



Status of ISWAP and ISGS in West Africa and Sahel

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Executive Summary

Since the initial rise in violent extremist and terrorist groups in the Sahel in the mid-2000s, the number of such groups in the region has continued to grow. This is reflected in the nature of the opportunistic alliances that have developed among different groups, with varying interests and memberships. **Furthermore, these groups have changed their operational tactics over time and, since 2019, began a gradual expansion of their activities towards the littoral states of West Africa.**

This paper focuses on two of the most important extremist groups in the Sahel: Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Islamic State in Greater Sahel (ISGS). In discussing the origins of both groups, this paper argues that their establishment was not borne out of religious rationales alone. **Rather, ISWAP's and ISGS's formation and expansion were based on their fractured relationships with the organizations from which they split and to a certain extent transformed,** as well as their pursuit for new allegiances and competition for preeminence in the leadership as they battled to expand and establish Islamic states in northern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and the Sahel.

Ideologically, this paper identifies the adoption of Takfiri doctrines as the driving force resulting in more draconian interpretation and implementation of Islamic laws implemented by the hisba relating to zakat, hudud, ta'zir, and qisas. This paper argues that factionalism and splits from the original organizations represent fundamental splits from their original members and that the alliances formed by these originally distinct groups constitutes a fundamental split and shift in operational tactics.

ISWAP and ISGS operations are characterized by opportunism and exploitation of local grievances that enables them to build specific narratives for support. As their operations expand, one of the key income streams is the institution of zakat, the 10 percent alms tax every Muslim must pay, supplemented by the jizya, the non-Muslim tax. Additionally, robberies and kidnapping of high-value targets is rampant. **With the acquisition of better logistics, since 2021, both groups have experienced expansionary moves to other parts of West Africa and the Sahel including Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo, and Niger. This paper argues that potential collusions among these two Jihadi groups and with government officials and community leaders underpin these expansionary moves.** Existing vulnerabilities serve as possible avenues for collusion. Such occurrences undermine state capacities to counter the presence of Jihadi groups through winning the hearts and minds of citizens. This paper briefly outlines the nature and capacity gaps of Sahel and West African states to confront and degrade the capabilities of these groups.

It offers several recommendations including what concrete actions German and European policymakers should take. These include:

- Identify, support, and strengthen structures and stakeholders who contribute to community resilience;
- Strengthening hybrid political and security orders to protect livelihoods;
- Initiate security sector governance and reform measures to improve performance of statutory agencies; and

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- Establish a border security cooperation council among Sahel states to share information.

Introduction

After the so-called Arab Spring in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 reached Syria and resulted in the devastating conflict that continues to this day, one of many Jihadi groups in the Middle East that saw an opportunity was al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). The group immediately realized that this conflict allowed it to expand its terrain and influence into Syria. ISI broke from al-Qaeda, actively engaged in recruiting foreign fighters globally, and rebranded itself, first as ISIS (the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham) and, after declaring their "Caliphate" on June 29, 2014, simply as the Islamic State (IS). This new IS "Caliphate project" proved to be a successful concept as Jihadi groups worldwide pledged allegiance to its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Some of the first countries outside the Middle East into which IS was able to expand its global project were in Africa, namely Tunisia and Libya. After Libyan dictator Mu'ammarr Qaddafi was killed, some of the former Libyan Jihadi's moved to the Syrian battlefield. In 2012, Katibat al-Battar al-Libiya was created as a sub-branch of the Islamic State. Some of the fighters of Katibat al-Battar al-Libiya stayed in Syria and some of them, such as Abdelhamid Abaaoud, were subsequently involved in the Paris attacks in November 2015. However, others returned to Africa to established affiliates of IS in their home countries.

Further south, Jihadi terrorism in the Sahel has had a long history. **Countries such as Mali and Nigeria had witnessed years of Jihadi violence and al-Qaeda affiliates had been active throughout the region for several years. This provided a fertile ground for the expansion of IS.** IS's appeal for a new Caliphate attracted Jihadi's worldwide, including in this region. From 2014 onwards, several groups loosely affiliated with the al-Qaeda network increasingly came under the influence of IS ideologists.

Rationale for the establishment of ISWAP and ISGS – Exploring the relationship with al-Qaeda affiliated groups

Arguably, the formation of both ISWAP and ISGS are not borne out of clergy-defined rationales—as was the case during the genesis of Boko Haram and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), respectively, from which ISWAP and ISGS splintered. Although in their current configurations, both ISWAP and ISGS subscribe to IS ideology and aim to establish Islamic states in northern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and the Sahel, their formation can be traced to the quest for new allegiances and competition for leadership within Boko Haram and AQIM respectively.¹ To analyze these dynamics and to understand how ISWAP and ISGS still maintain affiliations with al-Qaeda and Boko Haram, it is necessary to explore the background of these developments.

Although both ISWAP and ISGS subscribe to IS ideology, their formation can be traced to the quest for new allegiances and competition for leadership within Boko Haram and AQIM respectively.

ISWAP and ISGS split from Boko Haram and AQIM, respectively. Both groups currently continue to operate in two different geographical spaces. Boko Haram has been operating in the northeastern part of Nigeria since the early 2000s. From 2009 onwards, the group became more violent when Mumammad Yusuf and subsequently Abu Bakr Shekau assumed the leadership of the organization.² AQIM, which traces its origin to Algeria, established a foothold in the Sahel operating specifically in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso under the leadership of Mokhtar Belmokhtar.³

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Both ISWAP and ISGS emerged out of a fractured relationship with Boko Haram and AQIM, respectively. ISWAP exhibits distain for Boko Haram’s operational tactics— namely its attacks on Muslim civilians. ISGS has maintained some level of affinity with the al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the Sahel, namely Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Ansar-ul-Islam lil-Ichad wal Jihad (IRSAD), and Ansar Dine. However, recently ISGS’s relations with JNIM have become tense, characterized by deadly confrontations.⁴ This shift occurred due to their competition over control of territories in Gourma in Mali and the tri-border area of Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso.⁵

Ideology

Ideologically speaking, both ISWAP as well as ISGS adopted the Takfiri doctrines⁶ of IS, mixed with local influences. This resulted, as in Syria and Iraq, in a draconian interpretation and subsequent implementation of Islamic law. In areas controlled by ISWAP and ISGS, Shari’a was promptly introduced and imposed on the local population. This did not only affect the private lives of those living under their rule, but above all altered public life significantly. Examples include: forcing citizens to pay zakat (a tax of 10 percent); having the Hisba (religious police) control markets and enforce Islamic law in all aspects; and strictly forbidding smoking and drinking and, in cases where these laws were broken, having the Hisba apply the Hudud (Islamic penal law). Under the guise of Hudud, Ta’zir, and Qisas, hundreds of people were amputated, stoned to death, beheaded, and more. The most recent public executions publicly displayed by ISWAP were in Niger, where two men were beheaded for sorcery.⁷

