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Assessing the Impact of Factional Infighting within Boko Haram

By:
Paul Christopher Markos

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

University, Mississippi
May 2020

Approved by:

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FACTIONAL INFIGHTING WITHIN BOKO HARAM

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FACTIONAL INFIGHTING WITHIN BOKO HARAM

ABSTRACT

Assessing the Impact of Factional Infighting within Boko Haram

By: Paul Markos

Under the direction of Dr. Mark Chen

The emergence of Boko Haram in West Africa has resulted in severe disruption of the Lake Chad region and the displacement of millions. In 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS, signaling a shift in the organization's objectives and adopting a new strategy for influence over its region. Subsequent leadership changes led to the group's splintering into multiple factions. Infighting between and within factions has raised new questions imperative to understanding the group's outlook. This paper sought to examine the impact that deaths of ISIS and ISWAP leaders have on the outlook of Boko Haram and its factions (JAS, Ansaru, ISWAP) and to anticipate the group's potential next actions and aggressions. Data consisting of open source intelligence was compiled and analyzed. Based on this analysis, the report establishes that the Islamic State West Africa Province faction presents the greatest threat to Nigeria, due to its ability to gain popular support from civilians in the region. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's death provides a path for the possible re-emergence of al-Qaeda in Nigeria. It has also led to a hardline turn of events within ISWAP that will likely fuel an uptick in soft and hard target attacks across West Africa. By elucidating the driving factors behind the threat of increased insurgency, the analysis provided can be used as a roadmap to anticipate and deter Boko Haram's hand in West African affairs.

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Glossary

Allah: An Arabic word referring to the Islamic God.

Apostasy: Not believing in the essential tenets of Islam.

Al-Hayat: Referring to the media wing of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

Caliph: A person considered a politico-religious successor to the Islamic prophet Muhammed and a leader of the entire ummah.

Caliphate: An Islamic state under the leadership of an Islamic steward with the title of caliph.

Cleric: A priest or religious leader.

Imam: The person who leads prayers in a mosque.

Infidels: A person who does not believe in religion or who adheres to a religion other than one's own.

Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad: English translation means People Committed to the Prophets Teachings for Propagation and Jihad.

Jihad: A struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam.

Lake Chad: Large lake in Africa, which connects Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria.

Mujahideen: A guerrilla fighter in Islamic countries, especially those who are fighting against non-Muslim forces.

Quran: The Islamic sacred book.

Shaykh: An Arab leader, particularly the head of chief of a tribe, village, or group.

Sharia: Islamic religious law forming part of Islamic tradition and derived from Islam.

Shura council: A consultative council.

Takfir: The action or practice of declaring that a fellow Muslim is guilty of apostasy and therefore no longer a Muslim.

Ummah: The whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion.

Wali: The Arabic word refers to someone who is the authority.

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List of Abbreviations

AFRICOM: United States Africa Command

AQ: al-Qaeda

AQIM: al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

CT: Counter-Terrorism

IDP: Internally Displaced Persons

IED: Improvised Explosive Device

IS: Islamic State

ISGS: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara

ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

ISR: Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

ISWA: Islamic State West Africa

ISWAP: Islamic State West Africa Province

JAS: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad

K&R: Kidnap and Ransom

MNJTF: Multinational Joint Task Force

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- Figure 4** Religious Divide

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Research Questions

Primary:

- *What is the current and future impact of factional infighting within Boko Haram?*

Secondary:

- *How has Abubakar Shekau's ejection from Islamic State West Africa sculpted Boko Haram's new outlook?*
- *What effect does Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's death have on Islamic State West Africa?*
- *How does Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna compare with Islamic State West Africa in terms of civilian appeal?*
- *To what extent has al-Qaeda/ISIS played a role in fueling Boko Haram?*
- *To what extent have underlying internal systemic issues played a role in fueling Boko Haram?*
- *How does the internal execution of Abu Abdullah Umar al-Barnawi change ISWAP's goals?*
- *Does the organizational structure of Boko Haram allow fortified network resiliency?*
- *What are the indicators that will suggest what future direction Boko Haram is moving?*
- *How can Nigeria increase counter-terrorism efforts beyond military force?*
- *What policy is the US currently taking with respect to combating Boko Haram?*
- *What can the United States gain from the terrorist infighting, and what does it risk?*

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Methodology

The main method of research used in this work was qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources. These sources include scholarly works, journal articles, books, cyber-news articles, audio recordings, correspondence, speeches, and relevant social media content. Maps were used to detail and examine previous Boko Haram attacks and clashes throughout the Lake Chad Basin. The data was then used to understand where Boko Haram strongholds are and predict where they will likely be in the future, which was dependent on Structured Analytical Techniques.

Structured Analytical Techniques were employed to enhance the accuracy of analytical predictions and counter any unanticipated biases. In terms of combating bias, an analysis of competing hypotheses was used to aid in ensuring any future analysis was not in excessive confidence. “What if?” analysis was relied upon heavily since this topic centers around an emerging threat and what early indicators could help create awareness of change taking place.

Finally, multiple scenarios analysis was used to demonstrate the many possible outcomes that could manifest in the future and to demonstrate to readers the significance of each potential outcome, even if it is unlikely.

Research Limitations

A heavy portion of this paper is counter-terrorism analysis. The restriction of only being able to access unclassified, open source information heavily limits analysis when dealing with the dynamic threat of a terrorist organization. Furthermore, contradicting reports surface regularly on the internet. The fact that a large percentage of reports and research performed on this subject have originated in the United States, while addressing topics in Africa, leaves ambiguity in interpreting information, and at times this forced self-interpretation of whether a source was deemed credible or not. In response to this, many accounts have been cross-verified and cited by multiple sources. Lastly, cognitive biases remain pertinent in research that involves any form of personal analytical interpretation. Although objective Structured Analytical Techniques were employed to censor the level of bias that seeped into the work, it is inevitable that some remains. Confirmation bias, anchoring effect, and overconfidence can also impact analysis of any intelligence data.

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Assessing the Impact of Factional Infighting within Boko Haram

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 2009, the terrorist group referred to as Boko Haram has devastated the Lake Chad region within West Africa, primarily in Northeast Nigeria's Borno State. Murder of thousands, kidnappings, bombings, and displacement of millions have become an incessant result of conflict due to Boko Haram's viscous campaign. For more than a decade now, the group has tormented the people of West Africa. 2014 was the deadliest year for Boko Haram attacks and included the widely known kidnapping of 276 Dapchi schoolgirls from Chibok.¹ Following this, 2015 served as the beginning of a large factional split within the terror group that proved to be monumental in the continuation of Boko Haram as it previously existed.² As 2015's events transformed into modern day 2020, these factional splits have brought about new implications and resulted in opportunities for both the terrorist group and counter-terrorism forces. The question has been posed to assess the limitations of Boko Haram and its many factions as an expansive terrorist organization and to assess the level of counter methods necessary to expel the group from the region.

As of the date of this study, Boko Haram is primarily split into two main factions that continue to drive insurgent campaigns and remain enduring threats to the region: Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad (JAS), led by Abubakar Shekau, and the adversarial Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which has seen multiple leadership changes since the time of since Shekau's ejection in 2016. The third faction, Ansaru, translating to "The Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa," originated from Boko Haram, but has since distanced

¹ Mapping Militant Organizations. "Global Islamic State." (2019). Stanford University. https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/boko-haram#text_block_19380

² Callimachi, Rukmini. (2015). "Boko Haram generates uncertainty With Pledge of Allegiance to Islamic State." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/world/africa/boko-haram-is-said-to-pledge-allegiance-to-islamic-state.html>

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itself from the rest of the group, blurring the lines that separate the three current day jihadist networks.³ Ansaru has been primarily dormant in recent years in terms of offensives, having not claimed an attack since 2013 with the exception of the January 2020 attack on the Emir of Potiskum, Yobe State.⁴ Instead, the group has focused its efforts on spreading propaganda across West Africa and continuing conversations with factions of al-Qaeda across the continent.

The aim of this thesis is to characterize Boko Haram as a continuing high-level terrorist organization that has the potential to evolve parts of Africa into a Caliphate for the Islamic State movement. Throughout this paper, I will seek to explore how Boko Haram's 2015 pledge of allegiance to ISIS, followed by the factional split between JAS and ISWAP in 2016, has impacted both factions' grasp on the region and changed the nature of the threat that Boko Haram formerly presented. I will also address major factors that are likely to predict how Islamic jihad will torment the region in the future. The most notable of these includes the marriage of the Islamic State and Boko Haram, the death of ISIS caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, increased recent activity by Ansaru, and the execution of the most recent Islamic State West Africa leader, Abdullah Ibn Umar al-barnawi. The review of the literature will provide background and lay the foundation for explaining how Islamic State in West Africa presents a much more serious long-term threat than its sister faction, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna. In short, I will argue that ISWA has taken a far more holistic approach that consists of strong financial backing, a long-term vision with attainable short-term goals, a crucial ability to appease to the local civilian populace, and other characteristics that mirror the tactics once employed by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. This contrasts from the primary objective of Jama'atu ahlis Sunna, which is to gain a foothold in

³ Barkindo, Atta. (2016). "Understanding Boko Haram's Factional Structure." *Research Gate*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303685572_Understanding_Boko_Haram's_Factional_Structure

⁴ Weiss, Caleb. (2020). "Ansaru Publicly Returns to Nigeria." *Long War Journal*.
<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/01/ansaru-publicly-returns-to-nigeria.php>

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Nigeria's Northeastern Borno State through focused aggression and genocidal ventures that lack the ability to appeal strategically to the masses, sound financial backing, and much needed technological advancements.⁵ My belief differs from the prevailing opinion, which holds that alliance between ISIS and ISWAP is little more than superficial propaganda.⁶

Prior to addressing these questions, it is vital that one understands the origins of Boko Haram, how the group has evolved, and the source of the group's motivation. Understanding these fundamental principles provides the knowledge necessary to make accurate analytical predictions. It also gives insight into the warning signs of a new group backed by ISIS or al-Qaeda surfacing in the area and creates a tactical roadmap that Nigerian politicians, police, and military can employ to effectively shorten the longevity of Boko Haram.

⁵ Hinshaw, Drew and Parkinson, Joe. (2019). "Islamic State, Seeking Next Chapter, Makes Inroads Through West Africa." *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-seeking-next-chapter-makes-inroads-through-west-africa-11549220824>

⁶ Tisdall, Simon. (2015). "Boko Haram-Isis alliance is nothing but superficial propaganda." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/08/boko-haram-isis-alliance-is-nothing-but-superficial-propaganda>

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I. Geographic Perspective

The majority of fighting that will be discussed in this paper takes place in Northeastern Nigeria's Borno State. When comparing Borno State to its surrounding territory of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, it seems rather small, so when hearing reports of attacks repeatedly happening in the same vicinity, it is easy to confuse how groups, villagers, and security forces are not stacked on top of each other. Thus, it is important to be able to contextualize the territories where Islamic State West Africa and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad members are roaming, fighting, and growing influence.

West Virginia



Nigeria's Borno State



Figure 1. The images above were sourced from Google Maps. West Virginia (62,755 km²), pictured outlined in red on the left, is slightly smaller than the size of Borno State (70,898 km²), seen outlined in red on the right. Importantly, the terrain of Borno State is rocky and hilly in some places, dense with the Sambisa Forest in others, and meandering, rigid road structures serve elsewhere. This diverse topography allows Boko Haram ample space to set up multiple camps that are difficult to spot and even harder to combat.

