern Cameroon since 2013, and in 2015 began a series of cross-border attacks into Chad and Niger.<sup>82</sup>

It is possible that, in the beginning, Boko Haram may have had ties with many diverse jihadist groups, such as AQIM, al-Shabaab, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In particular, they have shared some training camps and have been in communication with these groups. In 2012, Boko Haram, was ideologically close to al-Qaeda more than what it would be to the forthcoming ISIS.<sup>83</sup> These contacts, enabled them to grow progressively from a mainly Nigeria-based group, to a pan-African threat.

Boko Haram has split into many factions that are at odds with each other, or that have been eliminated by security forces. In a scenario in which negotiations with authorities are initiated at a regional level, Boko Haram would be excluded, since it is too fragmented to present a common front for dialogue.<sup>84</sup> In 2012, Boko Haram started executing multiple simultaneous improvised explosive device attacks, showing that its members had learned from, and possibly incorporated members from international jihadi networks already present in the Sahel and beyond. Kidnapping and IED attacks are also two techniques that were not used by Boko Haram before 2012. These new techniques may have been learnt by approximately 200 Boko Haram, Hausa-speaking jihadis, who resided in *Ansar Dine*-controlled Timbuktu.<sup>85</sup>

### ***Ansar al Dine - Ansaroul Islam***

*Ansar Dine*, also known as *Ansar al-Dine*, *Ansar al-Din*, or *Ansar Eddine*, which means defenders of the faith, was formed in 2011 by Iyad ag Ghali, under the umbrella organization AQIM.<sup>86</sup> In 2012, *Ansar al-Dine* had an estimated strength of 300 fighters.<sup>87</sup> These 300 fighters have, together with MUJAO fighters, seized control of most of northern Mali.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> "Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa", *Congressional Research Service* (July 14, 2016) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R44563.html>

<sup>83</sup> "LRA, Boko Haram, AL-Shabaab, AQIM and Other Sources of Instability in Africa", *U.S. Government Publishing Office* (April 25, 2012) accessed January 12, 2021 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hrg73998/html/CHRG-112hrg73998.htm>

<sup>84</sup> "Ali Modu Sheriff and Boko Haram: A history", *World Watch Monitor* (no date) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/ali-modu-sheriff-and-boko-haram-a-history/>

<sup>85</sup> Dr. Mike McGovern, *ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> "Ansar Eddine", *United Nations Security Council* (February 03, 2015) accessed February 5, 2021 [https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/qa\\_sanctions\\_list/summaries/entity/ansar-eddine](https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/qa_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/ansar-eddine)

<sup>87</sup> Vincent Duhem, "Le groupe salafiste Ansar dine affirme contrôler le nord-est du Mali", *Jeune Afrique* (March 20, 2012) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/176897/politique/le-groupe-salafiste-ansar-dine-affirme-contr-ler-le-nord-est-du-mali/>

<sup>88</sup> Méryl Demuyneck and Julie Coleman J.D, "The Shifting Sands of the Sahel's Terrorism Landscape", *International Centre for Counter Terrorism* (March 12, 2020) accessed February 5, 2021 <https://icct.nl/publication/the-shifting-sands-of-the-sahels-terrorism-landscape/>

In 2013, its militants also settled in Timbuktu, where they started destroying symbols of paganism and of any religion other than Islam. After 2013, the group was forecast to wane, losing momentum to bigger and better-organized groups.<sup>89</sup> But *Ansar al-Dine* came through. In fact, its ranks grew to between 1,200<sup>90</sup> and 3,000 combatants.<sup>91</sup> In 2014, they attacked the Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in Kidal.<sup>92</sup> By 2021, their membership estimate was revised downward to about 800.<sup>93</sup> In 2016, its leader, Emir Mahmoud Barry alias Abou Yehiya, was arrested during an operation by the Malian special forces of the State Security, between Nampala and Dogofri, Segou region, Mali. The operation was carried out in response to a prior attack by *Ansar al-Dine*, which had killed 17 soldiers few days earlier.<sup>94</sup> The attack was claimed by two armed groups, by a generically identified armed Fulani movement and by *Ansar al-Dine*. In 2016, *Ansar al-Dine* was linked to al-Qaeda.<sup>95</sup> In 2018, soldiers of mission BARKHANE eliminated the rebels' commander Malick Af Wanasnat, a former Malian army officer, who was very close to Iyad Ag Ghali, in Tinzawaten, near the border between Mali and Algeria.<sup>96</sup>