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What ultimately complicates the doctrinal position of ISGS and ISWAP are the ethnic interests and local interpretations of Islam. Some groups that joined IS were also influenced by Sufism, which has adherents throughout the region. Others like Abu Bakr Shekau, the now deceased leader of Boko Haram, were even harsher in their interpretation of the Takfiri doctrine. Shekau pledged allegiance to IS, attempted to lead ISWAP as a rebranded Boko Haram formation, but was ousted. Continuing to lead a faction within Boko Haram, Shekau competed with ISWAP, which was led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi at the time. Seen as being too radical, Shekau was not able to prevail in the competition and, in 2021, he was killed. Subsequently, ISWAP absorbed most remaining fighters from Boko Haram.

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Factionalism and splits from original organizations -

Do these represent a fundamental split from their original members and does this explain any of their subsequent actions?

ISWAP’s emergence in Nigeria can be traced back to Abu Bakr Shekau and his ideological shift away from Boko Haram. On March 7, 2015, Shekau pledged allegiance to IS.⁸ While Baghdadi accepted Shekau’s pledge and new allegiance in April 2015, Shekau’s leadership of ISWAP was not widely recognized by the broader IS network. Consequently, in August 2016, IS Core rejected Shekau’s leadership and subsequently appointed Musab al-Barnawi—a key ally of Shekau—as the new leader of ISWAP, setting the stage for further divisions and new affiliations characteristic of terrorist groups. To remain relevant within the terrorist networks in the region, Shekau responded to the rejection by reclaiming the leadership of Boko Haram under its formal name Jama’tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and operated largely in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin.⁹

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ISGS was formed on May 15, 2015 because of a leadership crisis within al-Mourabitoun, an al-Qaeda-affiliated group operating in northern Mali.¹⁰ Prior to the formation of ISGS, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi attempted to assume the leadership of al-Mourabitoun after a vacuum had been created, following the death of former al-Mourabitoun leader Abubakr al-Nasri (al-Masri) in 2014. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who had been instrumental in the creation of al-Mourabitoun, and fighters loyal to him opposed the idea on the basis that Sahrawi was inexperienced and lacked knowledge of Jihadi strategy.¹¹ Continued tensions and confrontations consequently led to Sahrawi leaving al-Mourabitoun to form the IS-affiliated Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).¹² **Since 2019, ISGS has been formally incorporated into ISWAP by order from IS Core (ISC) in Iraq and Syria.**¹³ Both ISWAP and ISGS subscribe to Salafi Jihadi ideology and are part of the global IS network of affiliates, despite the fact that geographically and ideologically ISWAP and ISGS hail from different origins, i.e., Boko Haram and AQIM, respectively.

New alliances forged by these originally distinct groups constitute a fundamental split and a shift in their operational tactics. For example, a key distinction between ISWAP and Boko Haram is that, while the latter launches attacks on both Muslims and Christians and, in fact, all those who oppose Sharia, ISWAP prioritizes targeting non-Muslims, military structures, government, and security personnel.¹⁴

Another fundamental distinction between ISWAP and Boko Haram is that ISWAP provides essential services to needy Muslim communities, a practice that was common during the physical IS Caliphate in Syria and Iraq.¹⁵ Although ISWAP still employs violent and coercive methods in their

operations, they have been able to establish symbiotic relationships with the inhabitants in the Lake Chad area. Unlike Boko Haram, ISWAP exhibits cooperative posture and treats local Muslim civilians relatively well, and in many instances even better than the Nigerian state and its security forces.¹⁶ However, ISGS has not fundamentally shifted from emphasizing the organization of deadly terror attacks.¹⁷ For example, in October 2017, the group ambushed and attacked a joint United States (U.S.)-Nigerien force, killing four green berets and several Nigerien soldiers.¹⁸

New alliances formed by originally distinct groups constitute a fundamental split and a shift in operational tactics. While Boko Haram launches attacks on Muslims and Christians, ISWAP prioritizes targeting non-Muslim and military structures.

Nature of operational relationship between ISWAP and ISGS, if any? *Opportunism and exploitation of local grievances to build specific narratives for support*

Although ISWAP and ISGS operate in distinct geographical areas, i.e. Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel respectively, both organizations subscribe to similar ideologies, which in turn influences how they operate. Both profess IS's interpretation of Salafi Jihadi ideology; they share media offices; and ISWAP regularly claims responsibility for operations carried out by ISGS.¹⁹ Similarly, since 2019, propaganda produced by ISC has claimed all ISGS attacks in the name of ISWAP. **The claiming of responsibilities for each other's attacks by these affiliated organizations indicates the possibility of joint planning and launching of attacks, despite the groups operating in different geographical locations.**

The relationship between ISWAP and ISGS also manifests itself in the way they exploit similar grievances to establish connections with local communities in their areas of operation. Among others, vulnerabilities they exploit include governance issues such as corruption by political elites; discrimination of ethnic groups; and the unavailability of basic and essential services such as access to healthcare, education, and water. Such grievances have contributed to emergence of different narratives by these groups, resulting in winning of hearts and minds and building networks of support within the local population.

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In its propaganda, ISWAP emphasizes that Boko Haram failed to address governance challenges and neglected communities in their area of operation, including the islands in the Lake Chad Basin. This narrative, coupled with ISWAP's cooperative posture for local Muslim civilians, has entrenched ISWAP within the local communities, allowing ISWAP to further undermine the already fragile official Nigerian government structures in the area.²⁰

Indeed, the provision of essential services such as water and healthcare has endeared ISWAP to the local population. **Interestingly, the group has established disciplinary measures to punish its own members for deliberately abusing civilians.²¹ Such actions are intended to create the impression of the provision of fair and just societal conditions embedded in the Sharia principles within ISWAP-controlled areas.** To sustain the provision of these social services, the group taxes agriculture, fishing, and trade in its areas of operations. Consistent with its objective of establishing an Islamic state, the group also appoints its own police chiefs and offers protection services including law enforcement.²²

Although ISGS remains brutal and aggressive—not discriminating in its attacks between civilian and military targets within the Sahel enclave that it controls—it also exploits local grievances such as ethnic conflict, marginalization, and poverty to win local support. This allows ISGS to recruit, indoctrinate, and radicalize part of the local population.²³ For instance, there is a desire for self-defence among minority ethnic groups. The recurring tensions and conflict between Fulani and Mossi ethnic groups in Burkina Faso as well as between Fulani and Dogon ethnic groups in Mali have been exploited by ISGS to recruit and radicalize and to win local support to spread its Salafi Jihadi ideology.²⁴ This has become possible due the existing vulnerabilities within many ethnic groups in the Sahel including the Fulani, Bozos, Bambara, and Mossi.