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II. History

The origins of Boko Haram trace deep into the history of Nigeria's Borno State. Many scholars, like Kim Searcy, professor of Islam and African history, tie 19th century Islamic reformation in West Africa and the British colonial presence in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, as monumental events that sculpted Nigeria into the religious and ethnic battlegrounds necessary for the foundation upon which Boko Haram was built.⁷ These events led to deep marginalization of the Kinuri people, the ethnic group dominant in Borno State. The Kinuri people reside mostly in the Lake Chad region, lands that were previously home to the Kanem and Bornu Empires of their ancestors. It is estimated that only about eight percent of Nigeria's population is Kinuri, yet the overwhelming majority of Boko Haram fighters come from this ethnic group.⁸ Although these historical conditions paved the road to the events that take place today, systemic local political, religious, and economic factors in Nigeria also provided the necessary fertile soil in which the destructive organization could grow.⁹

Many scholars are divided on which factors contributed most to the creation of Boko Haram. Some see the local systemic issues as the primary impetus for the group's creation. Others see the role of international jihadi organizations like al-Qaeda as the main instigators. Both beliefs undoubtedly play a role in the creation and expansion of Boko Haram. The local factors created the physical landscape and political environment for a terrorist group to exploit while the psychological impact of international jihadi organizations and propaganda instilled

⁷ Searcy, Kim. (2016). "All Politics is Local: Understanding Boko Haram." *Origins.osu.edu*.
<http://origins.osu.edu/article/all-politics-local-understanding-boko-haram>

⁸ Asfura-Heim, Patricio and McQuaid, Julia. (2015). "Diagnosing the Boko Haram Conflict: Grievances, Motivations, and Institutional Resilience in Northeast Nigeria." *CNA*. https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DOP-2014-U-009272-Final.pdf

⁹ Bukarti, Audu. (2015). "The Origins of Boko Haram – And Why it Matters." *Hudson Institute*.
<https://www.hudson.org/research/15608-the-origins-of-boko-haram-and-why-it-matters>

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morale in militants to rise up against the local populous and government.^{10,11} In terms of international jihadi organizations' impact, ISIS has created the opportunity for Islamic State West Africa to threaten Nigeria, West Africa, and possibly the entire continent in ways that Boko Haram was never able to do prior to ISWAP's establishment.

Mohammed Yusuf was a native of Yobe State, Nigeria. He received a Quranic education, and it was during his studies when many scholars believe Yusuf began to expand his radical beliefs. Yusuf was a former member of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria and later joined the group Ahlus Sunnah wal jama'ah hijra. According to Yusuf's sons, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, which took place while he was on pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, largely inspired Mohammed Yusuf to broaden his influence through whatever means necessary.¹² This, in part, is what led to his more aggressive recruitment and intolerance of Western ideology propagating across the Maiduguri region in 2002 once Yusuf returned. According to analysis published by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, the head of Ansaru stated that initial funding to found Boko Haram came from individuals connected to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.¹³ At this time, Mohammed Yusuf built a religious building in Maiduguri that was coupled with an Islamic-principled school. Despite Nigeria's overall economic success at the time, the country suffered from a massive poverty rate. In 2003, the state of Jigawa in Northern Nigeria had a poverty rate of 95%, and in 2009 Jigawa's poverty rate was

¹⁰ Onuoha, Freedom. (2014). "Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?" *United States Institute of Peace*. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf

¹¹ Higazi, Adam. (2013). "The origins and transformation of the Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria." *CAIRN*. https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_POLAF_130_0137--the-origins-and-transformation-of-the.htm

¹² Bukarti, Audu. (2015). "The Origins of Boko Haram – And Why it Matters." *Hudson Institute*. <https://www.hudson.org/research/15608-the-origins-of-boko-haram-and-why-it-matters>

¹³ Zenn, Jacob. (2018). "Boko Haram: Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines_Chapter-6.pdf

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89%.¹⁴ Yusuf was able to allure poor youth from across Nigeria who were struggling for survival in poverty rates like Jigawa's. He utilized this recruitment to convert their young and to deftly sway their minds toward his extremist beliefs.

As Mohammed Yusuf grew in notoriety, he was selected as the leader of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah. Shortly after Yusuf took leadership, he began to frame Western ideology as the epicenter of wickedness. With this deep belief that the proper Muslim way of life had been overtaken by iniquitous Western values, it was at this time that Ahlus Sunnah wal jama'ah hijra was rebranded and named Jama'atu Ahlus- Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, or Boko Haram, with the loose translation meaning of "Western Education is forbidden".¹⁵

From 2003 to 2009, Boko Haram was primarily focused on isolating itself from the temporal society that Yusuf and his followers believed Nigeria to be. In 2009, Nigerian Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was serving in President Umaru Yar'Adua's absence. At this time Goodluck Jonathan was a large proponent of launching a counter-terrorism campaign focused on suppressing Boko Haram. According to many accounts, the Nigerian security forces were known for overstepping legal boundaries and ruling with heavy hands at the time. In July of 2009, security forces clashed with Yusuf's group, leading to the deaths of hundreds of Boko Haram militants and the capture of Mohammed Yusuf. The fight ceased with the killing of Mohammed Yusuf while in the custody of the Nigerian police.¹⁶

The Nigerian government's decision to kill Muhammed Yusuf without proper trial backfired in that this act unintentionally resulted in Yusuf being looked upon as a symbol of martyrdom and further drove Boko Haram militants to bring jihad to the Nigerian government. It

¹⁴ "National Poverty Rates for Nigeria: 2003-04 (Revised) and 2009-10." *National Bureau of Statistics*.

¹⁵ Mapping Militant Organizations. "Global Islamic State." (2019). Stanford University.
https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/boko-haram#text_block_19380

¹⁶ Nossiter, Adam. (2009). "Nigeria Confirms Death of Islamic Sect's Leader." *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/31/world/africa/31nigeria.html>

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was at this time that Boko Haram militants, led by their new leader, Abubakar Shekau, temporarily fell into the background and regrouped. Abubakar Shekau, Muhammed Yusuf's former second-in-command (deputy), was then in contact with the leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Abdemalik Droukdel, for strategic and financial support. The connection was successful and AQIM provided Boko Haram with money, weapons, and ammunition to seek revenge for the killing of "the martyr Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf".¹⁷ With the tools necessary to begin their offensive, Boko Haram's domain expanded with Maiduguri remaining as the axis.

Until this time, Boko Haram relations with al-Qaeda were largely speculated without much proof. There were talks of communication between the two groups, but nothing of this nature that incontestably showed the commitment that AQIM had been willing to dedicate in the pursuit of revenge and the slaughter of opposition.

The years 2010 to 2015 served as a devastatingly impactful time on Nigeria's population. Ravaged towns and villages led to further economic disparity, socio-political differences, and enormous struggles for the local populace solely to survive the threat of attacks each day. Boko Haram had pivoted its aims towards combating Nigeria's political agenda and setting up an Islamic Caliphate in the Northeastern region of Borno.¹⁸ During these years, Boko Haram strengthened its tactics, amplifying sophistication and employing the usage of mass killings through methods like man-borne and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (IEDs). This was witnessed on a national scale in August of 2011, when a vehicle-borne suicide bomber crashed into the United Nations headquarters in Abuja, killing or injuring over one-hundred

¹⁷ Esiri, George. (2010). "North Africa Qaeda offers to help Nigerian Muslims." *Reuters*.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-nigeria-qaeda-muslims-20100201-idAFJ0E6100EE20100201>

¹⁸ Thurston, Alex. (2016). "The disease is unbelief: Boko Haram's religious and political worldview." *Brookings*.

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Alex-Thurston_Final_Web.pdf

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people.¹⁹ Around this same time, the group orchestrated a series of bombing attacks that primarily targeted government buildings like police stations and military outposts. Many bombings occurring in 2011 were focused on retaliating against the election of Goodluck Jonathan as Nigeria's fourteenth head of state.²⁰

III. The Creation of Ansaru

Between the years 2011 and 2012, tensions between Abubakar Shekau and Mamman Nur, third in command at the time of Yusuf's death, began to adamantly rise. Shekau believed in the slaughter of all who did not turn their backs on Western ideology to follow the ways in which he interpreted the Quran. This would include the killing of other Muslims who did not see eye to eye with Shekau. Mamman Nur on the other hand, although a malicious terrorist who is believed to have orchestrated the 2011 UN bombing in Abuja, adamantly disagreed with the murder of fellow Muslims.²¹ Shekau would also kill members that defected from Boko Haram. According to West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, it was these fundamental disputes which led to Mamman Nur and other members breaking apart from Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lida'awati wal-Jihad in order to establish Ansaru.²² Mamman Nur is known to have strong ties to affiliates of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other African Jihadi groups.²³ This fundamental disagreement could have been one of the main drivers in why we later see that Abubakar Shekau's faction

¹⁹ Nossiter, Adam and Murray, Senan. (2011). "Suicide Bomber Attacks U.N. Building in Nigeria." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/27/world/africa/27nigeria.html>

²⁰ Zenn, Jacob. "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/leadership-analysis-of-boko-haram-and-ansaru-in-nigeria/>

²¹ Zenn, Jacob. (2018). "Boko Haram's Ultra-Extremist Side Resurfaces: From the Execution of Mamman Nur to Humanitarian Workers." *The Jamestown Foundation*. <https://jamestown.org/program/boko-harams-ultra-extremist-side-resurfaces-from-the-execution-of-mamman-nur-to-humanitarian-workers/>

²² Zenn, Jacob. "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/leadership-analysis-of-boko-haram-and-ansaru-in-nigeria/>

²³ Mapping Militant Organizations. "Global Islamic State." (2019). Stanford University. https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/boko-haram#text_block_19380

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lacked the networking aptitude to continue to fortify alliances with larger Islamic jihadist organizations like al-Qaeda and al-Shabab. These organizations could provide technical sophistication in the way that Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) is now thought to be successfully managing.

IV. Resemblance of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

Many attacks in 2013 resembled AQIM's markings. Boko Haram showed its ability to transform and adapt in malicious ways when militants dressed up in military uniforms and blockaded the town of Benisheik, located between Damaturu and Maiduguri in Borno State, leading to the shooting and killing of hundreds.²⁴ Furthermore, according to a senior lecturer at King's College London, murders of students as seen at the agriculture college in Yobe state, a secondary school in Mamudo, and in Benisheik and Dumba villages shared many similar characteristics with attacks perpetrated by AQIM in Algeria.²⁵ Following this, a trend began in Nigeria of increased deaths almost each month from 2011 until reaching a pinnacle of death and atrocities in 2014. According to the Council of Foreign Relations, deaths per month caused by Boko Haram attacks and clashes had reached 3,456 deaths in the month of March 2014 alone.²⁶ Yet, Boko Haram had still not caught the eye of the West to the extent that it soon would. During the following month of April, the infamous kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls occurred. The atrocious kidnapping from the girls' dormitories in the middle of the night, served as a tipping point for the West's involvement with Nigerian affairs. Also worth mentioning, the

²⁴ BBC Staff. (2013). "Nigeria's Boko Haram unrest: Scores dead in Benisheik raid." *BBC News*.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24169992>

²⁵ Reuters Staff. (2010). "North Africa Qaeda offers to help Nigerian Muslims." *Reuters*.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-nigeria-qaeda-muslims-20100201-idAFJQE6100EE20100201>

²⁶ Campbell, John. (2020). "Nigeria Security Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*.
<https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>

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internationally trending #BringBackOurGirls campaign shed light and notoriety on the terrorist group across the globe. Shortly after, the United States and other NATO allies sent counter-terrorism and anti-kidnapping specialists to Nigeria in an effort to assist any way possible.²⁷ This event was also the beginning of new tensions within Boko Haram. As many of the girls were held captive for three years, it shed light on how certain Boko Haram members disagreed with Abubakar Shekau's opinion as to how negotiations and other leadership efforts should have been managed.²⁸ At this point in the insurgency, Boko Haram had killed hundreds of students.