In 2021, the group's reach extended to Bamako. In Mali's capital, they have identified the Markaz mosque as a potential propaganda and radicalization hub, and possibly a recruitment hotspot. Representatives of the organization started visiting the mosque and spending time inside it. The content of the preaching sermons suddenly changed, becoming more radical.<sup>97</sup>

*Ansaroul Islam* is the Burkinabe branch of *Ansar al-Dine*. It was formed in late 2016 by the imam Malam Ibrahim Dicko, who died in April 2017 in Foulararé, Burkina Faso, following an attack by French forces that destroyed *Ansaroul's* largest base in the

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<sup>89</sup> Philipp Sandner, "Ansar Dine: radical Islamists in northern Mali", *Deutsche Welle* (December 18, 2014) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.dw.com/en/ansar-dine-radical-islamists-in-northern-mali/a-18139091>

<sup>90</sup> Jean-Pierre Chevenement and Gérard Larcher, "Rappel des principaux faits intervenes depuis le precedent rapport "Mali: Comment gagner la paix"? *Senat France* (April 23, 2013) last accessed December 24, 2021 <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r12-720/r12-7204.html#fn8>

<sup>91</sup> Jean-Paul Mari, "MALI. Qui sont les islamistes touaregs d'Ansar Dine ?", *L'Observateur* (January 15, 2013) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/guerre-au-mali/20130115.OBS5392/mali-qui-sont-les-islamistes-touaregs-d-ansar-dine.html>

<sup>92</sup> "Ansar Dine", Mapping Militants Organisations, *Stanford* (August 08, 2016) last accessed December 24, 2021 [http://stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print\\_view/437](http://stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print_view/437)

<sup>93</sup> "Le chef des Touaregs islamistes est de retour", *Le Figaro* (07/08/2014) <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2014/08/07/01003-20140807ARTFIG00252-le-chef-des-touaregs-islamistes-est-de-retour.php> (accessed 05/02/2021)

<sup>94</sup> "Arrestation de L'Emir Mahmoud Barry alias Abou Yehiya, leader de la katibat Ançar Eddine du Macina: une performance des forces spéciales", *Mali Web* (July 29, 2016) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.maliweb.net/la-situation-politique-et-securitaire-au-nord/arrestation-de-lemir-mahmoud-barry-alias-abou-yehiya-leader-de-katibat-ancar-eddine-macina-performance-forces-speciales-1704032.html>

<sup>95</sup> "Leader of Mali's Ansar Dine hauled before judicial police in Bamako", *Africa News* (July 27, 2016) accessed February 5, 2021 <https://www.africanews.com/2016/07/27/leader-of-mali-s-ansar-dine-hauled-before-judicial-police-in-bamako/>

<sup>96</sup> Kadiatou Sakho, "Au Mali, l'armée française tue un responsable d'Ansar Dine", *La Croix* (February 16, 2018) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Afrique/Au-Mali-larmee-francaise-tue-responsable-dAnsar-Dine-2018-02-16-1200914415>

<sup>97</sup> Marian Naguszewski, "Mali : dans le secret de Markaz, soupçons de radicalisme sur la mosquée [LeMémor]", *TV5 Monde* (January 30, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://information.tv5monde.com/video/mali-dans-le-secret-de-markaz-soupcons-de-radicalisme-sur-la-mosquee-lememo>



country<sup>98</sup> —although some sources have reported that he died of illness.<sup>99</sup> Initially, Dicko branded his philosophy under the label of tolerance and equality, buying the trust of both main local ethnicities, Peuls and Rimaïbé. In 2016, he was arrested and subsequently released by the French forces in Mali. Upon his return to Burkina Faso, it was clear that he had been completely radicalized.<sup>100</sup> While during its first phases of existence, it was thought that Ansaroul Islam would converge with the ranks of JNIM, the group definitely adhered to ISIS-inspired ideas.<sup>101</sup> However, *Ansaroul Islam* militants received training and logistical support from both AQIM and ISGS.<sup>102</sup>