Financing operations

Similar to other IS affiliates, one of the main income streams for both ISWAP as well as ISGS is zakat, the alms tax every Muslim has to pay according to the five pillars of Islam. **Zakat generally amounts to about 10 percent of an individual's income.** In Islamic law, these alms are meant for the needy in the society. However, in IS structures, these payments are concentrated in the treasury of the respective IS affiliate. Similarly, non-Muslims are taxed, which is known as jizya. Non-Muslims living under IS rule are left with few choices. They can convert, be killed, or live under the IS rule and pay jizya.

One of the main income streams for both ISWAP and ISGS is *zakat*, the alms tax every Muslim has to pay according to the five pillars of Islam.

Taxation is only one way IS affiliates fund themselves. **There seems to be a South African-based network that distributed resources from the global IS network to the local branches in Somalia, Niger, Nigeria, and other countries.²⁵ There are indications that international transfers between IS branches worldwide continue on a daily basis.** The use of existing Hawala structures obfuscates these transactions. Furthermore, in recent years, a range of terrorist groups, including IS, have begun misusing cryptocurrencies as well. Additional income is generated by robberies, cattle rustling, and kidnapping for ransom.²⁶

Weaponry and other logistical acquisitions

ISWAP and ISGS capture weapons, ammunition, and explosive materials during small-scale attacks against security and military forces. **However, it is important to note that a substantial number of weapons now used throughout the Sahel originate from Libya.** After the Libyan regime fell in 2011 and the country succumbed to internal instability, a significant number of weapons were captured by jihadi cells within the country. Subsequently, various types of weapons were widely distributed throughout the continent; a significant number of these are state of the art modern assault- and sniper-rifles. However, most weapons used and captured by the IS forces in the region are variants of the AK-assault rifle and other firearms commonly used throughout the region.

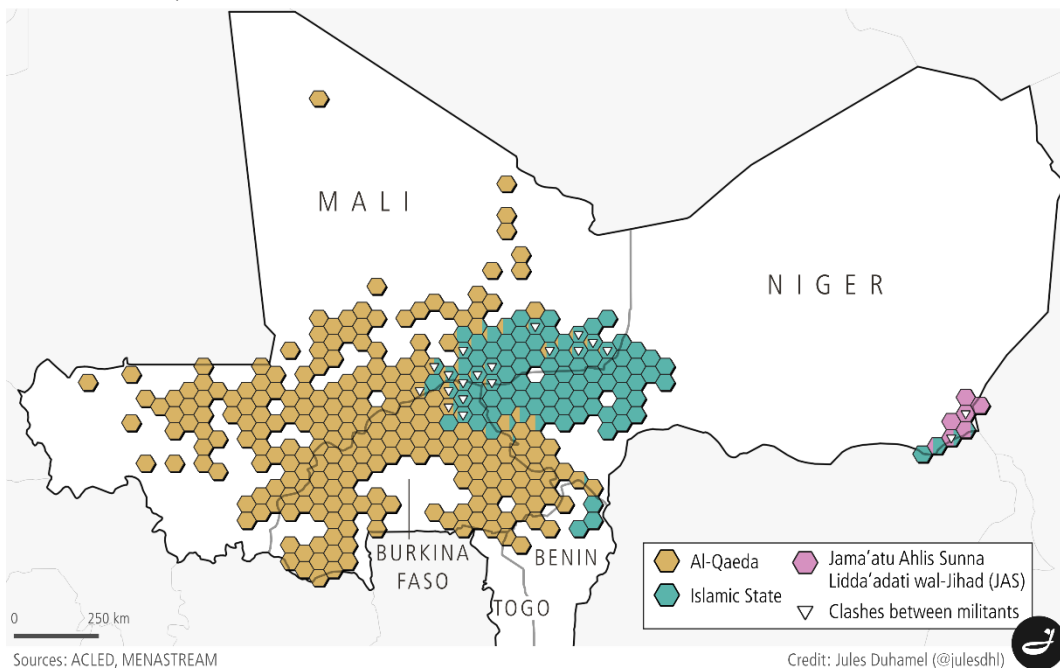
ISWAP and ISGS capture weapons, ammunition and explosive materials during small-scale attacks against security and military forces.

Attempts to expand to other parts of West Africa and the Sahel

Maps detailing the operations of ISWAP and ISGS clearly demonstrate the efforts by both groups to expand in 2022, a trend that continued in the first quarter of 2023. The maps below, compiled by Jules Duhamel, are based on open-source data provided by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and data provided by Héni Nsaibia via Twitter (MENASTREAM).

Activity of jihadist militant groups in Central Sahel, 2022

as of December, 09

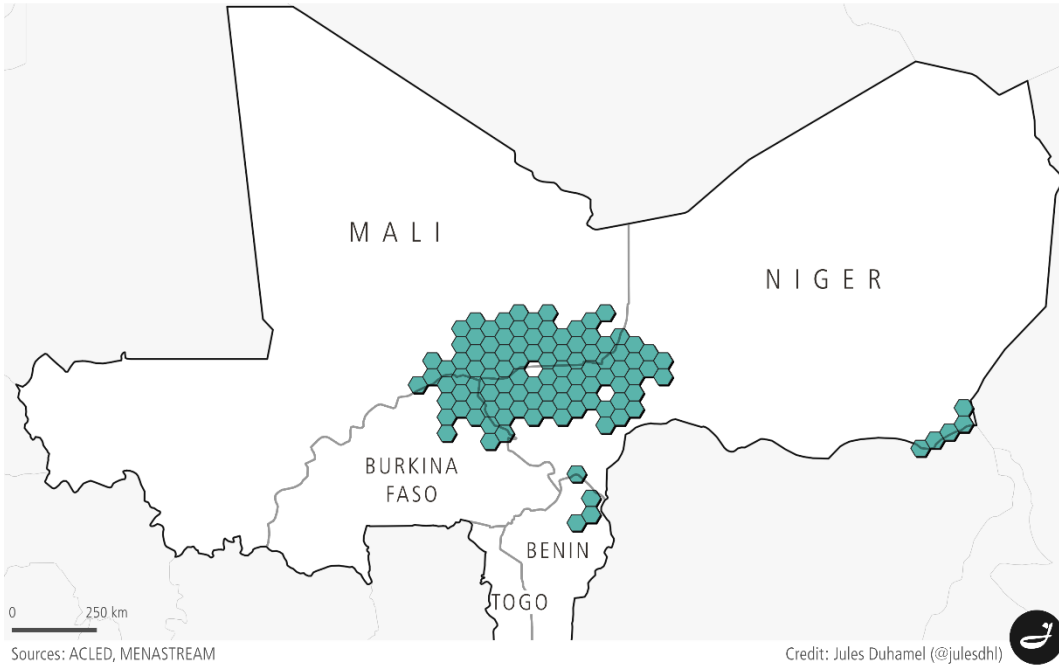


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Activity of the Islamic State in Central Sahel, 2022