²⁷ Gardner, Frank. (2014). "Nigeria kidnapping: How can foreign teams help?" *BCC News*.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27376720>

²⁸ Zenn, Jacob. (2014). "Boko Haram and the Kidnapping of the Chibok Schoolgirls." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/boko-haram-and-the-kidnapping-of-the-chibok-schoolgirls/>

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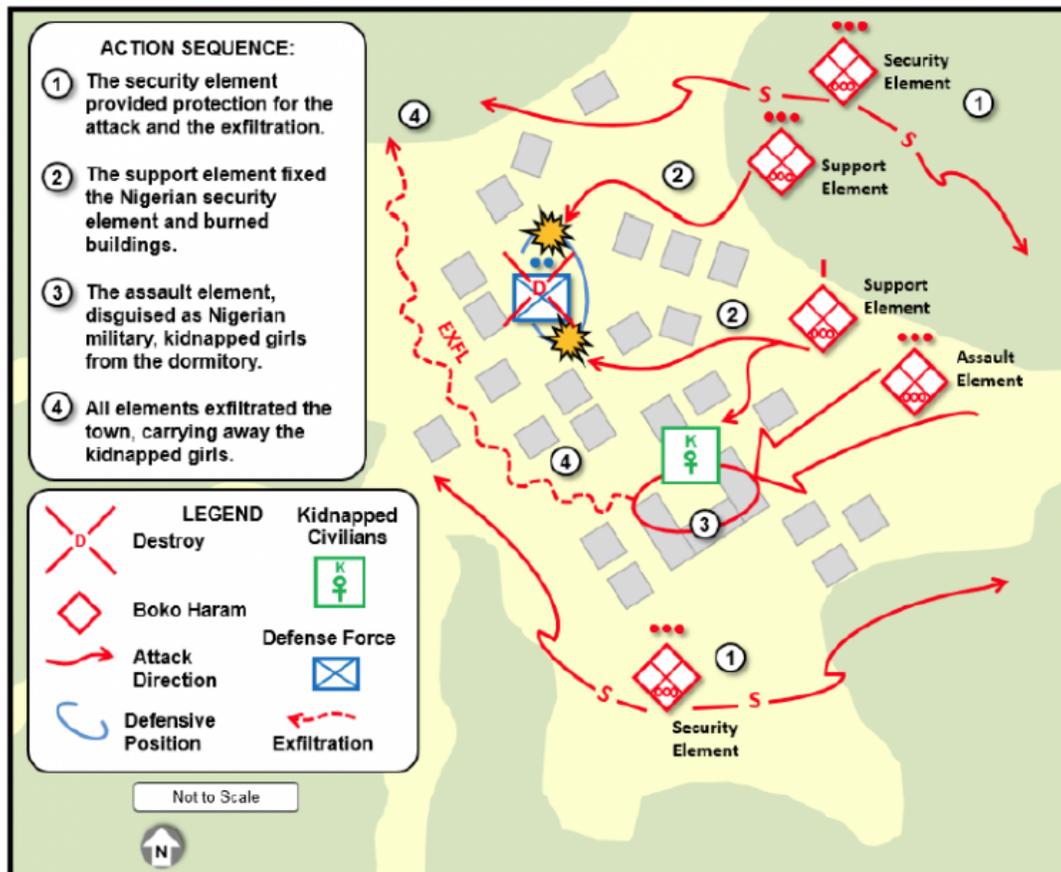


Figure 2. Raid on Chibok Girls Secondary School. The sketch above is provided by the U.S. Army from its 2017 Threat Tactics Report against Boko Haram demonstrating Boko Haram's plan of action. Utilizing three main teams: security element, support element, and assault element, the group was able to breach the government-run secondary school grounds, neutralize the Nigerian security elements, and exfiltrate themselves and the 276 girls without any casualties of their own. The sketch demonstrates Boko Haram's ability to apply military precision tactics on a facility guarded by armed security. The kidnappings took place during a time in which Boko Haram was especially targeting schools due to their teachings of Western education.^{29,30}

²⁹ U.S. Army. (2017). "U.S. Army Threat Tactics Report: Boko Haram." Public Intelligence.

<https://publicintelligence.net/us-army-boko-haram/>

³⁰ BBC Staff. (2017). "Nigeria Chibok abductions: What we know." BCC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32299943>

V. Boko Haram Pledges Allegiance to ISIS

Boko Haram continued its military campaign against Nigeria in 2015 and at this point had expanded its territorial dominance into neighboring countries. Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Mali have all suffered from the group's incessant wrath. Burning villages, bombing shopping malls and other centers, and countering timely government efforts forced militaries into an all-out tailspin.³¹ For example, Lake Chad's whereabouts located in the west of Chad borders Borno State, Boko Haram's launch pad, and is partially responsible for the group's overspill into the country of Chad. While attacks continued at an intensified level in 2015, the affected governments worked to mobilize regional security cooperation.

In March of 2015, Abubakar Shekau is noted as stating, "We announce our allegiance to the caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and will hear and obey in times of difficulty and prosperity."³² This alliance marks the date that Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, heralding a new era for the group and bringing about many new policy implications for the region. The new alliance was anticipated by security analysts around the world, and days after Boko Haram's allegiance, an ISIS spokesperson announced Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's acceptance of Boko Haram joining the caliphate, declaring the group's expansion into West Africa.³³

The new alliance answered many intelligence questions at the time. Particularly, since ISIS and al-Qaeda are rivals on many fronts, the new alliance indicated that Boko Haram's relationship with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was at a vulnerable point and that AQIM was likely unable to provide Boko Haram with the same benefits that ISIS was able to render. This

³¹ Asfuro-Heim, Patricio and McQuaid, Julia. (2015). "Rethinking the U.S. Approach to Boko Haram." *CNA*. https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/drm-2014-u-009462-final.pdf

³² Muir, Jim. (2015). "Nigeria's Boko Haram Pledges allegiance to Islamic State." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31784538>

³³ Ogbogu, Jennifer. (2015). "Analysing the Threat of Bok Haram and the ISIS Alliance in Nigeria." *JSTOR*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26351381?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

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also came at a vital time for Boko Haram's livelihood, as regional security forces were battling the group at a rather successful rate, gaining back territory and towns that had been overtaken in the past. Thirdly, this was an important gain for the Islamic State, as it was an added link to their "global franchise" initiative, a key piece to its long-term vision that assures the Islamic State has influence, even when defeated in Iraq and Syria, as would be seen in the following years. Boko Haram, now officially going by the name of Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), quickly began to resemble ISIS's characteristics on and off the battlefield.

Since the two groups' inception, beheadings of Christians, more adept usage of social media platforms geared towards propaganda videos, and methodically coordinated hard target attacks have all provided fear-inducing visuals. In March 2015, just a few days prior to the two groups' alliance being announced to the world, Boko Haram uploaded its first public video, the beheadings of two ISWAP members accused of working for the Nigerian government.³⁴ The details of the executions shared many similar attributes to the beheadings of Christians and journalists in Iraq and Syria carried out by ISIS, including high-definition resolution cameras, special effects edits, and the same extremist ideological rhetoric repeated in the video.³⁵ Furthermore, 2015 marked a time when hard target attacks on Nigerian, Cameroonian, and Chadian soldiers were elevated. Strategic ambushes and the ability to foresee where military units had established forward operating posts seemed to have hit a new high. This was the point at which ISWAP began using drones to gather aerial imagery intelligence. This tactic modernized Boko Haram's ability to launch daytime and nighttime operations with promising

³⁴ Joseph, Dan and Seldin, Jeff. (2015). "Boko Haram Beheads Two Accused Spies in Video." *VOA*. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/boko-haram-beheads-two-accused-spies-video>

³⁵ Associated Press. (2018). "Britons Accused of Being Islamic State 'Beatles' Call Beheadings 'Regrettable'." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/31/world/middleeast/britain-isis-beatles-syria.html>

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success.³⁶ It was a tactic seen in Iraq and Syria from ISIS and signaled to the security industry that the Islamic State central was indeed aiding ISWAP in training and tactics.

The increase in hard target attacks on military and police forces seemed to continue to be the field of focus as the Islamic State's ideals soaked into the West African organization's strategic objectives. As the push toward hard target attacks progressed, disputes between Abubakar Shekau and ISIS began to rise. Fundamental disputes in ideology and tactics seemed to infect the relationship. In 2016, after a little over a year of the marriage of the two groups, ISIS declared Abu Musab al-Barnawi the new leader of Islamic State West Africa. Abubakar Shekau's relief of duty came after leaders in other jihadist organizations voiced concerns to al-Baghdadi about his leadership style.³⁷

³⁶ Zaimov, Stoyan. (2015). "Boko Haram Beheads Two Spies in First Public Video; Group Is Being 'Shaped' by ISIS' Media Wing, Calls Itself 'Islamic State Africa'." *The Christian Post*. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/boko-haram-beheads-two-spies-in-first-public-video-group-is-being-shaped-by-isis-media-wing-calls-itself-islamic-state-africa.html>

³⁷ Campbell, John. (2018). "Boko Haram Leader Shekau's Book Helps Explain Factional Rifts." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/boko-haram-leader-shekaus-book-helps-explain-factional-rifts>

Chapter 2: Leadership Profiles of Boko Haram

It is important to examine the leadership styles of both current and former Boko Haram leaders. Personality characteristics and prior decisions made by a leader provide important insight into:

- *A group's long term vision*
- *How a group will plan attacks*
- *Who a group will target*
- *How a leader reacts under pressure*
- *What other organizations a group may align itself with*
- *What type of followers a group attracts*
- *Who a group leader will take orders or advice from*
- *How a group can best be combated*
- *Whether negotiations are on the table*
- *Who and what type of future leadership the group may endorse*

Little is known about most of the upper-level members within Boko Haram, as many use multiple names. However, Abubakar Shekau has persisted long enough for information to be gathered on him based primarily from his decisions as the leader of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna for over a decade, though not from first-hand accounts.

Abu Musab al-Barnawi falls into a different category in that while he has existed in Boko Haram for a long time, he was not spotlighted as a leader until recent years. Therefore, the characterization of Abu Musab al-Barnawi is primarily based on what we know from his upbringing and how he led Islamic State West Africa as the spokesman in 2015 and as the commander from 2016 to 2019.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss specific leaders of Boko Haram. Leaders have an ability to influence history, but it is important to highlight that in the story of Boko Haram, the overall economic and political situations have an instrumental influence. As the following leadership profiles are presented, it is important to consider the role of the actor versus the stage on which they are set.

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I. Abubakar Shekau



Leader: 2009-2016

Age: Unknown, estimated 45-55 years old

Hometown: Shekau (Tarmuwa district), Yobe State

Languages spoken: Hausa, Fulani, Arabic, English

Left Home at an Early Age

According to an interview with Dalmata Abubakar, Shekau's mother, Abubakar Shekau left his village in Yobe State around the age of fifteen to become an almajiri. An almajiri, or in Arabic "al-Muhajirun," refers to someone who leaves his hometown to study Islam. In Shekau's case, Maiduguri became his place of study. It was here in Maiduguri where he met Mohammed Yusuf and began to become ingrained with Mohammed's Islamic teachings. According to the interview, Shekau is not close with his parents, as his father is dead and his mother has not seen him in over 17 years.³⁸ The fact that Shekau left home at an early age to become an al-Muhajirun is not significant in itself, but there is a common trend within Boko Haram ranks that many leaders follow the path of the al-Muhajirun by leaving home at an early age to begin their journeys of being mentored into the radicalist beliefs that dwell within West African terrorist organizations. Recognizing this trend bolsters counter-terrorism forces capabilities and exposes an area to focus efforts of de-radicalization towards potential Boko Haram members that are at

³⁸ VOA Associated Press. (2018). *Voice of America*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZAqn6CyHho

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extremely high-risk to being influenced and recruited. In this case, the current course suggests the majority of al-Muhajirun seekers tend to travel to Maiduguri and other impoverished cities in and around Borno State.

An Elusive Actor

It is a commonly known fault of the Nigerian government to make claims without ample evidence to back the statement when discussing Boko Haram matters. Following true to this belief, the Nigerian government has claimed it has killed Abubakar Shekau on multiple occasions. In July of 2009, the Nigerian government reported that Shekau was killed during a firefight with the Nigerian military. Yet, Shekau was seen in a video recording stating he had been shot and was no doubt still alive. Similar instances occurred in 2013, 2014, 2015 and again in 2016 when the Nigerian Air Force reported they had neutralized the leader during an airstrike.³⁹ The many firefights in which he was purported to be caught suggests he is at times on the frontlines with his men, but the elusiveness which surrounds him and his ability to stay one step ahead of the Nigerian government indicates his tradecraft intellect.