## Alliances and Cooperation Between Groups

Between 2016 and 2019, ISGS and AQIM cooperated,<sup>103</sup> probably due to the fact that their respective chiefs were long time acquaintances. This was an exception because in no other part of the world did the two organizations cohabit in peace. Then, in 2019, the two groups started to fight occasionally, until March-April 2020, when they started a fully-fledged war.<sup>104</sup> ISGS established alliances with local militias created by Peul communities in the Tillabéri Region, Niger, and was able to partly coerce or convince some Kel Tamasheq, Yiad Ag Ghali's ethnicity, to join them.<sup>105</sup>

In 2020, JNIM and AQIM leaders, and leaders from other affiliated groups, met to discuss a possible expansion of the area of operations of the al-Qaeda-linked organizations in West Africa, in particular into the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>106</sup> Considering that many southwest African countries are unprepared to counter terrorism, this is a particularly worrying sign.

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<sup>98</sup> "Burkina Faso : les derniers jours d'Ibrahim Malam Dicko ?", *Jeune Afrique* (July 12, 2017) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/455496/politique/burkina-faso-derniers-jours-dibrahim-malam-dicko/>

<sup>99</sup> Tim Cocks, "How a preacher sent gunmen into Burkina Faso's schools", *Reuters* (November 12, 2019) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-islamists-preacher-insight-idUSKBN1XM1K8>

<sup>100</sup> Morgane Le Cam, "Comment est né Ansaroul Islam, premier groupe djihadiste de l'Histoire du Burkina Faso", *Le Monde* (April 11, 2017) last accessed December 24, 2021 [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/11/comment-est-ne-ansaroul-islam-premier-groupe-djihadiste-de-l-histoire-du-burkina-faso\\_5109520\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/11/comment-est-ne-ansaroul-islam-premier-groupe-djihadiste-de-l-histoire-du-burkina-faso_5109520_3212.html)

<sup>101</sup> Jacob Zenn, "AQIM's Alliance in Mali: Prospects for jihadist Preeminence in West Africa", *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume: 15 Issue: 8 (April 21, 2017) accessed February 5, 2021 <https://jamestown.org/program/aqims-alliance-mali-prospects-jihadist-preeminence-west-africa/>

<sup>102</sup> "Burkina Faso's war against militant Islamists", *BBC* (May 30, 2019) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39279050>

<sup>103</sup> Méryl Demuyck, Julie Coleman J.D., LL.M, "Les Sables Mouvants du Paysage Terroriste Sahélien", *International Centre for Counter Terrorism* (March 16, 2020) accessed January 29, 2021 <https://icct.nl/publication/les-sables-mouvants-du-paysage-terroriste-sahelien/>

<sup>104</sup> Wassim Nasr, *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Alex Thurston, "Roundup of Analyses on the JNIM-ISGS Conflict", *Sahel Blog Covering Politics and Religion in the Sahel and Nigeria* (June 08, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://sahelblog.wordpress.com/2020/06/08/roundup-of-analyses-on-the-jnim-isgs-conflict/>

<sup>106</sup> "A biweekly analysis and assessment of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Africa and related security and political dynamics", *Critical Threats* (February 04, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/africa-file>

In addition to the risk of infiltration, and of terrorist cells slipping into neighboring southwestern African countries, the greatest threat to these countries is the existence of multiple and overlapping organizations, which may lead to their federation.<sup>107</sup> There are close ties between JNIM and AQIM. Some of these ties have transcended the level of political alliances to become social relationships, solidifying and reinforcing them. One of Ag Ghali's nephews, Abdelkrim al-Targui, is head of an AQIM's *Katiba Macina* in Mali. Another one of his nephews, Bilal Ag Acherif, was the secretary general of Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA).<sup>108</sup>