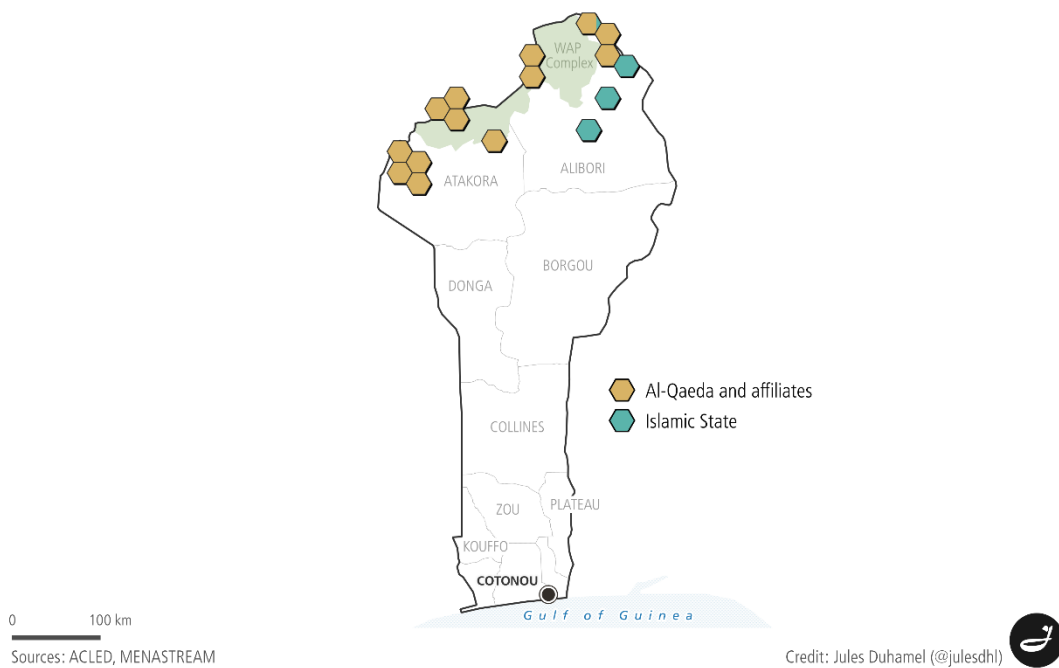
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Activity of jihadist militant groups in Benin, 2022

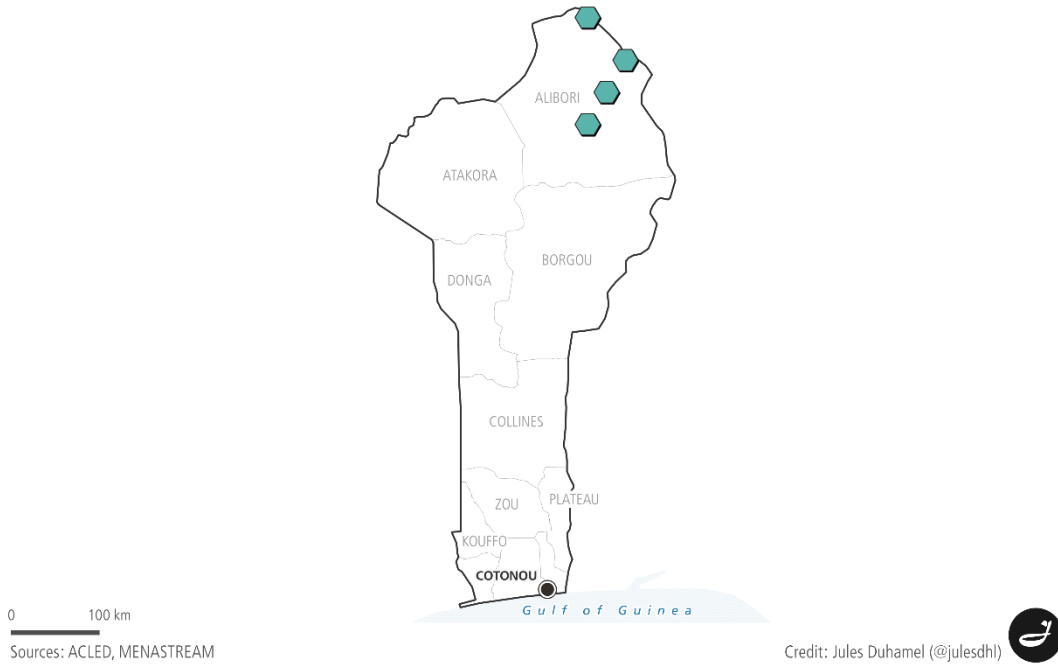
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Activity of the Islamic State in Benin, 2022

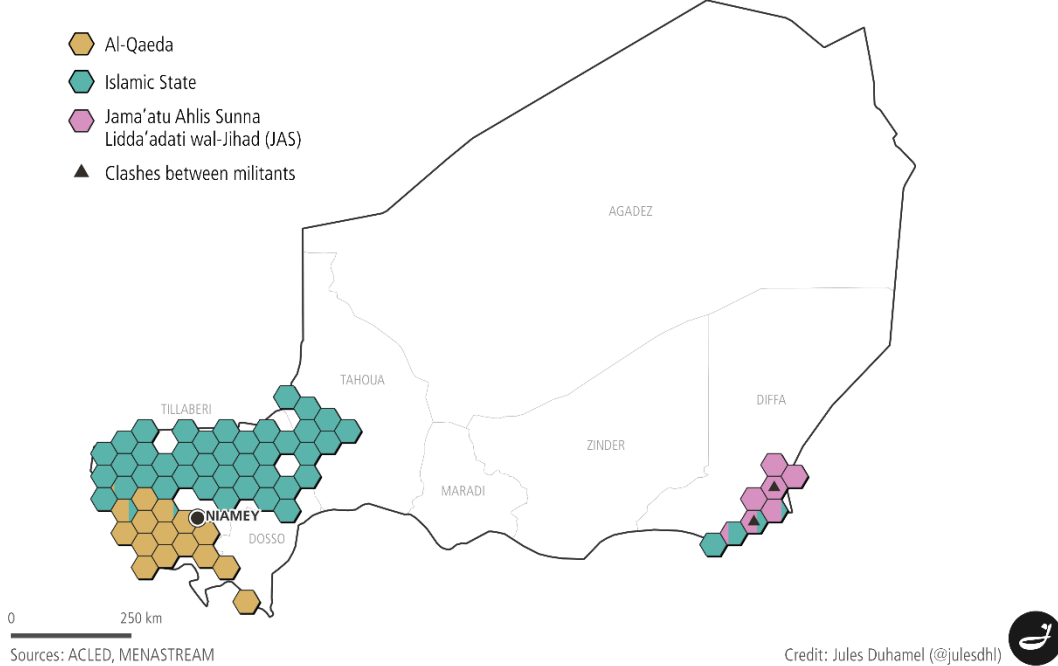
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Activity of jihadist militant groups in Niger, 2022

