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ISLAMIC STATE AND ITS AFFILIATES

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Introduction

In 2014 Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi announced the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) caliphate and marked the group's official split from Al Qaeda. At the peak of its success, ISIS held 1/3rd of Syria and 40% of Iraq.¹ By 2017 due to the combined effort of the various players such as the United States of America, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and Turkey amongst others, ISIS had lost 95% of the territory in its proclaimed caliphate. It has also transformed from ISIS to Islamic State (IS) a group whose Caliphate extends wider now. Despite this loss, the IS has since consistently claimed responsibility for various acts of violence across the globe from France to the Philippines to Mozambique to Afghanistan.²

These acts of terror have been part of the global franchise of terror under the Islamic state. The group's referral to itself as the Islamic State can be seen as part of its aspirations to widen its reach and expand beyond the Levant region. This shift begs the question – Are Syria and Iraq still the main battle fronts? How has IS managed to continue to terrorize despite its massive territorial losses?

Africa: The New Front?

Al Qaeda was the first global terror group to make its advent into Africa through Somalia in the 1990s. Since 2014, The IS has competed with and dominated the presence of Al-Qaeda in the

¹ Glenn, Cameron, Mattison Rowan, John Caves, and Garrett Nada. 2019. "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, And Fall Of The Islamic State". *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

² Joscelyn, Thomas. 2018. "State Department Designates 7 ISIS-Affiliated Groups As Terrorist Organizations | FDD's Long War Journal". *FDD's Long War Journal*. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/02/state-department-designates-7-isis-affiliated-groups-as-terrorist-organizations.php>.

continent.³ The IS is a symptom as well as a cause of instability in the region. In 2021 acts of terrorism have declined in the west by 68% since 2012 while sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 48% of global terrorist deaths. The economic cost of terrorism in Africa rose more than tenfold from \$1.54 billion in 2007 to \$15.5 billion in 2016.⁴The nation-states of Africa have provided a fertile ground for the IS to breed. The easy proliferation of arms, weak governmental structures, environmental concerns and resource shortages, plentiful lootable resources, and easy availability of vulnerable victims are common features that can be observed across African countries with a strong Islamic state presence. The groups find easy entry and recruitment in a country if there are already fault lines to be exploited. It recruits along existing religious and ethnic lines in such places.

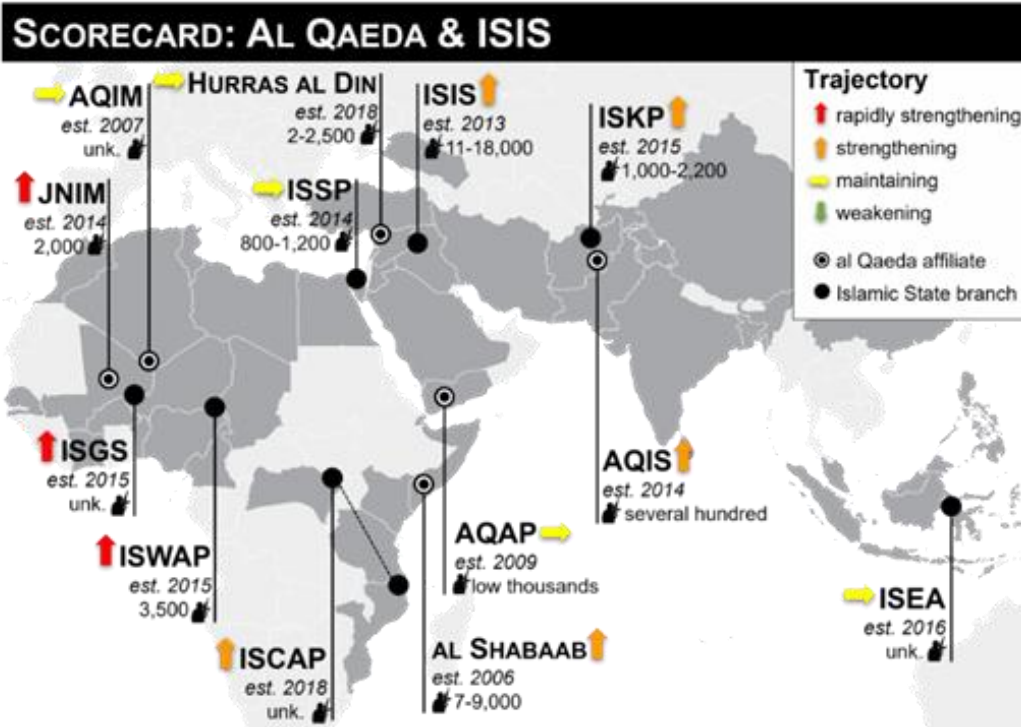
In the manual *Idarat al-tawahush*⁵ published by IS the group explains its three-step strategy to gain control of a country. The first being to instigate/ join a popular uprising. The second encourages one to create general chaos in the country and further weaken the systems in place. The third insists on dehumanizing the outgroup as they take control over the state. One can observe this manual in practice when looking at the spread of IS and its affiliates across the globe. Islamic State Central African Province (ISCAP), The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State Sinai Province (ISSP), and The Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) are the major affiliates of the Islamic state in the African continent.⁶ Each affiliate functions in various countries and helps form an interconnected system of smuggling, violence and information. The affiliate system works like any other global franchise chain where the local branch pledges allegiance to the headquarter. The meteoric rise of IS in the continent was first observed in the Sahel region.