ISGS maintained a constant presence in the Liptako-Gourma region. It is now converging to the Lake Chad basin, where ISWAP is already present. The two groups are candidates for a merger because they share the same narrative, targets, and modus operandi. They both combine pure guerrilla tactics with theft. Their objective is to overrun small outposts or military camps, and gather as many weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and as much petrol as they can.<sup>109</sup>

In June 2021, ISWAP attacked Boko Haram in the Sambisa forest, northeast Nigeria, where the head of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, was sighted. ISWAP had the upper hand and offered Boko Haram's chief the possibility to surrender but, apparently, Shekau preferred to kill himself.<sup>110</sup> In the following weeks, ISIS propaganda outlets published various videos announcing the merger between ISWAP and Boko Haram. In one of the videos, a spokesperson formerly belonging to Boko Haram stated that “despite the mistakes that have been made by both groups in the past, now they are a unified force”.<sup>111</sup>

### **Conflicts between groups**

The main conflicts are those that oppose groups of opposite matrices, namely ISIS-linked groups against al-Qaeda-linked groups. However, there is at least one example of infighting between groups that belong to the same matrix organization, namely ISWAP versus Boko Haram. Despite the fact that in their communiqués the groups accuse each other of ideological treason and of not adhering to established jihadist norms, the conflicts between armed groups are mostly driven by the need to ensure control over

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<sup>107</sup> Dr. Ghalib Abdul Aziz Al-Zamil, *ibid*.

<sup>108</sup> “Servan Ahougnon, *ibid*.”

<sup>109</sup> Laurent Lagneau, “Un groupe jihadistste implanté dans le centre du Mali a fait allégeance à l’État islamique”, *Zone Militaire* (February 03, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <http://www.opex360.com/2020/02/03/un-groupe-jihadistste-implante-dans-le-centre-du-mali-a-fait-allegeance-a-letat-islamique/>

<sup>110</sup> “Abubakar Shekau: Nigeria’s Boko Haram leader is dead, say rival militants”, *BBC* (June 7, 2021) accessed December 23, 2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57378493>

<sup>111</sup> Propaganda video accessed on June 8 2021. Video no longer available because the website was taken down

territory and related extraction of resources, including exaction of *zakat*, and receiving payments from local criminal rings as a permit tax to operate.

Apart from the objective of imposing their ideological will on the local population, armed groups need to control territory and establish corridors within, to control legal and illegal trade, and to facilitate the running of criminal economies from which extracted funding will be used to support their operations.<sup>112</sup> West Africa is rich in natural resources, but has scarce potential to convert these resources into economic growth. Terrorist organizations compete to fill the infrastructural void, controlling extraction as a means to fund their operations.<sup>113</sup>

Groups also engage in media wars. Sometimes more than one group claims responsibility for an attack and sometimes a group is blamed by other groups that were not involved. This damages the reputation of the group in question, depending on the type of attack. For example, on 11 November 2020, a military convoy from Tin-Akoff, Burkina Faso, was ambushed and 14 soldiers were killed. Both JNIM and ISGS claimed responsibility for this attack.<sup>114</sup> Sometimes, the reason why more than one group claim responsibility is because two or more groups are going through some kind of merger or are establishing closer ties with each other. This was seen in the case of the attack in Ivory Coast of 2016, when AQIM and its former rival movement, Al-Murabitoun, jointly claimed responsibility.<sup>115</sup> In 2019, ISWAP started claiming responsibility for ISGS attacks. This could be a way to portray a unified ISIS presence in the region.<sup>116</sup>

JNIM relies on a local base for the manning of its ranks. It can be considered as a homegrown terrorist-insurgent group. While this may be a sign of strength, because it ensures cohesion and partial support of members of the population, it is also a sign of weakness in the context of the war with ISIS. In fact, ISIS has more of an international approach to jihad, which translates into constant flow of weapons and fighters from the Sahel and beyond. These fighters are less likely to identify with JNIM, because of the intrinsic local nature of the group, and are more inclined to join ISIS. JNIM understood that ISIS would never represent a stable ally and that sooner or later, war would erupt with them.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> "Africa Terrorism Bulletin 4 - April 2020", *African Centre for the Study & Research on Terrorism* (May 2020) accessed January 12, 2021 <https://caert.org.dz/Medi-review/Terrorism-bulletin/BULLETIN%20-%202020.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> "Semaj N. McDowell, "An African Powder Keg: Terrorism in the Sahel", *Geopolitical Monitor* (July 21, 2020) last accessed November 29, 2021 <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/an-african-powder-keg-terrorism-in-the-sahel/>