Attracting Hardline Followers

Given his dedicated group of followers and since Shekau heavily recruited soldiers from the Northeast Borno region- the very place he and his men have terrorized for years- he likely has the ability to recruit persuasively when necessary. He has been said to be highly knowledgeable on the Quran, just as Muhammed Yusuf was.⁴⁰ Of certainty is the fact that Abubakar Shekau is not merciful. His ruthless atrocities and lack of respect toward human existence demonstrates the belief that he is superior to all other walks of life. Businessmen,

³⁹ Ahmed, Saeed. (2014). "Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau: A ruthless with a twisted ideology." *CNN News*. <https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/07/world/africa/abubakar-shekau-profile/index.html>

⁴⁰ Nossiter, Adam. (2014). "A Jihadist's Face Taunts Nigeria From the Shadows." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/19/world/africa/a-jihadists-face-taunts-nigeria-from-the-shadows.html>

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teachers, men, women, children, Christians, and even Muslims have died by his hand. Shekau's method of massacring whole villages and kidnapping girls as slaves negates any belief that his path is in any way holy. Accounts of suicide bombers with babies strapped to their backs, thoughts that seem unimaginable to most of the world, occurred under Shekau's terror.⁴¹

Takes a Takfirist Approach

The bombings of Mosques and the enslavement of Muslim women are pieces of what heavily set Shekau apart from al-Barnawi and other Islamic State-backed leaders. Shekau's opposition to the multiplicity of Imams, or having more than one leader, is said to be another fundamental discrepancy that has led to many fallouts with other jihadist organizations. Shekau's clear inability to empathize based on his brutal tactics against civilians, security forces, and his own members show his unpredictability.⁴²

Ill-Tempered Disposition

On many accounts, Shekau has been observed as ostensibly angered. His rage was largely noted when Shekau has dealt with the Nigerian government or broadcasted videos referencing Western ideology; however, Shekau further demonstrated his temper and disagreeableness when he was ejected as leader of ISWAP by ISIS caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Shekau's denial of having been succeeded by Abu Musab al-Barnawi and his claim that he was still in control proved his lack of ability to adjust in his form of thinking and deal with the demands of other organizational leaders.⁴³ This inability to acquiesce carried over when

⁴¹ Searcey, Dionne. (2017). "The New York Times interviewed 18 girls who were captured by militants in Nigeria and sent into crowds to blow themselves up. Here are their stories." *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/10/25/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-suicide-bomb.html>

⁴² BBC Staff. (2014). "Nigeria's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in profile." *BBC News*.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-18020349>

⁴³ Muhammad, Mustapha and Nwaohuocha, Ony. "Boko Haram Leader Shekau Rejects Replacement by IS in Audio." *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-08-04/boko-haram-leader-shekau-rejects-replacement-by-isis-in-audio>

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negotiating with government officials during the long and drawn-out Chibok kidnapping negotiations.

These personality traits may be why he is no longer recognized by the Islamic State, as well as the main factor that led to the separation of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb from Boko Haram. It appears that when al-Qaeda did not provide Shekau with what he needed, the leader quickly re-aligned his loyalties to ISIS. The same image seemed to resurface when Shekau was no longer the ISIS-desired “caliph” of ISWAP, as he angrily left and proclaimed himself as the leader of the JAS faction, boldly marking the two as unequally yoked.

II. Abu Musab al-Barnawi (Habib Yusuf)



Leader: 2016-2019

Age: Late 20's to Mid 30's

Hometown: Borno State, Nigeria

Languages Spoken: Suspected Hausa, Arabic, Fulani, English

ISWAP Likely Saw Deep Allegiance

Abu Musab al-Barnawi was the former spokesperson for Boko Haram. More significantly, al-Barnawi was the son of Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf.⁴⁴ The Islamic State having selected the son of the founder of Boko Haram to lead the group can by no means be chalked up to coincidence. It was believed that al-Barnawi shared many of the same principles as his father. As someone who has been committed to the jihadist cause, and more importantly someone that has a deep emotional and personal connection to the founding of Boko Haram, al-Barnawi was a candidate that likely showed the necessary skills capable of maintaining a strategic plan, designing an attainable multi-year vision, and staying loyal to the ISWAP allegiance.

⁴⁴ BBC Staff. (2016). "Boko Haram in Nigeria: Abu Musab al-Barnawi named as new leader." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36963711>

Non-Takfirist Approach

According to the Islamic State’s newspaper, al-Barnawi is quoted as stating that Boko Haram does not endorse attacks on mosques or the killing of Muslims.⁴⁵ With this, he has been considered too lenient by group members that left ISWAP to follow Shekau in his separation. In 2018, ISWAP released a book that was said to be written by al-Barnawi and another one of Yusuf’s sons. According to Jacob Zenn, an assistant professor at Georgetown University’s Security Studies program and a fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, the book focuses heavily on why the faction rejects Abubakar Shekau’s excessive methods of killing, particularly using children as suicide bombers and the killing of fellow Muslims.⁴⁶

More Cooperative Than His Predecessor

The move could also have been considered a potential effort by al-Barnawi and ISIS to rejoin forces with the Ansaru faction, abandoning Shekau’s rule with “too extreme” methods. The book even mentioned restoring Ansaru militants back into ISWAP in order to help defeat fighters that were still loyal to Shekau after his defection.⁴⁷ The timing of al-Barnawi’s promotion seemed to have occurred when Boko Haram was desperate for a revival. It can be concluded that the demotion of Abubakar Shekau was potentially a non-negotiable deal in keeping ISIS’s support during a time when the group was constantly on the run from Nigerian military offensives.

⁴⁵ Schitt, Eric and Searcey, Dionne. (2016). “Boko Haram May Have a New Leader, ISIS Magazine Suggests.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/world/asia/boko-haram-may-have-a-new-leader-isis-magazine-suggests.html>

⁴⁶ Campbell, John. (2018). “Boko Haram Faction Released Book on History and Ideology.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/boko-haram-faction-releases-book-history-and-ideology>

⁴⁷ Campbell, John. (2018). “Boko Haram Faction Released Book on History and Ideology.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/boko-haram-faction-releases-book-history-and-ideology>

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Rule with Heavy Hand Persists

It is important to point out that while Abu Musab al-Barnawi may not have been considered as hardline an extremist as his former leader, he is by all terms of the word, a terrorist, whose sole focus was to wage jihad against all who did not conform. Al-Barnawi made multiple statements through the Islamic State's news outlet and through ISWAP propaganda videos that showed his continued commitment to eradicate all non-Muslims through shootings, bombings, and any other method of killing.⁴⁸ This has led to the dismantling of Western ideology in the region.

Steered ISWAP in the Islamic State's Intended Direction

After the leadership change, the Islamic State loudly broadcasted their disputes with Shekau. This was largely because Islamic State main was aware of the new impression ISWAP would need to make on the Muslim crowds in Nigeria so that ISWAP could truly establish a caliphate in Borno State. ISWAP's heavy focus on military attacks instead of soft targets backs this belief. Political opposition talks were enhanced on all fronts of Islamic State media.⁴⁹

Lastly, while under al-Barnawi's rule, ISWAP would routinely propagandize its hard target successes against the militaries of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. This would later show that ISWAP under al-Barnawi's reign was more concerned about the big picture of expanding ISIS across West Africa, rather than Shekau's domain that was largely confined to the Sambisa Forest.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ "Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province." (2018). *Congressional Research Service*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10173.pdf>

⁴⁹ Brechenmacher. Saskia. (2019). "Stabilizing Northeast Nigeria After Boko." *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Brechenmacher_Nigeria_final.pdf

⁵⁰ ICG Staff. (2019). "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province." *International Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province>

III. Restructuring of ISWAP Leadership

Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi was replaced by Abu Abdullah Idrisa bin Umar Albarnawi, otherwise referred to as Ba Idrisa, as the new Wali of ISWAP in March of 2019. The two are not suspected of having any relation to one another, despite having the same last name. The decision to change leadership was made by ISIS caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.⁵¹

With the structural shift arose questions of whether al-Barnawi would reject Ba Idrisa's appointment just as Shekau did in 2016. These events differ greatly from the leadership change between Abubakar Shekau and al-Barnawi as the caliphate in Syria and Iraq was bolstered by a stable foundation of 30,000 fighters in 2016. While in 2019, the Islamic State was on the run with only remnants of the so-called caliphate left in the region.⁵²

In reference to al-Barnawi's response to the change, he would have understandably seen the change as a possibility, having taken part in Shekau's removal. More importantly, al-Barnawi was in power when the execution of Mamman Nur took place. Many researchers speculated that Mamman Nur was actually the brains of the Boko Haram operation even when Mohammed Yusuf was still alive. Bulama Bukarti, an analyst at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change who translated an audio recording of ISWA press release, claimed that Mamman Nur desired to be the leader of ISWA and disputed al-Barnawi's abilities to lead the group.⁵³ According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the translated audio recording presented three reasons for Mamman Nur's demise. The first attempts to sabotage al-Barnawi's rule, the second is back-channel negotiations with the government, and the third is an attempt to defect from ISWAP and turn himself into the Nigerian government, risking severe sabotage. This is an important finding

⁵¹ Salkida, Ahmad. Published Mar. 4, 2019. Twitter. https://twitter.com/A_Salkida/status/1102689629340426241

⁵² BBC Staff. (2019). "IS 'caliphate' defeated but jihadist group remains a threat." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45547595>

⁵³ Campbell, John. (2019). "New Audio Offers Potential Window Into ISWA Decision-Making." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/new-audio-offers-potential-window-iswa-decision-making>

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as it provides an understanding of events that would sculpt al-Barnawi's form of thinking when he, too, became exiled in terms of no longer being the faction's leader. Seeing that he recognized and played a forceful hand in the way Shekau and Nur were treated when they were no longer desired, he would have known that any pushback would have likely led to his becoming entirely exiled or even executed.

"I am announcing to my mujahideen brothers, commanders, and leaders in the Islamic State West African Province that the commander of the believers has deposed Abū Mus'ab al-Barnāwī as the Governor.

"He has been replaced by Shaykh Mujahid Abū Abdīllah Idris bin 'Umar also known as Ibn 'Umar al-Barnāwī.

"Together with my brothers in the consultative council, we are announcing to you our hearing and obedience of the command from the Commander of the believers and we are giving our full allegiance to the newly chosen Governor imposed on us by the Commander of the believers.

"And we are saying to him, you should lead us on the commands of Allah. We are the people that listen and obey. There is no one that will disobey you among us. Even if anyone disobeys you, we will all converge with you against him as long as you did not command us to disobey Allah.

"Allah can bear witness for our testimony. At this juncture, I am announcing to my brothers in the entire province that they should follow the footsteps of their leaders in the consultative council and give their hearing and obedience to the new Governor. We are praying to God to help and guide him. In the end, I am reminding all my brothers that the deposition and replacement of a Governor in the caliphate is not a new phenomenon that started today."

Figure 3.⁵⁴ **Internal ISWAP Communication.** The passage above represents a translation of the audio recording that one of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's clerics was said to have broadcasted across Islamic State communication channels. While the reasoning behind this shift is unclear, it may have been part of a broader leadership restructuring effort across Islamic State-affiliated groups in anticipation of what was to come in post-caliphate times.

⁵⁴ Kelly, Fergus. (2019). "Islamic State enforced leadership change in West Africa province audio reveals." *The Defense Post*. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/03/15/new-islamic-state-west-africa-leader-audio-nigeria/>

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According to The Jamestown Foundation, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara was restructured under Islamic State West Africa Province in March 2019, and a new “Central Africa Province” was established in April of 2019, with both actions taking place around al-Barnawi’s March demotion.⁵⁵ Al-Barnawi was said to have been demoted but still serving on the shura council, and possibly in charge of the group’s media outlet. The shift in leadership did bring about factional infighting and reportedly led to some of al-Barnawi supporters leaving the group to start a separate faction wedded with Ansaru members in the Northwest. This faction later migrated their camp back to the Lake Chad region near ISWAP headquarters.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Zenn, Jacob. (2020). “Islamic State in West Africa Province’s Factional Disputes and the Battle With Boko Haram.” *The Jamestown Foundation*. <https://jamestown.org/program/islamic-state-in-west-africa-provinces-factional-disputes-and-the-battle-with-boko-haram/>

⁵⁶ Al-Hussaini, Bassim. (2020). “ISWAP, terror group in Nigeria, rebrands, reversing tradition.” *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/379362-iswap-terror-group-in-nigeria-rebrands-reversing-tradition.html>

Chapter 3: Challenges Amid Success

I. Impactful Propaganda

Many claims have been made that Boko Haram was dead and defeated after regional militaries stepped up attacks in 2016. These claims come from Western news outlets as well as local governments. The Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, stated in 2015 that the group had been “technically defeated” and again in 2018 he stated, “We have since beaten Boko Haram.”⁵⁷ These claims were quickly proven wrong by more attacks in the Northeastern region and were largely considered political propaganda from President Buhari, as he was focused on his re-election.