³ Styszyński, Marcin. 2022. "Evaluation Of ISIS'S Threats In The Middle East And Africa". *African Security* 15 (1): 74-88. doi:10.1080/19392206.2022.2048594.

⁴ Estelle, Emily. 2021. "The Islamic State Resurges In Mozambique". *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/16/mozambique-islamic-state-terrorism-france-total/>.

⁵ Doukhan, David, and Eitan Azani. 2021 "Global Jihad in Africa: Danger and Challenges." International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep37744>.

⁶ Zimmerman, Katherine. 2021. "Al Qaeda & ISIS 20 Years After 9/11". *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-isis-20-years-after-911>.



Source: Katherine Zimmerman⁷

The fall of Muammar Ghaddafi in Libya and return of war-hardened trained fighters and the easy flow of small and light weapons to these countries such as Mali, Nigeria and Niger ensured a supply of fighters and arms.⁸ The affiliation between Boko Haram under Shekau and IS in Nigeria before the group splintered on grounds of ideological difference could be seen as a success. This affiliate relationship provided Boko haram with international legitimacy and material support. Whereas the IS gained a foothold in the country and could further its brand of extremism from there.⁹ It's a mutually beneficial relationship that increases the reach of both parties involved. The

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Styszynski, Marcin. 2022. "Evaluation Of ISIS'S Threats In The Middle East And Africa". *African Security* 15 (1): 74-88. doi:10.1080/19392206.2022.2048594.

⁹ Hendrix, S. E. 2016. Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Nigeria: Defining a New Approach to Winning Modern Jihadist Conflict. *The International Lawyer*, 49(3), 427–450. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26415586>

northern region of Nigeria is comparatively underdeveloped and neglected compared to the southern part which has gained the attention and perks of the ruling governments. The majority of Muslims in the country reside in the North whereas the Christians are concentrated in the South. The state also has hardened ethnic identities that have earlier been the grounds of mobilization during the Biafra civil war. In such a divisive situation with a history of violence being employed as an effective tool of governance, the environment was highly susceptible to extremist groups flourishing in the region. In Nigeria, the Kidnapping of the Chibok girls¹⁰ captured the attention of the global audience and brought attention to the dangers of Africa being the next hotspot of extremist Islamist groups.

The presence of IS and its affiliates in a state is accompanied by a weak governance structure. The ISWAP and other affiliates have established a system of jihadi governance¹¹ in the region where previously none existed. This included IS imposing a religious tax on the rich and protecting competing groups. The governance aspect rather than focusing on crude violence has played a role in increasing the influence of the group. While it is important to note that the IS global caliphate ambitions are not limited to the African continent. The Islamic State in Khorasan province in Afghanistan and the Maute group in the Philippines can be taken as examples of the group's presence beyond the African continent.¹² However, it is in the African region that IS has enjoyed the most success in terms of territory gained and influence extended after its fall in Syria and Iraq as observed in the examples above.