as of December, 07

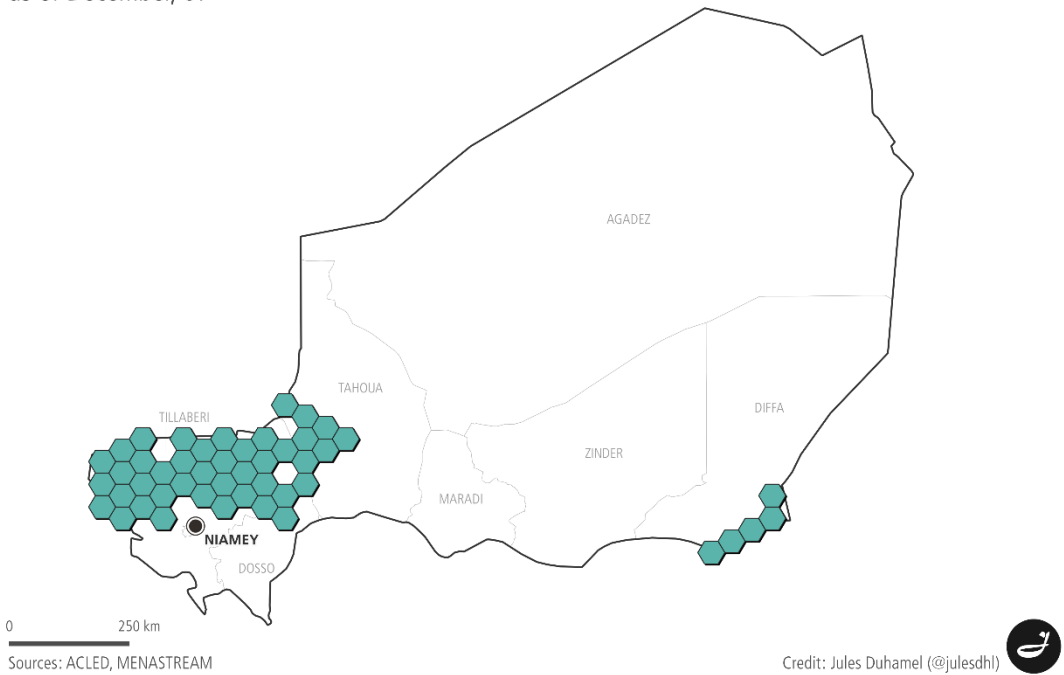


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Activity of the Islamic State in Niger, 2022

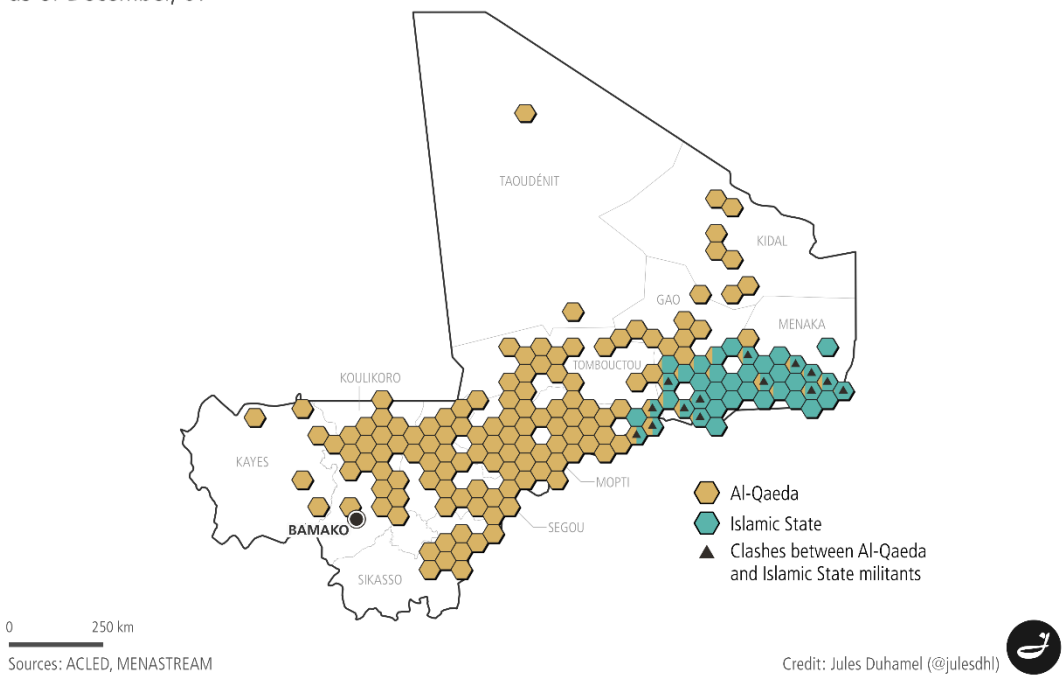
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Activity of jihadist militant groups in Mali, 2022