Recent years have included many high profile attacks, which have fallen in line with the Islamic State’s goals in the region. BBC News reported Nigerian soldiers claiming to have more advanced drones than seen in the previous years.⁵⁸ The head of U.S. Africa Command (Africom), General Stephen Townsend, stated in 2019 that ISWAP was far more dangerous than Boko Haram’s other factions. The General also mentioned an increase in numbers due to the Islamic State establishing recruiting methods specifically focused on increasing the number of foreign fighters in Nigeria.⁵⁹ In 2019, the *New York Times* released an article showing evidence that Islamic State West Africa was in control of four of Borno State’s ten zones.⁶⁰ At the same time, the Nigerian military pulled its troops back from forward outposts due to lack of advancement, retreating back to camps that have been reinforced and designed to protect civilians against

⁵⁷ Mumbere, Daniel. (2018). “Pres. Buhari insists that Boko Haram has been defeated.” *Africa News*.
<https://www.africanews.com/2018/01/02/pres-buhari-insists-that-boko-haram-has-been-defeated/>

⁵⁸ BBC Staff. (2018). “Boko Haram dey use drones and foreign fighters to attack us- Nigerian Army.” *BBC News*.
<https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-46382348>

⁵⁹ Seldin, Jeff. (2019). “Even in Defeat, Islamic State’s Foreign Fighters Expanding.” *Voice of America*.
<https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/even-defeat-islamic-states-foreign-fighters-expanding>

⁶⁰ Searcey, Dionne. (2019). “Boko Haram is Back. With Better Drones.” *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/13/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram.html>

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militant attacks. The retreat led to ISWAP having full territorial control over the rural region, as well as a major offensive. According to John Cambell of Nigeria's security tracker, the Nigerian military thought they would be able to launch attacks from the camps. Instead, ISWAP continued to have success with military ambushes, deterring patrols that extended far past the new base camps' securities.⁶¹

Through the Islamic State West Africa Province's revolutionized strategic military decisions, the group has threatened West Africa with a much more long-term dynamic than previous events have suggested. ISWAP now overruns towns in Borno State. Instead of killing the villagers as previously seen with Shekau's faction, the group announces to the village that it is not there for them, but rather just the "infidels." Infidels, in this context, is primarily referring to the military. ISWAP often allows villagers to stay in harmony under their rule or flee if they so choose.⁶² The group has been noted to be building wells, passing out farming necessities, and providing safe passage for farmers and herders. According to an interview conducted by the news agency Reuters with a herder in the Lake Chad region, Islamic State West Africa does not harm herders, drivers, or traders as long as you follow their laws. Rather, they only harm security personnel.⁶³ This holistic approach aids in boosting the local economy and provides an opening to raise taxes. Islamic preachers are used in the recruitment of new members, local herders, and farmers. Additional populace has been used to gather intelligence about incoming military attacks, and new checkpoints were constructed to ensure unwanted guests are kept out.

⁶¹ Campbell, John. (2019). "The Humanitarian Dilemma Around the Military's "Super Camps" Strategy in Nigeria." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/humanitarian-dilemma-around-militarys-super-camp-strategy-nigeria>

⁶² Maclean, Ruth. (2019). "They say Boko Haram is gone. One mother's terror tells another story..." *The Gaurdian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/02/election-nigeria-boko-haram-refugees>

⁶³ Carsten, Paul and Kingimi, Ahmed. (2018). "Islamic State ally stakes out territory around Lake Chad." *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security/islamic-state-ally-stakes-out-territory-around-lake-chad-idUSKBN110063>

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These strategic tactics allow ISWAP to gain territory and project a new facade toward civilians. It also inevitably allows the group to gain far more followers as it is seen as an opposition group working to combat the “corrupt” government’s political agenda instead of a terrorist group with a takfirist position. Although relations between Islamic State West Africa and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna are oftentimes unclear, ISWAP in certain territories has actually offered sanctuary from Boko Haram’s JAS faction, further splitting the groups similarities. This is a fascinating progression as the Islamic State is known to utilize the exploitation of humanitarian crises or a failed state as means of strengthening the group and expanding its domain. Once embedded, the group will offer support to the local issues at hand. This approach demonstrates the Islamic State’s ability to intellectually adapt to new circumstances. It would mean that the Islamic State attached to Boko Haram to then exploit both the original terrorist group and the crisis taking place in the country in order to establish its new faction away from Shekau's reach.⁶⁴

II. Implications of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s Death

ISIS is a battle-hardened force that grew in its militaristic capabilities and ideological propaganda attractiveness through years of experience fighting in the Middle East. As the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria unrolled, starting in 2016 and destroying the last pocket in Syria in 2019, ISIS needed its worldwide subdivisions and allies more than ever.⁶⁵

It is difficult to tell whether the majority of influence ISIS had on ISWAP was more ideological versus strategic, but one thing is certain- the Islamic State provided Boko Haram the

⁶⁴ Clarke, Colin. (2019). “What does the Islamic State’s Organizational Restructuring Tell Us?” <https://icct.nl/publication/what-does-the-islamic-states-organisational-restructuring-tell-us/>

⁶⁵ BBC Staff. (2019). “IS ‘caliphate’ defeated but jihadist group remains a threat.” *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45547595>

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tools necessary to maintain its influence. We know that Boko Haram's tactics on the battlefield became more calculated and hard target-centered after the two groups' union. The Islamic State was providing ISWAP with training and funding in the beginning, but it is hard to tell where the relationship has solidified in more recent years. It seems as if monetary support had declined instinct with the slow diminution of ISIS in Syria, but ideological support stayed on a similar path as before.⁶⁶

The death of the Islamic State caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, raised a plethora of questions surrounding the implications that his demise posed for ISWAP and other groups that formally pledged allegiance to ISIS.⁶⁷ Al-Baghdadi, who was killed by U.S. forces in Syria in October of 2019, was said to be in contact with Boko Haram on many occasions beginning in 2016. So close, that according to the Institute for Security Studies, the Islamic State caliph ordered the execution of Mamman Nur in 2018.⁶⁸ ISWAP serves as the largest Islamic State affiliate in all of Africa with an estimated 3,500 to 5,000 group members.^{69,70} Therefore, while it was already vital to the livelihood of Islamic State influence in Africa prior to the leader's murder, it was all the more imperative when the existence of ISIS became threatened by metaphorically cutting the head off the snake. Since al-Baghdadi's death, two events have taken place that could sculpt the battlefields of West Africa for better or for worse. First is the possible

⁶⁶ Cummings, Ryan. (2016). "The Shadowy Ties Between ISIS and Boko Haram." *Institute for Global Change*. <https://institute.global/policy/shadowy-ties-between-isis-and-boko-haram>

⁶⁷ Zenn, Jacob. (2019). "What does the death of IS leader al-Baghdadi mean for Boko Haram?" *African Arguments*. <https://africanarguments.org/2019/11/07/what-does-the-death-of-is-leader-al-baghdadi-mean-for-boko-haram/>

⁶⁸ Ewi, Martin and Olojo, Akinola. (2019). "What does al-Baghdadi's exit mean for Africa?" *Institute for Security Studies*. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-does-al-baghdadis-exit-mean-for-africa>

⁶⁹ Hulme, Charlotte and Warner, Jason. (2018). "The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells Across the Continent." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. <https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-state-africa-estimating-fighter-numbers-cells-across-continent/>

⁷⁰ Maclean, Ruth and Schmitt, Eric. (2019). "ISIS Affiliate in Nigeria Releases a Video Showing 11 Executions." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/27/world/africa/ISIS-executions-Nigeria.html>

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reintegration of al-Qaeda's hand in Nigerian affairs. The second is structural leadership changes in ISWAP which bring about many new questions for the group's future in the Lake Chad Basin.

III. Threat of al-Qaeda Re-emergence in Nigeria

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in Idlib, a city in northwest Syria that has been destabilized from excessive regional fighting over the past decade, leading to a massive humanitarian crisis. Idlib is a deep pocket for al-Qaeda linked fighters to seek safe haven. When al-Baghdadi was hiding out in Idlib, al-Qaeda offshoot Hayat Tahrir al Sham was estimated to have around 20,000 fighters still controlling the province.⁷¹ It was speculated at the time of al-Baghdadi's death that he was perhaps in the Idlib region not only hiding but also trying to recruit from within al-Qaeda's ranks.⁷² ISIS and al-Qaeda oftentimes carried on ideological and territorial disputes, and many ISIS fighters originally came from the ranks of al-Qaeda and its affiliates. One of the most important questions that remains to be answered is whether fighters that have not already returned to al-Qaeda will do so in the midst of chaos in their own group. A high-level member of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement, al-Qaeda's Somalian affiliate, called out to ISIS fighters in hopes of their return to al-Qaeda. The man, who goes by the alias Adel Amin, asked ISIS members to reconsider returning to the path of "righteousness" and joining groups with allegiance to al-Qaeda.^{73,74} Although al-Qaeda and ISIS are at times ripe with disputes, the groups hate Western ideology far more than they dislike each other.

⁷¹ "Report: Jihadi Groups in Syria." (2019). Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/report-jihadi-groups-syria>

⁷² Kats, Rita. (2019). "What Baghdadi's Death Means for al-Qaeda – and Why it Matters." *The Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/what-isis-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadis-death-means-for-al-qaeda-and-why-it-matters>

⁷³ Kats, Rita. (2019). "What Baghdadi's Death Means for al-Qaeda – and Why it Matters." *The Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/what-isis-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadis-death-means-for-al-qaeda-and-why-it-matters>

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Specifically for the Lake Chad Basin, it is estimated that 10,000 jihadist foreign fighters came from the West Africa region to fight in Iraq and Syria.⁷⁵ Where will the remaining fighters go now that ISIS no longer has a stronghold in Syria and al-Baghdadi is dead? They may join Islamic State affiliates like ISWAP or Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), or members might turn to a host of al-Qaeda affiliates in the district. Since al-Qaeda was once active in Nigeria, it is not unrealistic to expect al-Qaeda to return to Nigeria as ISWAP could look to realign its vision with that of their Jihadi brothers.

Ansaru's bouts with other Boko Haram factions were considered to be centralized around Abubakar Shekau's malicious actions towards other Muslims; therefore, there may not be anything stopping ISWAP and Ansaru from aiding one another. After all, reports of fighters abandoning their own faction to defect to another have continually surfaced since the factional splits first occurred. As previously discussed, the link between Ansaru and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has been evident for years.⁷⁶ The most significant fact is that Ansaru, after more than six years of dormancy, re-upped its active status in October 2019, the very same month that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed.⁷⁷ Following this, Ansaru took responsibility for an attack in Kaduna State in Northwest Nigeria that claimed the lives of seven men. The attack, which occurred on January 17, 2020, hit a vehicle convoy containing political and security

⁷⁴ Site Intelligence Group. Published Oct. 28, 2019. *Twitter*.

https://twitter.com/siteintelgroup/status/1188875801623699461?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1188875801623699461&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wilsoncenter.org%2Farticle%2Fjihadi-reactions-to-baghdadis-death

⁷⁵ BBC Staff. (2019). "How many IS foreign fighters are left in Iraq and Syria?" *BBC News*.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47286935>

⁷⁶ Zenn, Jacob. (2018). "Boko Haram's al-Qaeda Affiliation: A Response to 'Five Myths about Boko Haram'." *Lawfare blog*. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/boko-harams-al-qaeda-affiliation-response-five-myths-about-boko-haram>

⁷⁷ Zenn, Jacob. (2019). "What does the death of IS leader al-Baghdadi mean for Boko Haram?" *African Arguments*.
<https://africanarguments.org/2019/11/07/what-does-the-death-of-is-leader-al-baghdadi-mean-for-boko-haram/>

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personnel along with the Emir of Potiskum, Yobe State.⁷⁸ Ansaru's part in the attack was publicly declared through al-Qaeda's al-Hijrah media outlet.⁷⁹ This attack gives validity to the theory that al-Qaeda and Ansaru may be attempting to take advantage of Islamic State's recruiting lull, forming new coalitions, and amplifying attacks in order to maximize its broadcasted activity through propaganda apertures.