¹⁰ Juan, Jovi, Karen Leigh, and Jason French. 2022. "Islamic State And Its Affiliates". *The Wall Street Journal*. Accessed July 13. <https://graphics.wsj.com/islamic-state-and-its-affiliates/>.

¹¹ Burke, Jason. 2021. "Isis-Linked Groups Open Up New Fronts Across Sub-Saharan Africa". *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/25/isis-linked-groups-open-up-new-fronts-across-sub-saharan-africa>.

¹² Joscelyn, Thomas. 2018. "State Department Designates 7 ISIS-Affiliated Groups As Terrorist Organizations | FDD's Long War Journal". *FDD's Long War Journal*. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/02/state-department-designates-7-isis-affiliated-groups-as-terrorist-organizations.php>.

Mozambique: A Case Study

In 2020, IS occupied territory in Cabo Delgado in the northern part of Mozambique through its affiliate Al- Shabaab (not the same Al- Shabaab in Somalia).¹³ IS through this occupation marked its advent into the southern African region. Though localized attacks from the group have existed since 2017 this occupation was different. Now the territory of Mozambique is no longer being used as a host for attacks but rather the launch pad for IS operations. This is the largest urban population and territory that the IS had managed to control since the fall of its caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

The minority Muslim population of Mozambique is largely concentrated in the northern region. The region is highly endowed with exploitable resources such as gemstone fields and natural gas fields. Despite supporting the FRELIMO government that gained power in Mozambique after the civil war the region did not see the benefits of being a resource-rich area. The Islamic council of Mozambique and Frelimo's relationship did help fund and encourage Muslim students' education abroad. This introduced the younger generation to Salafi Muslim practices in opposition to the traditional Sufi practices of their ancestors.¹⁴ This caused a religious and generational divide among the Muslim minority to an extent. Further international parties like Iran have been using trade links used by terrorists in the region to circumvent The United States of America's sanctions. This has also played a role in spreading religious education best suits their interests. Since the beginning of the insurgency, the group has focused on targeting existing government infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and postal offices. Such attacks aim to increase chaos and help the group present itself as an alternative way of governance.

¹³ "Civil Society Perspectives: ISIL In Africa – Key Trends And Developments". 2022. United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/files/documents/2022/Apr/cted_civil_society_perspectives_isil_in_africa_april_2022.pdf.

¹⁴ "Stemming The Insurrection In Mozambique'S Cabo Delgado". 2021. *International Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/southern-africa/mozambique/303-stemming-insurrection-mozambiques-cabo-delgado>.

The resource curse phenomenon has once again been proved in the case of Mozambique. Precious gems have been mined in the Montepuez district by garimpeiros (artisanal miners) for more than a decade. Due to corrupt governance and personal business ties. The garimpeiros were side-lined by the incoming foreign extractors with close ties with the government. This shift has been accompanied by the dislocation of hundreds of families.¹⁵ It has additionally invoked xenophobic attitudes against foreigners as a majority of the new extractors are Tanzanian. Al Shabaab launched a violent attack on Palma a port town close to the natural gas field in the Afungi peninsula that led to the death of foreign workers. Due to this instability, ExxonMobil and Total companies involved in the natural gas projects have suspended their work in Cabo Delgado. This further exasperates the problems as the government struggles to give employment to the populace who might now seek to join the insurgents.

The group has also been exploiting colonial-era tensions between various ethnic groups. Al Shabaab mainly recruits from Mwani and Makua people that have traditionally been farmers, fishermen, traders and smugglers.¹⁶ The exclusion of the two groups from benefitting from either the gem extraction or the natural gases has not boded well with the group. This puts them at odds with the Makonde group¹⁷ from where their recruitment rates are relatively low. The region's exclusion from the national political power and economic progress coupled with religious ethnic and linguistic diversity made the situation in the region combustible. The civil war had set the precedent for how the monopoly over violence translates to power. Making an armed rebellion an appealing option in the face of desperation.

The continental connection of IS and its affiliates played a role in making the capture of Mocimboa da Praia and other areas possible. The Mozambique security suspects a strong link between

¹⁵ Alden, Chris, and Sergio Chichava. 2020. "Cabo Delgado and the Rise of Militant Islam: Another Niger Delta in the Making?" South African Institute of International Affairs. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27022>.