<sup>114</sup> Claire Zutterling, *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> "Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa", *Congressional Research Service* (July 14, 2016) Accessed January 12, 2021 <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R44563.html>

<sup>116</sup> "Violent Extremism in West Africa", The Danish Immigration Service (June 2020) <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1308976/download> (accessed 29/01/2021)

<sup>117</sup> "Beyond the clashes between ISIS and al-Qaeda in West Africa", *Al Ain* (December 31, 2020) <https://al-ain.com/article/clashes-between-isis-and-al-qaeda-in-west-africa>

## Conflicts between JNIM and ISGS

Clashes Between JNIM and ISGS have intensified in early 2020. The major battles between the two groups were fought in the Inland Niger Delta area, traditionally under the control of JNIM, through *Katiba Macina*, without any known presence of ISGS thus far, in Téméra;<sup>118</sup> around Mopti, Koulbi, Dialloubé,<sup>119</sup> Dogo, Mali; in the Gourma area, in Ndaki,<sup>120</sup> In-Tillit, and Tin-Tabakat, Mali, and Korfooueyouey, Arayel, Arbinda, Nassoumbou, Pobé, Burkina Faso.

Prior to these battles, ISGS and JNIM coexisted in the Malian side of Liptako-Gourma and the Soum Province in Burkina Faso. In the Niger Delta, most of the ISGS attacks were either repelled or ISGS could not hold its positions for long. After some initial ISGS success, in the Malian part of Liptako-Gourma region, JNIM has now regained control over almost the entire area. In northern Burkina Faso, JNIM increased its influence to the Soum province, chasing out ISGS.<sup>121</sup>

On 7 April 2020, in the Mopti region, FLM, headed by Amadou Kouffa, and the ISGS, engaged in violent combat in Bore, in the area of Douentza and in Dialloubé, as well as in the Mopti region. According to local sources, ISGS received reinforcements that were sent from the Soum province, in Burkina Faso, while FLM received a substantial reinforcement from JNIM. After the reinforcement from both sides arrived, the balance of power was in favor of FLM, which inflicted important losses on ISGS. The goal of FLM was to control the area and the criminal activities therein.<sup>122</sup> The combat continued for several days.

The following is a recap of combatant activities involving JNIM and ISGS during 2020.

On 12 April 2020, a convoy of armed men on motorcycles, each carrying up to three men, was sighted crossing the river Niger by Konna, a city in Mopti region in the direction of Dialloubé. This was probably a reinforcement for ISGS.<sup>123</sup>

On 13 April 2020, the leader of ISGS, Adnan Abu Walid El Sahrawi, exhorted his brigades to join the ongoing fight against JNIM-FLM, and a unit belonging to the signatories to the peace agreement in Mali (CMA).<sup>124</sup> After this appeal, the city of Kidal,

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<sup>118</sup> "Incident 68 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la Plateforme pour la Coopération en Matière de Sécurité (PCMS) du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (05/06/2020)

<sup>119</sup> "Incident 46 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>120</sup> "Incident 51 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>121</sup> Flore Berger, "Sahel - a new battlefield between IS and al-Qaeda?", *The Africa Report* (June 04, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.theafricareport.com/29184/sahel-a-new-battlefield-between-is-and-al-qaeda/>