IV. A Hardline Takeover

Abu Abdullah Idrisa bin Umar Albarnawi remained a character few knew much about throughout his time as group commander. His placement as leader of ISWAP was established by the consultative council, and he was said to hold similar ideological standards as his predecessor. According to the *Premium Times*, ISWAP members wanted to begin a new campaign spotlighting members that chose to abandon ISWAP and live in peace. Ba Idrisa apparently denied this action, as he recognized that it would lead to the execution of the former members. He was claimed to have led with too weak of a hand, not punishing townspeople that were suspected of reporting information to opposing forces.⁸⁰ In response to Ba Idrisa being called too soft, he was overthrown. Reports vary, but Ba Idrisa and his cabinet, composed of Mohammad

⁷⁸ "Re-emergence of Ansaru in northern Nigeria raises threat level." (2020). *Janes*. <https://www.janes.com/article/93867/re-emergence-of-ansaru-in-northern-nigeria-raises-threat-of-targeted-violence-against-western-nationals-and-companies>

⁷⁹ "Re-emergence of Ansaru in northern Nigeria raises threat level." (2020). *Janes*. <https://www.janes.com/article/93867/re-emergence-of-ansaru-in-northern-nigeria-raises-threat-of-targeted-violence-against-western-nationals-and-companies>

⁸⁰ Al-Hussaini, Bassim . (2020). "New ISWAP boss slays five rebel leaders, silences clerical tones." *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/379975-new-iswap-boss-slays-five-rebel-leaders-silences-clerical-tones.html>

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Bashir, Mustapha Jere, Ali Abdullahi, and Baba Mayinta, may have been killed when group members loyal to Ba Idrisa attempted to free them.⁸¹

This hardline takeover could perhaps be connected to Islamic State main pushing members to seek revenge for the death of caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State's spokesperson, Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, who was killed just one day after al-Baghdadi.⁸² Since al-Baghdadi's death, many killings have

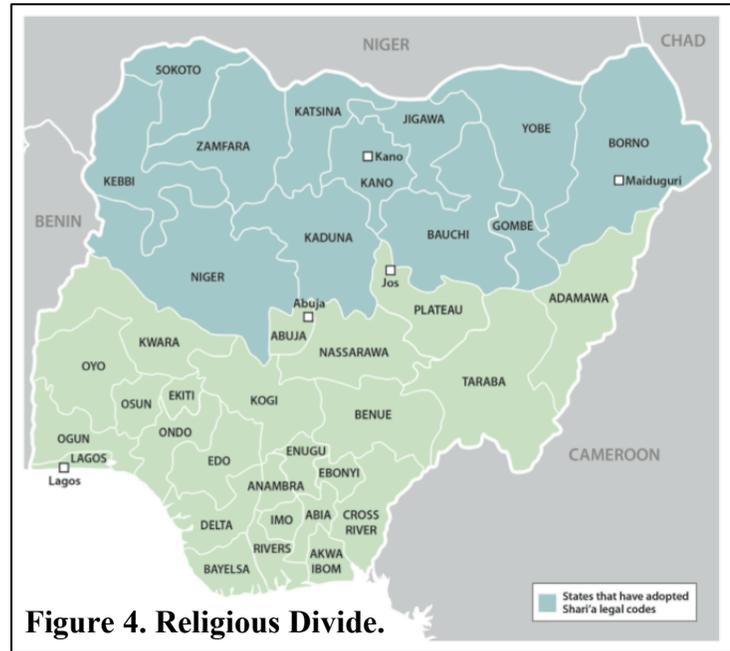


Figure 4. Religious Divide.

taken place, particularly focused on revenge for the attack and execution of Christians across the country. Information Minister Lai Mohammed believes Islamist groups are attempting to, “trigger a religious war and throw the nation into chaos.”⁸³ Just one day after Christmas, eleven Christians were murdered, ten of them having their throats slit and an eleventh shot to death. “Those who you see in front of us are Christians, and we will shed their blood as revenge for the two dignified sheikhs, the caliph of the Muslims, and the spokesman for the Islamic State, Sheikh Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, may Allah accept them,” declares the Islamic State

⁸¹ Al-Hussaini, Bassim . (2020). “New ISWAP boss slays five rebel leaders, silences clerical tones.” *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/379975-new-iswap-boss-slays-five-rebel-leaders-silences-clerical-tones.html>

⁸² Maclean, Ruth and Schmitt, Eric. (2019). “ISIS Affiliate in Nigeria Releases a Video Showing 11 Executions.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/27/world/africa/ISIS-executions-Nigeria.html>

⁸³ Onuah, Felix. (2020). “Nigeria’s Islamists targeting Christians to provoke religious war, says minister.” *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security/nigerias-islamists-targeting-christians-to-provoke-religious-war-says-minister-idUSKCN20L2K9>

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propaganda video that streamed the murders of the eleven Christians, who were blindfolded with restraints.⁸⁴ Following the executions, a Christian pastor was beheaded and a Nigerian church torched, leaving more than two dozen dead in the central Nigerian state of Plateau.⁸⁵ These unfortunate actions show that ISWAP is expanding into regions it previously avoided in an effort to inflict harm upon Christians. Figure 4 above shows the divide between the Nigerian states that have adopted Sharia Law and states that have not.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Maclean, Ruth and Schmitt, Eric. (2019). "ISIS Affiliate in Nigeria Releases a Video Showing 11 Executions." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/27/world/africa/ISIS-executions-Nigeria.html>

⁸⁵ Smith, Samuel. (2020). "Nigerian church torched by suspected Fulani; over 2 dozen killed in attacks." *Christian Post*. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nigerian-church-torched-by-suspected-fulani-over-2-dozen-killed-in-attacks.html>

⁸⁶ CSMNIGERIA. (2016). "Nigeria Constitutionally Is a Secular Not Multi-Religious Country: Factually It Is An Islamic State." *Christian Science Monitor*. <https://csmnigeria.org/blog/262-nigeria-constitutionally-is-a-secular-not-multi-religious-country-factually-it-is-an-islamic-state>

Chapter 4: How A Terrorist Group Ends

I. Comparison of Organizational Structures

The organizational structure of ISWAP is designed quite similarly to that of ISIS and al-Qaeda. ISIS, for example, has a leader (caliph Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi) and the leader is backed by a shura council that supports the leader but also has the power to dethrone the caliph.⁸⁷ ISWAP's structure is largely the same, consisting of a leader and a shura council that support the group's leader but can replace him if they see necessary. This organizational shift has not always been in place for Boko Haram and was only implemented when Abubakar Shekau was ejected from ISWAP. The adoption of organizational structure ensures a more democratic, equal balance in power, and it safeguards the group from exploding into anarchy at the sudden death of a leader. This is only partly applicable to the recent leadership changes since it was a complete takeover of both the caliph position and the consultative council, instead of a nonviolent restructure made by the shura council as was seen during the shift from Abu Musab al-Barnawi to Ba Idrisa in 2019. Another important consideration, at least at the current time, is that ISWAP appears to still be in direct communication with ISIS central. This is significant in that ISIS can still provide guidance on future strategic decisions.

The new leader of the Islamic State faction is suspected to be Lawan Abubakar.⁸⁸ Although Boko Haram has survived leadership changes before- Mohammed Yusuf, Abubakar Shekau, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, Ba Idrisa- the turnover in leadership is far more disparate than ever before. A Boko Haram leader, no matter the faction, has never reportedly killed off his predecessor or as has been reported, his entire shura council. At the moment, the fact that the

⁸⁷ Almohammad, Asaad. (2020). "New Caliph, Same Old Problems." *Foreign Affairs*.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/west-africa/2020-01-01/new-caliph-same-old-problems>

⁸⁸ Al-Hussaini, Bassim . (2020). "New ISWAP boss slays five rebel leaders, silences clerical tones." *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/379975-new-iswap-boss-slays-five-rebel-leaders-silences-clerical-tones.html>

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new leader has enough followers to stage a successful coup is the only concrete information open source intelligence provides.

II. Assessing Network Resiliency

Research performed by Jenna Jordan, associate professor at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, suggests that a terrorist network's resilience is based primarily off of two factors: 1) bureaucratization and 2) communal support.⁸⁹ Osama Bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and Abu Yahya al-Libi are but a few examples of high-level al-Qaeda leaders that the United States terminated in counter-terrorism operations. Despite the many successful targeted killings of al-Qaeda leaders that the United States has conducted, the group still thrives today. The dual-pronged approach that Jordan suggests would mean that al-Qaeda had enough decentralization and organized sub-leadership positions in order for the group to sustain and adapt in response to an upper-level hit. It would also translate that al-Qaeda was heavily resilient due to the fact that it is a transnational organization with a large host of supporters willing to aid the cause.

Kathleen Carley's 1991 "A Theory of Group Stability" proclaims that a group with a more decentralized organizational structure has a far better chance withstanding the loss of leaders than a group that is entrenched in a hierarchical leadership design.⁹⁰ Applying this theory to al-Qaeda gives an unusual outcome. How did al-Qaeda prove to be so resilient if its structure is that of a hierarchical style? Although al-Qaeda has a hierarchical leadership anatomy within its

⁸⁹ Jordan, Jenna. "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark." *MIT Press Journal*.
https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ISEC_a_00157

⁹⁰ Carley, KM. (1991). A theory of group stability. *American Sociological Review*. 56(3): 331-354.

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organization, the group has not been known to directly manage day to day operations of its many factions, thus putting more power in the hands of sub-level leaders.⁹¹

When applying both Jenna Jordan's and Kathleen Carley's theories to examining Islamic State West Africa's resilience as a terrorist organization, it can be recognized that ISWAP does contain a certain level of bureaucratization as its leader is supported and held accountable by four members making up the shura council, each of whom is in charge of a different division.⁹² The sub-levels continue within military units (waterborne, ground, artillery operations), but are not as established as al-Qaeda's surplus of units, based upon the literature that exists. Rather, ISWAP would be more equivalent to just one of al-Qaeda's factions. From a communal standpoint, ISWAP has gained heavy influence in recent years and has a much larger support group than Abubakar Shekau's faction. ISWAP also has the popularity of Islamic State to bolster its support. In terms of hierarchy and revisiting ISWAP's recently instituted shura council, ISWAP's efforts to make the group a more democratically functioning society will likely boost its ability to defend against sudden changes.

Implications of sudden leadership shifts can appear in many different forms. In Audrey Cronin's study "How al-Qaida Ends", the author presents key factors that have led to past terrorist groups' decline or change in nature. Some examples that may fit closely with Boko Haram include: the loss of a leader, an unsuccessful generational transition, and a terror group's transformation into a political group.⁹³ The change in leadership could actually be a major driving factor in all three of these outcomes and more. Boko Haram has increasingly had

⁹¹ Glenn, Cameron. (2015). "Al Qaeda v ISIS: Leaders & Structure." *Wilson Center*.
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-v-isis-leaders-structure>

⁹² Courtin, Nicolas. "Understanding Boko Haram." *CAIRN*. https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_AFECO_255_0013--understanding-boko-haram.htm

⁹³ Cronin, Audrey. (2006). "How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups." *Belfer Center*.
<https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/how-al-qaeda-ends-decline-and-demise-terrorist-groups>

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younger leaders since ISWAP forced Abubakar Shekau out. It is inevitable that the group will be approaching a generational shift as Muhammed Yusuf began gathering his original followers for the group around the year 2002.⁹⁴ Generational turnover could eventually lead to a lack in foundational group knowledge, a diminished sense of belonging than felt before, and even contribute to a loss in motivation and vision.

The shift in perception of a group from terrorist organization to political entity often signals a group has the characteristics necessary for longevity. Hamas provides a strong example of this trend. It was deemed a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States in 1997, yet Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006 and assumed control over parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.⁹⁵ Prior to its leadership change, it appeared that ISWAP had become heavily ingrained in the rural villages of Northeast Nigeria, collecting taxes, enforcing Sharia law, and providing livelihood necessities to civilians. This push largely demonstrates ISWAP's interest in advancing their political sway and popularity in the region with strong similarities to historic actions of Hamas.

⁹⁴ Cook, David. (2011). "The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.* " <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/the-rise-of-boko-haram-in-nigeria/>

⁹⁵ (Updated 2020). "Foreign Terrorist Organizations." Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

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Chapter 5: Applied Analysis

The majority of information that has been presented through the course of this research can be interpreted many different ways. Below are two examples of interpretations of the recent leadership changes within Islamic State West Africa based on analysis that has been presented throughout the paper.

The “so what” or “why” of the first report is most significant to security forces of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon in that it can help governments best prepare for an uptick in violence that in many ways could mimic attacks witnessed in 2014 and 2015.

The second example is based on the “multiple scenario outcomes” technique. A brief summary of possible outcomes due to the recent leadership shift from Abu Abdullah Idrisa bin Umar Albarnawi to Lawan Abubakar is presented. These scenarios are just three examples of possible outcomes and are not all-encompassing possibilities. The outcomes focus on leadership alignments and not on battlefield impact.

Lastly, I will discuss the application of Fjilde and Nilssons’ work on the factors that increase the likelihood of violence between rebel groups, in this case between factions of Boko Haram.