as of December, 07

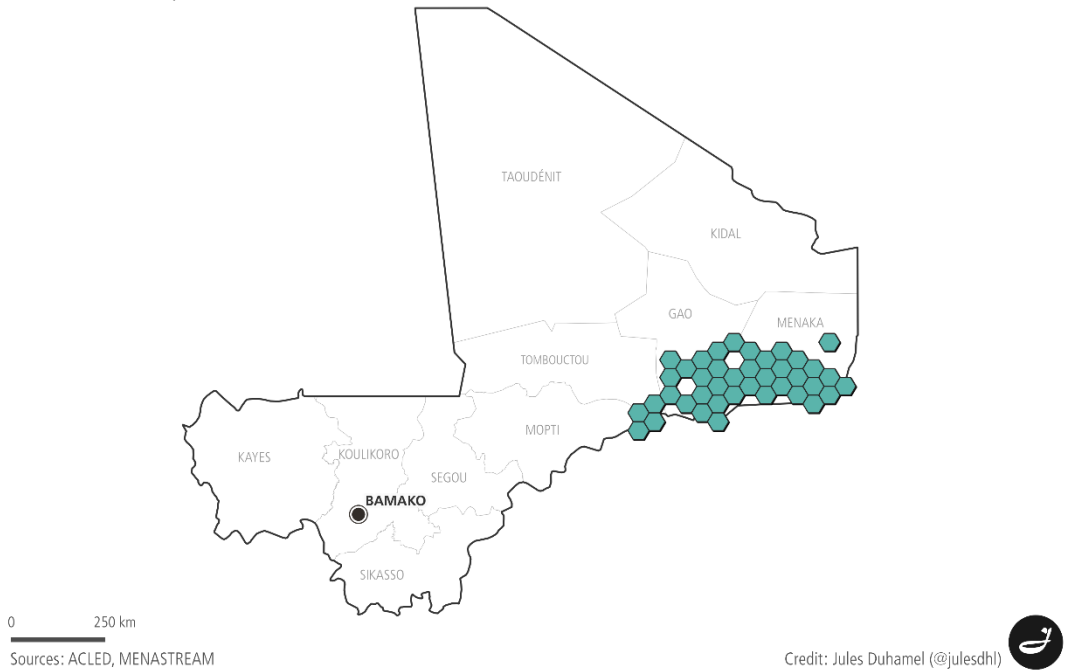


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Activity of Islamic State in Mali, 2022

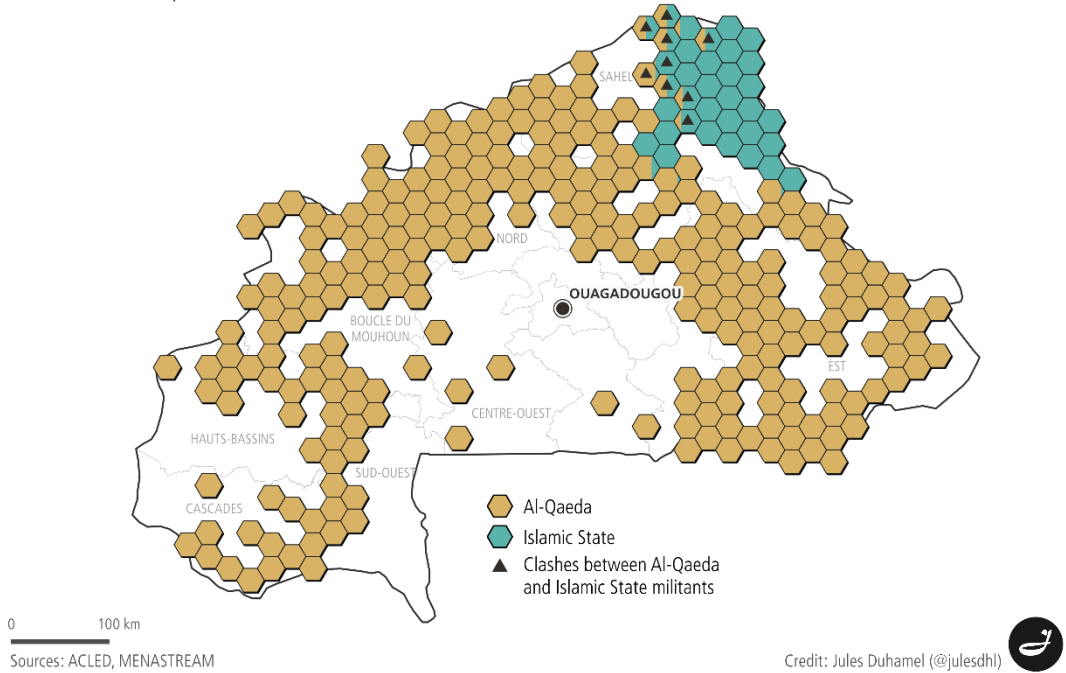
as of December, 07



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Activity of jihadist militant groups in Burkina Faso, 2022

as of December, 07

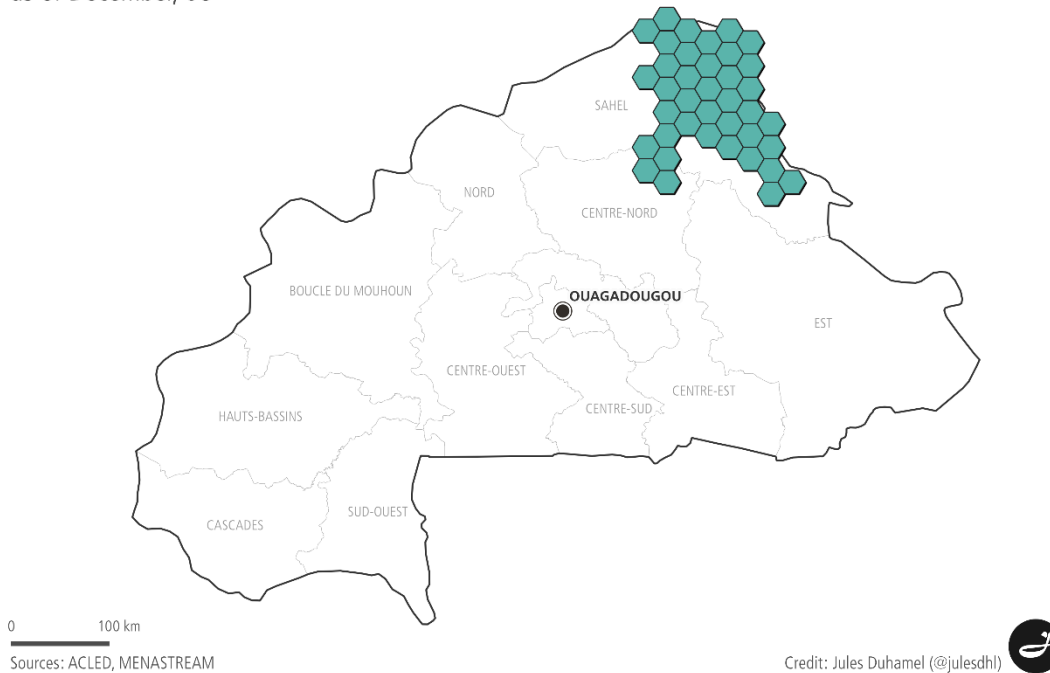


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COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

Activity of the Islamic State in Burkina Faso, 2022

as of December, 06

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Possible collusion between government officials, community leaders and criminal networks with ISGS and ISWAP?