<sup>122</sup> "Incident 31 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>123</sup> "Incident 46 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>124</sup> Peace accord concluded in 2015 between the Malian Government and two coalitions of armed groups that were fighting the government and against each other, namely the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and the Platform of armed groups (the Platform), and two groups forming part of the CMA. The remaining CMA groups signed the accord on 20 June 2015. Dr Gaudence Nyirabikali, "Mali Peace Accord: Actors, issues and their representation" *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (August 27, 2015) last accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/node/385>

became temporarily deserted by CMA fighters. The pre-existing checkpoints were replaced by pickup trucks equipped with machine guns and the security close to CMA commanders were reinforced. A high number of CMA heavily armed fighters left Kidal and were probably deployed in support of *Katibat Ansar Dine*, to anticipate ISGS response following their initial losses.<sup>125</sup>

During the night between 13 and 14 April 2020, Ansaroul Islam, affiliated with JNIM, battled against ISGS in N'Daki, municipality of Gossi, along the border between Mali and Burkina Faso. Both sides suffered important losses and a number of civilians were killed as well during the fight.<sup>126</sup>

On 20 April 2020, the men who left Kidal on 13 April, were seen close to Téméra while they were crossing the river Niger in the direction of Liptako-Gourma, where CMA was meant to join JNIM in their ongoing battle against ISGS.<sup>127</sup>

Between 20 and 23 April 2020, near N'Daki, a convoy of JNIM composed of about forty motorcycles and four pickup trucks, executed a series of attacks on three ISGS bases. The three bases were located between Tin-Woussouk and Egaye, not far from N'Daki and Gossi.<sup>128</sup> One of the targets was a mobile base, made of pickup trucks, motorbikes and tents that were commanding a swath of territory in Egaye, and was more like an outpost than a base. In the base in Tin-tasadalt, JNIM captured ISGS' second in command for Gourma, Malick Tolobé. JNIM managed to infiltrate ISGS' communication system. This enabled them to ambush their enemy repeatedly in the following hours and days.<sup>129</sup>

In the last three months of 2020 there was a further escalation of the conflict between ISGS and JNIM in Mali. In October 2020 alone, the two groups met in battles of various sizes at least 150 times.<sup>130</sup> In 2021, the two groups are fully engaged in war. JNIM, accused implicitly ISGS of the massacre of civilians occurred in Niger in January 2021,<sup>131</sup> in a statement that they issued to claim responsibility for another attack against the soldiers of Barkhane in Ménaka.<sup>132</sup> This was the first time that JNIM mentioned ISGS in a statement and it is a clear sign that the two groups are at war.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> "Incident 48 – (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>126</sup> "Incident 51 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>127</sup> "Incident 68 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>128</sup> "Incident 74 - (Mali) Bulletin d'Information N°016 de la PCMS du G5 SAHEL", PCMS (June 05, 2020)

<sup>129</sup> "Mali Burkina : le JNIM réussi un gros coup contre l'EIGS dans le Gourma et près de la frontière Mali Burkina", *Nord Sud Journal* (April 21, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.nordsudjournal.fr/mali-burkina-le-jnim-reussi-un-gros-coup-contre-leigs-dans-le-gourma-et-pres-de-la-frontiere-mali-burkina/>

<sup>130</sup> "Claire Zutterling, *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> "'They came to kill everyone': Niger massacre survivors tell of horror", *Yahoo News* (January 11, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://news.yahoo.com/came-kill-everyone-niger-massacre-160305950.html>

<sup>132</sup> Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, "Nouvelle attaque contre un véhicule de l'opération Barkhane près de Menaka au Mali", *Bruxelles 2* (January 02, 2021) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.bruxelles2.eu/2021/01/nouvelle-attaque-contre-un-convoi-de-barkhane-a-menaka-2/>

<sup>133</sup> Wassim Nasr, *ibid.*

## Conflicts between MUJAO and MNLA

Historic data about defunct groups is relevant because it may help understand the dynamics of newly formed groups that have kept the initial nucleus of old organizations in their cadres or rank and file. Old grievances between individuals that may have been part of opposite factions and now are part of the same group, may emerge and produce effects much later.