I. Bottom Line:

ISWAP: Internal Execution of Ba Idrisa Likely to De-rail Operational Track

The execution of Abu Abdullah Idrisa bin Umar Albarnawi, known briefly as Ba Idrisa, could very likely be seen as a hardline takeover. The group has expressed animosity toward the level of intensity with which Ba Idrisa has enforced Sharia Law throughout the Lake Chad region. It is almost certain that this shift from moderate to hardline leadership will result in continued intensification of hard and soft target attacks. Islamic State West Africa Province has been active under its current name since 2015, primarily in Northeast Nigeria's Borno State and surrounding borders of the Lake Chad Basin. Leadership changes have occurred multiple times throughout the group's inception, which has led to the creation of sub-factions.

- In February of 2020, Ba Idrisa and four members of his consultative council were killed during a coup, according to the *Premium Times*.⁹⁶
- According to *Al Jazeera News*, ninety-two Chadian soldiers were killed in an attack launched by Boko Haram in the Boma peninsula in March of 2020. The attack marks the deadliest attack on Chad soldiers since Boko Haram's birth in 2009.⁹⁷
- In March of 2020, ISWAP abducted four women in Niger during two attacks. Abductions of Muslim women were previously not seen under the leadership of Ba Idrisa, according to the Jamestown Foundation.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Al-Hussaini, Bassim . (2020). "New ISWAP boss slays five rebel leaders, silences clerical tones." *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/379975-new-iswap-boss-slays-five-rebel-leaders-silences-clerical-tones.html>

⁹⁷ Associated Press. (2020). "92 Chad soldiers killed in 'deadliest' Boko Haram attack." *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/92-chad-soldiers-killed-deadliest-boko-haram-attack-200325010212370.html>

⁹⁸ Zenn, Jacob. "Boko Haram Factionalization: Who are Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) Fighters in Niger and Chad?" *Jamestown Foundation*. <https://jamestown.org/program/boko-haram-factionalization-who-are-islamic-state-in-west-africa-province-iswap-fighters-in-niger-and-chad/>

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Factional infighting is not unique in its own nature when reflecting on the groups' origins; however, the hardline takeover is almost certainly an after effect of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria calling upon ISWAP to seek revenge for the recent deaths of Islamic State Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, Islamic State's head spokesperson.

In October of 2019, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed when U.S. special operations forces conducted a raid to capture Baghdadi in Syria's Idlib province. One day later, Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir was killed by a CIA air strike in Northwest Syria. After the assassination of the two leaders, ISIS called upon its affiliates to seek revenge for the leaders' deaths against the infidels.

- According to Reuters news, ISIS swore vengeance for the death of its Caliph in an audio recording that was uploaded online just a few days after the death of al-Baghdadi.⁹⁹
- In Nigeria, ISWA executed ten Christians on Christmas day by slitting their throats. They credited the killings to revenge for the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, according to the *New York Times*.¹⁰⁰
- In January of 2020, ISWAP abducted two Christian students that were studying at the University of Maiduguri. A young boy was later seen executing the twenty-two year-olds after stating the execution was revenge for bloodshed perpetrated by Christians.¹⁰¹

I assess that the execution of Ba Idrisa and takeover by Lawan Abubakar will almost certainly lead to an increased number of soft and hard target attacks. This will likely be focused towards Christians and security forces. The takeover suggests that while attacks

⁹⁹ Abdulkhalek, Hesham and Laessing, Ulf. (2019). "Islamic State vows revenge against U.S. for Baghdadi killing." *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-baghdadi-confirmation/islamic-state-vows-revenge-against-u-s-for-baghdadi-killing-idUSKBN1XA25A>

¹⁰⁰ Maclean, Ruth and Schmitt, Eric. (2019). "ISIS Affiliate in Nigeria Releases a Video Showing 11 Executions." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/27/world/africa/ISIS-executions-Nigeria.html>

¹⁰¹ Smith, Samuel. (2020). "ISIS child soldier executes Nigerian Christian student, declares 'we will not stop'." *The Christian Post*. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/is-child-soldier-executes-nigerian-christian-student-declares-we-will-not-stop.html>

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were taking place, they were not at the magnitude that ISIS leadership or many ISWA group members were content with. The events also demonstrate a perceived lack of Sharia Law enforcement. Leadership takeovers have happened in the past but not in the form of a coup that ended with multiple executions. This is an almost certain indicator that the new leadership will quickly get its affairs in order and launch aggressive attacks.

- Based on previous attacks and the current battlefield layout, militants will likely focus their efforts on attacking security forces located in “super camps” in Northeast Nigeria that have a strategic disadvantage to ISWAP’s rural countryside hideouts.
- Christians will continue to be targeted in the middle belt of Nigeria, and attacks on mission stations and churches that serve pockets of Christians in the North are also very likely to be targeted.
- Due to the hardline shift, it is possible that we see a realignment of sorts between Abubakar Shekau’s JAS faction and Islamic State West Africa to increase the success of hard target attacks toward Lake Chad Basin military forces.

II. Multiple Scenarios Analysis

Scenario #1:

The first scenario is that ISWAP chooses to realign with Abubakar Shekau's faction in order to amp up success against hard target strikes. If this happens, we will likely see Shekau's influence spread back into ISWAP. Abubakar Shekau was expelled from the group because of his hardline approach which included the abduction of Muslims. We now see a circumstance where ISIS is likely willing to relax certain ideals in order to advance overall jihad which is most important to ISIS at the time in order to prove they have not been defeated following al-Baghdadi's demise.

The Shekau-like approach is supported by the March 2020 abductions of four Muslim women during attacks in Niger that were carried out by ISWAP.¹⁰² Even in this scenario, it is very unlikely Shekau will be brought back as the leader of ISWAP. As mentioned in previous analysis, this was not done prior to the month that the leadership change occurred. Since the group is still believed to be in communication with ISIS, it does not need JAS for funding, training, or guidance. Instead, ISWAP will use Shekau's faction solely for manpower during hard target attacks to expand its reach across the Lake Chad region.

Scenario #2:

A second scenario is that the group loses communication with ISIS main. This could occur for a number of reasons, such as: 1) ISIS did not agree with the execution of Ba Idrisa and, thus, has lost control over the group, 2) ISIS is not able to provide ISWAP with the desired ideological, financial, or strategic support, or 3) al-Qaeda, through Ansaru and AQIM, gains a

¹⁰² Sahara Reporters. (2020). "Gunmen Kill 11, Kidnap Four Women in Niger State." *Sahara Reporters*. <http://saharareporters.com/2020/01/26/gunmen-kill-11-kidnap-four-women-niger-state>

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foothold in the Northwest and can offer ISWAP more direct support than ISIS central is able to in its current state.

If communication with ISIS main is lost, it will likely lead to one of two possible new alliances: 1) ISWAP pledges its allegiance to al-Qaeda and gains back Ansaru and any new AQIM members that have migrated. As discussed above, the whole reason Ansaru and ISWAP are separate today heavily falls on their allegiances to rival terrorist organizations. In the end, both groups desire the same outcome, a caliphate in West Africa and jihad against infidels. 2) ISWAP aligns with JAS and, in this case, could actually re-incorporate Abubakar Shekau as the leader of both ISWAP and JAS. Abubakar has far more notoriety than any of the members affiliated with the recent coup against Ba Idrisa. Therefore, during a time when all prior leadership has been killed off and ISIS is no longer available for guidance, the group may turn to the only leader left that they know has the experience and grit to lead Boko Haram in Nigeria for more than a decade.

Scenario #3:

A final scenario for ISWAP is that the group takes a hybrid response to the hardline takeover. The execution of an entire shura council has never been seen before within Boko Haram. Many of Ba Idrisa's followers disagree with the actions taken to overthrow the leader. Due to this, we could see defectors that will either start their own sub-faction, defect to Ansaru, or join JAS. The remaining group will continue on with the hardline approach under the new leader's guidance.

III. Violence Between Non-State Actors

Fighting between factions of Boko Haram represent conflict between non-state actors. In their 2012 study, Fjeld and Nilsson sought to determine why rebel groups find value in fighting other rebels and other non-state actors.¹⁰³ Using quantitative analysis of data on armed conflict between non-state actors from 1989 to 2007, they identified multiple factors that increased the likelihood of these inter-rebel conflicts. Some of these factors apply in the case of Boko Haram and its conflicts that are not with state actors. Specifically, the two factors that apply in the case of Boko Haram are control of territory beyond government reach and a weak state authority in the region. The political and geographic factors in which Boko Haram is situated mean that they are mainly located in areas where national governments have poor control. Additionally, citizens in the regions where Boko Haram is found have weak allegiances to their national governments and those governments have relatively weak authority in the regions.

IV. Indicators

Looking ahead, funding could be one of the most important indicators for understanding what direction the current leadership will lean. For example, in terms of finances, Boko Haram has a plethora of resources that it has tapped into in the past. External funding (first seen from al-Qaeda and now seen from ISIS), bank robberies, extortion in the form of collecting taxes and protection fees, the trafficking of drugs and weapons, and stealing weapons from the Nigerian military are all successful financing tactics that have been used in the past by both JAS and ISWAP. A largely known tactic that has been utilized by Boko Haram is kidnap and ransom

¹⁰³ Fjelde, Hanne & Nilsson, Desirée. (2012). "Rebels against Rebels: Explaining Violence between Rebel Groups." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

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(K&R) negotiations with governments.¹⁰⁴ Particularly for ISWAP, watching to see if the faction enhances K&R operations, whether the prisoners are released or executed, and whether operations are being conducted on the Muslim population could serve as a major indicator that the group is trending away from its prior values of not harming its fellow brothers and sisters in Islam.

V. An Opportunity to Exploit ISIS

Of significant interest to the U.S. defense sector is the fact that Islamic State West Africa is still believed to be in heavy communication with Islamic State central. On both sides new leadership exists. If there was ever a time to exploit group members within an organization, it would be while this infighting is taking place, making members far more likely to turn against each other. Secondly, a restructure of leadership means that an organization's regular methods of communication, routine, and order have been disrupted. This, in hopes, leads to an insouciant demeanor toward operational security loopholes.

Ten days after the events of 9/11, President George W. Bush shared with the American people the following words: “We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—by abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies.”¹⁰⁵ The passage supports that terrorism is not a new methodological form of suppressing the innocent, but rather it is an old tactic that has

¹⁰⁴ “Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa.” (2016). *Financial Action Task Force*. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Terrorist-Financing-West-Central-Africa.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ “National Strategy For Combatting Terrorism.” (2003). *CIA*. https://www.cia.gov/news-information/cia-the-war-on-terrorism/Counter_Terrorism_Strategy.pdf

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risen and fallen many times before. The United States harbors the knowledge of the inner workings of terror groups. The nation understands the structure of terror from its leadership to the underlying conditions that laid the groundwork for a vacuum of susceptibility in an environment. Thus, the U.S. has the strategic skills, technical know-how, and operational means to properly utilize the infighting within Islamic State West Africa and the timing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's death.

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Chapter 6: Policy & Accountability

This paper seeks to understand the impact of factional infighting within Boko Haram for the purpose of creating positive dialogue in the conversation of advancing counter-terrorism efforts. Since it is a security-centered paper, I will only be stating U.S. policy goals in the region, and I will address the state of the U.S. defense sector in West Africa solely and specifically in reference to its fight against Boko Haram. This is done in an effort to give the reader a holistic understanding of the current situation. Therefore, the writing does not address what the United States is doing to combat other threats in the region, nor will I be recommending what U.S. policy goals should be or forming policy proposals in reference to the United States. This research is centered on stating my interpretation of what open source intelligence suggests is occurring within the organizational structure of Boko Haram and the events that could potentially unfold in the future. However, in an effort to contribute to a much needed dialogue, I will address efforts that need to continue by the Nigerian government for deterring future violent extremism in the region.