To analyze possible incidents of collusion between Jihadi-terrorist groups (i.e., ISWAP and ISGS) and government officials or community leaders is a significant challenge. The illegal and criminal nature of Jihadi groups necessarily include an area of opaqueness as to the details of their internal operations. However, it is plausible to argue that existing vulnerabilities within the Sahelian states may serve as avenues for possible collusion between and among the groups. First, **the Sahel region remains a hub for transnational organized crime such as drug, human, and arms trafficking, among other vulnerabilities including corruption, marginalization, and poverty.** These vulnerabilities have contributed to the destabilization of the region and accentuated the fragility of Mali and Burkina Faso.²⁷

The illegal and criminal nature of Jihadi groups necessarily include an area of opaqueness as to the details of their internal operations.

Consequently, some state actors may be compromised and collude with criminal and terrorist groups to engage in criminality and indirectly perpetrate acts of terror. Second, **community leaders and their members remain vulnerable to poverty and unemployment, creating alliances between them and the Jihadi groups for support.** In Burkina Faso, state officials allegedly colluded with criminal networks to engage in trafficking of drugs, cigarettes, and small arms in the northern parts of the country.²⁸ Accordingly, such criminal networks benefited from state security protection in transporting illegal and trafficked goods across the country and to other Sahelian states.²⁹ Proceeds from such activities contribute to fuelling terrorist activities, especially in the tri-border regions of Liptako Gourma.³⁰ In some instances, Jihadi terrorists have exploited the vulnerabilities of communities and their leaders to establish local networks, leading to subsequent attacks in the northern part of Burkina Faso.³¹

Some state actors may be compromised and collude with criminal and terrorist groups to engage in criminality and indirectly perpetrate acts of terror.

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State capacities to counter the presence of these groups militarily and ideologically to win the hearts and minds of citizens

Within the Sahel, most governments in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and the northern part of Nigeria grapple with the threat of ISWAP and ISGS. While these countries face multiple challenges including insufficient financial, logistical, and training capacities to confront the threats posed by these groups, there are also challenges specific to each country due to internal political dynamics and regional/external political imperatives.

The capacity of the Malian state to confront the threat of ISGS and other terrorist groups is weakened by its recent political instability characterized by coups and counter coups. This has compounded already fraught relations with France. Mali's relations with some of its neighbors and Western partners also remain strained.³² For instance, since 2020, the United States has restricted foreign assistance to the government of Mali pursuant to section 7008 of the Annual Appropriations Act.³³ Russia in the form of the semi-official Wagner Group appears to attempt to fill some of the capacity vacuum created by the absence of France and other Western partners. Russia is also known to contribute weapons, equipment, and military training to combat the threat of terrorism.³⁴ Despite this support, **Wagner's role has been mainly counter productive as more civilian casualties have been recorded since its arrival in Mali between December 2021 and late March 2022 than during the entire previous year.³⁵ Consequently, the expectation that the Wagner Group will reduce the frequency of terrorist attacks remains a mirage.** Not dissimilar to the high point of the French counterterrorism Operation Barkhane, the number of Jihadi terrorist attacks has increased in Mali since Wagner's operations began in late 2021,³⁶ indicating that the presence of foreign troops on the ground also acts as a motivating factor for terrorist groups as well as presenting an increased number of potential terrorist targets.

Similar challenges exist in Nigeria with regards to its capacity to deal with the threat of terrorist groups, despite its significant military capabilities. Indeed, both Boko Haram and ISWAP have contributed to internal displacements of an estimated two million people in the terrorist-controlled states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. This is in addition to the displacement of more than 328,000 Nigerian refugees to neighboring countries of Cameroon and Chad.³⁷ Furthermore, despite experiencing terrorist attacks for many years already, **Nigeria's Disarmament, Deradicalization and Reintegration (DDR) efforts remains at best underdeveloped and at worse uncoordinated, contributing to its weakness in addressing the menace of the twin threats of terrorism and violent extremism.**

Niger has several counterterrorism measures in place, including through law enforcement forces, which are active in deterring and preventing terrorism. The country also promotes inter-agency collaboration between the police, the national guard, and the gendarmerie, and has established anti-terrorism courts supported by the United States. **At the community level, Niger has established local peace committees to strengthen local conflict monitoring, prevention, and management.** These measures, notwithstanding, as one of the poorest countries in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Index,³⁸ Niger lacks the necessary financial resources to recruit and train a sufficient number of effective security forces. As the U.S. Department of State's 2021 Country Reports on Terrorism indicates, **Niger is incapacitated by its small defence force and continued challenges concerning coordination among the various security services.³⁹ Moreover, budget shortfalls and instability in neighboring Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, and the wider Lake Chad Basin continue to weaken Niger's capacity to confront the threat.⁴⁰**

While these countries face multiple challenges including insufficient financial, logistical and training capacities to confront the threats posed by these groups, there are also challenges specific to each country due to internal political dynamics and regional/external political imperatives.

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In Burkina Faso, weakness of the state and its security forces has been clearly visible for several years already. Indeed, operations of ISGS and other terrorist groups such as JNIM have further weakened the capacity of state security forces over the last seven years, leading to the coup and counter coup by Colonel Paul-Henri Sandogo Damiba and Captain Ibrahim Traore in January 2022 and September 2022, respectively. While Damiba's strategy focused on dialogue with the terrorists, Traore considers military action as the more effective approach and has attempted to increase military operations. To this end, Traore's transitional administration has launched a recruitment campaign, aiming to enlist 3,000 new soldiers and 1,400 new members of the gendarmery, ostensibly to reinforce the Security and Defence Forces (SDFs).⁴¹ In addition, steps have been taken to improve the image and awareness of the armed forces among the general population, aimed at widening national coverage and to counter the ever-expanding threats of the terror groups.⁴² This focus on expanding military operations also resulted in the decision to increase the number of military regions from three to six to cover the Sahel, Boucle du Mouhoun, and eastern areas, which remain largely insecure. However, despite these efforts and Burkina Faso's membership of the G-5 Sahel and the Accra Initiative, incidents of terrorist attacks suggest that the actual capacity of the transitional administration to effectively counter the increasing terrorist threat remains limited.