Before being absorbed into other groups, MUJAO and MNLA engaged in gun battles with each other. In 2012, MNLA clashed with MUJAO in Gao when a total of 20 fighters were killed on both sides. In the same year, MNLA was reportedly driven out from their last stronghold in Ansongo by MUJAO and *Ansar al-Dine*.<sup>134</sup> Between 2012 and 2013, MUJAO and MNLA were linked to drug smuggling across northern Mali. In November 2012, MUJAO seized a convoy of vehicles that was transporting Moroccan hashish near the border between Niger and Mali, which was under the control of MNLA. In March 2013, MNLA seized a convoy that was transporting drugs under the control of MUJAO.<sup>135</sup>

## Conflict Between ISWAP-Boko Haram and *Katiba Macina*-ISWAP

The start of hostilities between the two factions could have been triggered by the change in leadership of ISWAP, when Ba Idrisa took over the position from Abu Musab al-Barnawi. The hostilities may be linked to a change in policy regarding the abduction of women, to which the new leader was more favorable than al-Barnawi. ISWAP started abducting women from the area of influence of Boko Haram.<sup>136</sup> They also kidnapped 13 women from a Boko Haram camp in the Diffa region, Niger.

In 2020, clashes between Boko Haram and ISWAP continued. Shekau's fighters on pickup trucks stormed the ISWAP camp in Sunnawa, Abadam district, Nigeria, near the border with Niger, and engaged them in a gun battle in order to reclaim their women seized previously by ISWAP, unsuccessfully.<sup>137</sup>

In April 2020, *Katiba Macina* clashed with ISWAP in the west of Mali. The battle ensued from the defection of some elements of Kouffa's troops that joined ISWAP. Kouffa's faction was the winner of this fight. The real objective of the battle may have been to assume control of western Mali and cut ISWAP off from the region. After the battle, *Katiba Macina* established a base in the Kayes region, not far from the Senegalese

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<sup>134</sup> Anaïs Maroonian, "Mali, Conduct of Hostilities", *Casebook* (no date) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/mali-conduct-hostilities>

<sup>135</sup> Wolfram Lacher, "Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus in the Sahel", *Global Communications on Drugs* (September 2013) last accessed December 24, 2021 <http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Challenging-the-Myth-of-the-Drug-Terror-Nexus-in-the-Sahel-2013-09-12.pdf>

<sup>136</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram Factionalization: Who are Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) Fighters in Niger and Chad?", *The Jamestown Foundation* (June 14, 2019) accessed February 4, 2021 <https://jamestown.org/program/boko-haram-factionalization-who-are-islamic-state-in-west-africa-province-iswap-fighters-in-niger-and-chad/>

<sup>137</sup> "Several killed in fighting between Nigeria jihadistst factions", *Outlook* (January 21, 2020) last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/several-killed-in-fighting-between-nigeria-jihadistst-factions/1713396>

border, and with no standing military forces. After the establishment of the base, *Katiba Macina* started recruiting and preaching and, in the following months, started staging attacks on national forces in the area.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusions and recommendations

The death of Abubakar Shekau has enabled the merger between two redoubtable groups, Boko Haram and ISWAP, ensuring territorial continuity in a vast region for the emerging group's operations. In the five years preceding this event, it was obvious that, at least some resources of the two factions, were expended to fight each other. Now with the merger, the new group no longer has concerns of this type and can fully dedicate its resources to attack government representatives, civilian targets and institutions, as well as the national armies in the region.

There is a concrete risk of expansion of terrorist groups' influence or presence from the Sahel region and Nigeria to the whole of West Africa. The governments of Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau, should discuss potential avenues of cooperation in view of the expansion of violent jihadist extremism in those countries. Intelligence-sharing should be improved and an efficient system for exchanging intelligence on terrorism matters among these countries should be put in place. The most obvious suggestion is that INTERPOL should boost its effort for establishing the foundations of this system. Although not discussed in this article, other African countries such as Ghana, Togo, and Benin, are also at high risk.

Cooperation among all these countries should be enabled at the level of international law, by signing multilateral agreements, allowing for more concrete cooperation among armies and security forces of these countries. The multilateral aspect mirrors the transnational nature of the armed groups, which do not rely and do not make reference to territorial sovereignty of any country, and move, almost undisturbed, across countries. That represents a freedom of movement that is not enjoyed by the national regular army of any of the countries in the region.

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<sup>138</sup> Theo Locherer, *ibid.*

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