I. U.S. Policy Goals in Nigeria

According to the State Department, Nigeria is the single most important strategic partner for the United States in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁰⁶ Nigeria is one of Africa's most politically influential countries, referred to as "the largest democracy in Africa" by President Trump in 2018.¹⁰⁷ The country serves as Africa's largest oil producer and has allegedly surpassed South

¹⁰⁶ UNCLASSIFIED. "Integrated Country Strategy: Nigeria." *State.gov*. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICS-Nigeria_UNCLASS-508.pdf

¹⁰⁷ Garden, Rose. (2018). "Remarks by President Trump and President Buhari of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in Joint Press Conference." *Whitehouse.gov*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-buhari-federal-republic-nigeria-joint-press-conference/>

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Africa as the largest economy on the continent.¹⁰⁸ In 2018, Nigeria was the United States' second largest trading partner in Africa.¹⁰⁹

From the American policy perspective, Washington's relations with Abuja have been healthy for the past two decades. The election of President Buhari in 2015 helped to minimize any issues that arose during President Goodluck Jonathan's leadership regarding unfair elections.¹¹⁰ Looking ahead, President Trump has expressed interest in expanding Nigeria's bilateral trade relationship with the United States. Nigeria's significance will only continue to increase as its population is expected to be ranked number three in the world, surpassing the United States by the year 2047.¹¹¹

U.S. military and diplomatic first-line goals in Nigeria are sighted on protecting the United States from cross-border security and health hazards, advancing trade relations, and supporting development toward stability and self-reliance.¹¹² From a counter-terrorism perspective, the U.S. is focused on securing its borders from transnational threats stemming from Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa, as well as ensuring that Nigeria has the ability and assistance required to diminish terrorism activity and allow for the successful return of displaced persons. Collectively, these efforts help to combat underlying terrorism stability and expansion issues.

¹⁰⁸ UNCLASSIFIED. "Integrated Country Strategy: Nigeria." *State.gov*. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICS-Nigeria_UNCLASS-508.pdf

¹⁰⁹ "Africa." *Office of the United States Trade Representative*. <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa>

¹¹⁰ Pham, Peter. (2015). "Nigerian president's visit a refresh for US-Nigerian relations. *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/248467-nigerian-presidents-visit-a-refresh-for-us-nigerian>

¹¹¹ Cilluffo, Anthony and Ruiz, Neil. (2019). "World's population is projected to nearly stop growing by the end of the century." *Pew Research*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/worlds-population-is-projected-to-nearly-stop-growing-by-the-end-of-the-century/>

¹¹² Bureau of African Affairs. Under Secretary for Political Affairs. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-political-affairs/bureau-of-african-affairs/>

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II. U.S. Defense Activity in West Africa

The United States has heavily weighed cutting back on troop activity in West Africa, but the constant threat of terrorism has only increased in the region. U.S. military objectives in West Africa have changed in recent years from aiming to diminish terrorist organization's recruitment and impact to focusing primarily on containing terrorist activity to its current level.¹¹³ A large portion of U.S. military action in efforts to combat Boko Haram is carried out in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. This is primarily seen in the form of Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) support, airstrikes, information sharing, and allied forces training.¹¹⁴ In addition, U.S. Africa Command instructs courses at the Nigerian Defense Intelligence College in Abuja, Nigeria. In 2020, U.S. AFRICOM instructors graduated 20 West African female intelligence officers in an effort to enhance force multipliers.¹¹⁵

The United States has strayed away from supporting the Nigerian military in direct counter-terrorism efforts largely due to corruption and human rights violations that have riddled Nigerian security forces for years. Abuses perpetrated by security forces have included torture, extra-judicial killings, airstrikes mistaking displacement camps for Boko Haram hideouts, and other war crimes that regularly go without fair accountability measures.¹¹⁶ However, the United

¹¹³ Schmitt, Eric. (2020). "Terrorism threat in West Africa Soars as U.S. Weighs troop Cuts." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/world/africa/terrorism-west-africa.html>

¹¹⁴ Dalton, Matthew. (2020). "The US Should Send More, Not Fewer, Troops to West Africa." *Defense One*. <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/03/us-should-send-more-not-fewer-troops-west-africa/163479/>

¹¹⁵ Loch, Patrick. (2020). "All-female military-intelligence training in Nigeria supports peace, security initiatives." *AFRICOM*. <https://www.africom.mil/media-room/Article/32525/all-female-military-intelligence-training-in-nigeria-supports-peace-security-initiatives>

¹¹⁶ Ewang, Anietie. (2019). "Video Exposes Beating by Nigerian Security Forces." *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/04/video-exposes-beatings-nigerian-security-forces#>

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States does provide boots on the ground in training capacities and security specialists as seen in 2014 in response to the Chibok girls' kidnapping.¹¹⁷

Cameroon and Chad fall on a similar playing field. The United States has soldiers based at the Cameroon Air Force Base in Garoua that focus on ISR support to the Multinational Joint Task Force.¹¹⁸ In Chad, U.S. forces operate a drone base that also relies on ISR capabilities targeting Boko Haram militants in Nigeria.¹¹⁹ The base is located in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, which is positioned on the side of the country bordering Northeast Nigeria.

The U.S. Air Force has a drone air base located in Agadez, Niger, that houses fighter jets and armed drones capable of conducting surveillance and striking enemy combatants in West Africa. Additionally, the U.S. gave the Niger army its C2 Node, an operations and communications control center, to help combat against Boko Haram militants.¹²⁰ The death of four Green Berets in Niger during a 2017 battle with Islamic State affiliates led to soldiers being forced to scale back ground operations in the country to some extent.¹²¹ Although the U.S. is only in the area in a support capacity, AFRICOM was forced to declassify and release a map that

¹¹⁷ Consable, Pamela. (2014). "White House to send specialists to help recover abducted Nigerian schoolgirls." https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/protesters-plan-morning-rally-to-demand-nigerian-authorities-take-action-to-rescue-girls/2014/05/06/c3408bba-d514-11e3-8a78-8fe50322a72c_story.html

¹¹⁸ Kimmons, Sean. (2017). "Isolated from US military, small Army post looks to rid terrorism in West Africa." *U.S. Army*. https://www.army.mil/article/187679/isolated_from_us_military_small_army_post_looks_to_rid_terrorism_in_west_africa

¹¹⁹ Friend, Alice. (2018). "The Evolution of U.S. Defense Posture in North and West Africa." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/evolution-us-defense-posture-north-and-west-africa>

¹²⁰ Staff Writer. (2019). "US gives control center to Niger for Boko Haram operations." *The Defense Post*. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/02/04/us-niger-boko-haram-operation-center/>

¹²¹ Meek, James. (2018). "US soldiers killed in Niger were outgunned, 'left behind in hunt for ISIS leader.'" *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-soldiers-killed-niger-outgunned-left-hunt-isis/story?id=54909240>

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exposed interim outposts in Africa due to the Freedom of Information Act. The map displayed temporary bases in the Arlit, Dirkou, Diffa, and Ouallam areas of Niger in 2019.¹²²

At the end of the day, the United States' goal in West Africa is to ensure American security and to promote U.S. interests. The United States and other Western counterparts like France and the U.K., two of West Africa's largest Western-based support allies, can only aid the Lake Chad countries so much in combating Boko Haram. It is up to Nigeria and its neighbors to play their vital roles in stopping terrorist expansion.

III. Analysis of Nigerian Efforts to Combat Boko Haram

President Buhari was elected in 2015 against serious opposition on the platform that he would diminish terrorism, combat corruption, and ease poverty matters, but he has fallen short thus far. In terms of direct military action, Buhari relocated the military's central command station from the capital to the heart of Boko Haram affairs in Maiduguri.¹²³ His previous experience as a top level military official played a vital part in his electoral support. These efforts were strategically valuable, but Boko Haram cannot be deterred through combat alone. As demonstrated in my research, Islamic State West Africa continued to engage with and overpower security forces leading to forward outpost retreats and loss of control over Borno's countryside. Efforts to gain back this territory must be brought to the top of priorities if Nigeria seeks to claim that they are playing their part in the Lake Chad Task Force.

Pervasive acts of corruption by the government and human rights violations by security forces have poisoned the country with distrust and animosity towards the government, and this

¹²² Turse, Nick. (2020). "Pentagon's Own Map of US Bases in Africa Contradicts Its Claim of "light" Footprint." *The Intercept*. <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/27/africa-us-military-bases-africom/>

¹²³ Oladipo, Tomi. (2015). "Boko Haram: Nigeria military moves HQ to Maiduguri." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33048511>

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has not seemed to improve during Buhari's leadership. In 2016, it is estimated that Nigerian officials were bribed in excess of \$4.6 billion in the one year alone.¹²⁴ Transparency has lacked in the country for years. Accounts of military and presidential claims that Boko Haram is on the run, defeated, nearing its demise, or any other false glimmer of hope to help enhance political appeal must halt with complete repudiation in order to regain the public trust.

Operation Safe Corridor, an effort geared toward the deradicalization of prior Boko Haram militants, began in 2015, and is without any doubt a step in the direction toward deescalating the country's hardships. Although the program focuses on areas that include religious education, psychosocial therapy, and reintegration efforts, the program is unequally balanced and needs to expand partnerships with businesses to enhance job opportunities. One issue that ails the current effort is the lack of desire projected by Nigeria's populace after being tormented by Boko Haram for years. Additionally, the program falls short in addressing defectors that rank highly in Boko Haram's command structures. Facing this issue is vital in that upper-level combatants could provide critical information to hasten the downfall of Boko Haram. This does not mean forgoing justice or accountability, but clear-sighted policy must be in place to deal with Boko Haram members at all levels who choose to defect from the organization.

Youth exploitation programs must also be enhanced, especially in areas like Maiduguri where many leave home at a young age in an attempt to grow in their understanding of the Quran. This can be approached from multiple angles but must prioritize proper religious education and support self-interpretation. It also must direct efforts toward combating illiteracy, especially in regions with exceedingly high poverty rates. The World Bank estimated that the North accounted for almost 87% of all Nigerians considered poor in 2016, also citing that

¹²⁴ (2019). "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service*.
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33964.pdf>

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poverty reduction has been less effective compared to its West African neighbors, regardless of overall economic growth.¹²⁵ Utilizing former Boko Haram members that have been integrated back into society as first-hand accounts to counter youth manipulation is one method of continuing to pursue gains in the midst of unfavorable circumstances.

Lastly, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) must see to it that the work is continued in equal weight. In 2019, AFRICOM held its annual Lake Chad Region Intelligence Workshop. The central discussion was centered around intelligence operations integration.¹²⁶ Signs point that the MNJTF is working in the right direction and seeking to grow in areas that will keep their countries a step ahead of the enemy. The Director of Intelligence for the task force is Colonel Ayuba Banningo of Nigeria, yet Chad has been cited numerous times stating that Nigeria is not doing their part in combating threats. Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin need to utilize the Multinational Joint Task Force as a true frontline platform for holding each other accountable and ensuring that each country's military is working not only maintain its current standing, but striving to enhance its current methods of operation, code of conduct, and transparency. This multinational military and intelligence collaboration are a true key to combating Boko Haram's grip on the region.

IV. Conclusion

Nigeria and its neighbors in West Africa are a long way from erasing the underlying systemic issues that led to the rise of Boko Haram and which truthfully have only worsened since Boko Haram's campaign imploded the Lake Chad region over a decade ago. Internally displaced

¹²⁵ Awojulgbe, Oluseyi. (2020). "World Bank: 87% of poor Nigerians are in the North." *The Cable*. <https://www.thecable.ng/world-bank-north-accounts-87-poor-people-nigeria>

¹²⁶ Reho, Samantha . (2019). "Senior African Military Intelligence Directors Discuss Lake Chad Region Threat Environment." *AFRICOM*. <https://www.africom.mil/media-room/Article/32115/senior-african-military-intelligence-directors-discuss-lake-chad-region-threat-environment>

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persons have reached over 2.2 million in Nigeria, and external displacement has forced the migration of thousands into neighboring Chad, Niger, and Cameroon.¹²⁷ The people of West Africa are tired of being cursed with the misfortune of warped ideology and pseudo-transformational leadership, and they are weary of Boko Haram's killings, kidnapping, and infliction of destitution. However, while researching Nigeria's hardships through open-source scouring of published research documents, news articles, video media content, twitter feeds, terrorist propaganda, think tank conferences and more, I encountered multiple sources of content that displayed how Nigeria's people are fighting on. Nigerians are living their lives despite the atrocities taking place. A study in 2019, conducted by World Values scientists out of the United Kingdom, suggested that the happiest people in the world live in Nigeria, proof of a people taking an optimistic look at their future despite the challenges and suffering a large portion of the nation faces.¹²⁸

Stopping the spread of terrorism takes a multipronged approach, and through support from the West, accountability among West African neighbors, and the continuation of open dialogue by academic institutions surrounding these detrimental security issues, there is a path to combat Boko Haram in West Africa.

¹²⁷ Tamfu, Hanson. (2020). "UNHCR calls on Nigeria to heed wishes of internally displaced." *UNHCR*. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/unhcr-calls-nigeria-heed-wishes-internally-displaced>

¹²⁸ BBC Staff. (2003). "Nigeria tops happiness survey." *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3157570.stm>

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