Recommendations

Violent extremism and terrorist violence in the Sahel and West Africa are expanding to the littoral states. Several national, regional, and international endeavors since 2012 have failed to stem the tide of the violence. The longer the violence pertains, the wider and more complex it becomes. This paper disaggregated the nature of Sahel and West African state capacities to confront and degrade the capabilities of these Jihadi-terrorist groups. It offers several recommendations including what concrete actions German and European policymakers should take. These include:

1. **Identify, support, and strengthen structures and stakeholders who contribute to community resilience.** In the countries under stress, it will be necessary to encourage (a) inter-religious dialogues as a means of strengthening trust and confidence-building measures and (b) identify women and youth groups and build their capacities in mediation and inter- and intra-communal dialogue;
2. **Strengthening hybrid political and security orders to protect livelihoods.** In most of these states and communities under stress, state capacity to provide protection is weak and statutory security forces are mistrusted. Security is, therefore, routinely provided by hybrid security orders involving both statutory and community joint task forces. It is necessary to train these community-based forces in basic capacities relating to the rule of law and respect for human rights when providing protection under conditions of stress as well as deepen collaborative ventures in a transparent manner;
3. **Initiate security sector governance and reform measures to improve performance of statutory agencies.** Oversight institutions such as Select Parliamentary Committees relating to security, intelligence, and finance, for example, should be supported and enabled to perform their oversight responsibilities in a professional manner by developing standards and transparent procedures to improve professional behavior and performance of both statutory and non-statutory forces in the respective countries;
4. **Establish border security cooperation councils (BSCC) among Sahel states to share information.** Due to the porosity of international borders in the Sahel and West Africa and the fact that several similar ethnicities straddle several boundaries, establishing BSCCs among and between communities straddling international boundaries can lead to: (a) trust and confidence building; (b) willingness to share intelligence and knowledge; and (c) contribute to building safer livelihoods along and among border communities. Therefore, the establishment of such structures should be a priority in bilateral or multilateral

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cooperation mechanisms with the countries in the region. **The existing structures of relevant international organizations**, such as INTERPOL through its National Central Bureaus (NCBs), **could play a central role in this regard**; and

5. **Greater emphasis on and resources for a detailed analysis of the conflict parties' interests and alliances as a fulcrum around which peacebuilding efforts must be undertaken.** It is critical to appreciate, albeit briefly, the diverse narratives, approaches, and understandings that have determined the intervention logic of different actors and undertake peacebuilding interventions focusing on local imperatives. This could be operationalized not only through formal cooperation with ministries and government structures but also through the strengthening of local and regional civil society and research institutions that can provide recurring detailed advice based on data generated on-the-ground and from within the affected communities. Based on such detailed analysis, new forms of intervention and capacity building efforts should be oriented.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province" 16 May, 2019. Available at <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province>> (accessed 5 March, 2023).
- ² Ibid.
- ³ https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state-greater-sahara#_ftn12
- ⁴ See "North of the Countries of the Gulf of Guinea: The New Frontier for Jihadist Groups?" <https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/13432629/North> (accessed 5 March, 2023)
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ ISIS Takfiri doctrine in essence denotes the groups ideological tenet that any Muslim not adhering to its reading of Islam must be declared an apostate and therefore must be killed. See f.ex.: Haniff Hassan, M. (2017) "The Danger of Takfir (Excommunication): Exposing IS' Takfiri Ideology", ETH Zürich Center for Security Studies <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/316b8048-d26a-44cb-b4ce48d8167f1c7c#:~:text=Takfir%20is%20a%20theological%20declaration.with%20punishment%20in%20the%20afterlife> (accessed 24 May 2023).
- ⁷ The Islamic State, an-Naba' magazine issue 380. (accessed 18 March, 2023)
- ⁸ See "Nigeria's Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Islamic State" 7 March, 2015. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31784538> > (accessed 4 March, 2023)
- ⁹ Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province" 16 May, 2019. Available at <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province> > (accessed 5 March, 2023).
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- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province" 16 May, 2019. Available at <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province>> (accessed 5 March, 2023).
- ¹⁴ <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-nigeria-2021/131-boko-haram-including-jas-iswap-and-ansaru>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state-greater-sahara>
- ¹⁷ Having separated from its original organization, AQIM, ISGS initially operated in Western Niger and Menaka, north-eastern Mali and launched multiple attacks in Burkina Faso and near the border with Mali in 2016. https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping/isgs
- ¹⁸ <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state-greater-sahara>
- ¹⁹ https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ACLED_Boko-Haram-ISWAP-Factions_March-2021.pdf; For instance, the killing of more than 50 Malian soldiers in Mali's Menaka region was claimed by ISGS in the name of Nigeria-based ISWAP. See also, "IntelBrief: The Sahel is a Growing Arena of Competition for Jihadist Groups" 18 November, 2018.

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Available at: <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-the-sahel-is-a-growing-arena-of-competition-for-jihadist-groups/> (accessed 6 March, 2023)

²⁰ <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state-greater-sahara>

²¹ Ibid

²² ACLED. (2021). ACLED Methodology for Coding Boko Haram and ISWAP Factions . Available at https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ACLED_Boko-Haram-ISWAP-Factions_March-2021.pdf

²³ Interview with former National Assembly Member, Ouagadougou, March, 2020.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See "South Africa a growing conduit for Islamic State funds, says new UN Report" July, 2022. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-07-22-south-africa-a-growing-conduit-for-islamic-state-funds-says-new-un-report/>

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²⁷ Gaye, S. B. (2018). "Connections between Jihadist groups and smuggling and illegal trafficking rings in the Sahel". Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Peace and Security, Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa.

²⁸ Interview with former National Assembly Member, Ouagadougou

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview, Civil Society Actor, Ouagadougou, February, 2020

³¹ Ibid

³² See "Mali: Avoiding the Trap of Isolation" 9 February, 2023. Available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/b185-mali-eviter-le-piege-de-lisolement> (accessed 4 March, 2023)

³³ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Mali Bureau on Counter-terrorism" <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/mali/>

³⁴ Elbassoussy, A. (2022). 'The growing Russian role in sub-Saharan Africa: interests, opportunities and limitations'. *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences*, 4(3), 251-270.

³⁵ Mehra, T. and Demuyneck, M. (2023) "Raising the stakes against the Wagner Group: From mercenaries to a designated terrorist group?" 17 January, 2023 <<https://www.icct.nl/publication/raising-stakes-against-wagner-group-mercenaries-designated-terrorist-group>> (accessed 4 March, 2023)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/nigeria/>

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³⁸ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Human Development Index (HDI), <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>

³⁹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/niger/>

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Kone, H. and Kone F.R (2023) "Risks of Burkina Faso's new military approach to terrorism" 9 January 2023. Available at <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/risks-of-burkina-fasos-new-military-approach-to-terrorism> (accessed 5 March, 2023)

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