¹⁶ Cook, Nicolas. 2022. "Insurgency In Northern Mozambique: Nature And Responses". Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>.

¹⁷ Ibid

the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the IS affiliate in Congo and the Al Shabaab. The assault level employed by the group to capture Mocimboa da Praia which relied on coordinated assaults from multiple fronts supports this possibility.¹⁸ The leader cadre in Al Shabaab also hail mainly from Tanzania as the presence of trained IS fighters there has been longer. The attempt to storm Mizeze prison and free the captives to gain recruiters in Mozambique is a tactic previously employed by IS during the "breaking the walls"¹⁹ campaign and by its affiliate ADF in Congo as well²⁰. Employing previously tested tactics in new geographical areas comes with its benefits and costs. The history of these tactics makes these moves predictable but the newness of the area where they are employed gives the offensive an edge. Al Shabaab lost control of the Mocimboa da Praia in August 2021 after holding it for a year. Despite this drawback, the group has managed to extend its influence by launching attacks in Southern Cabo Delgado and northern Nampula district where previously the violence had been absent.

There are a few players involved in the attempt to counter this insurgency and the spread of extremist violence in Mozambique. Rwanda has intervened in the country sighting the responsibility to protect as its motivator.²¹ Nyusi the current leader of Mozambique also requested this move as he struggled to deal with the uprising. However, this intervention came after Emanuel

¹⁸ "Stemming The Insurrection In Mozambique'S Cabo Delgado". 2021. *International Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/southern-africa/mozambique/303-stemming-insurrection-mozambiques-cabo-delgado>.

¹⁹ Glenn, Cameron, Mattison Rowan, John Caves, and Garrett Nada. 2019. "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, And Fall Of The Islamic State". *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>.

²⁰ Ingram, Haroro J, and Lorenzo Vidino. 2021. "The Islamic State Is In Congo. What Now?". *Lawfare*. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/islamic-state-congo-what-now>.

²¹ "Stemming The Insurrection In Mozambique'S Cabo Delgado". 2021. *International Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/southern-africa/mozambique/303-stemming-insurrection-mozambiques-cabo-delgado>.

Macron visited Kigali in 2021.²² Some have raised valid concerns that as France pulls its resources and personnel from fighting militancy in the Sahel region to remain consistent with its policy; it has backed and encouraged Rwanda to intervene to protect its interests in Mozambique such as the Total natural gas plant.²³ The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has deployed peacekeepers in the region. The RENAMO, the main opposition party and SADC leadership has criticized the Rwandan involvement citing various humanitarian and coordination concerns.

The Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique (FADM), the military Branch of Mozambique finds itself ill equipped to handle the new problem. The civil war years have exhausted its resources and it has been unable to build back. Due to this, a police unit Unidade Intervenção Rápida (UIR) has been the main force in the country. The FADM and UIR have struggled to coordinate and fight the insurgency as a united front.²⁴ The ethnic identities in these institutions over the last few years have also become a contentious issue. Many view the UIR as dominated by the Makonde group due to its leadership cadre.

Private military companies (PMCs) have also flooded the country. The initial arrival of these companies was to protect the plants set up by foreign companies such as Total. However, now the government is relying on them to help counter the insurgents. Burnham Global and Paramount Group are the two groups helping the government with logistical support as they do not provide the service of mercenaries. This need is fulfilled by Dyck Advisory group, South African-based PMC.²⁵

²² Ibid

²³ Clark, Phil. 2021. "How Big Is The Islamist Threat In Mozambique? And Why Are Rwandan Troops There?". *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/how-big-is-the-islamist-threat-in-mozambique-and-why-are-rwandan-troops-there-168123>.

²⁴ Cook, Nicolas. 2022. "Insurgency In Northern Mozambique: Nature And Responses". Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>.

²⁵ Ibid

All the above-mentioned parties that play a role on the ground have been responsible for human rights abuses in the country.²⁶ These abuses play a role in the recruitment strategy employed by Al Shabaab. The lack of coordination between the multiple players has further rendered it difficult for the groups to fight the insurgency effectively. Though Al Shabaab lost the areas it occupied in 2020 it continues to expand and grow despite holding no definite geographical territory. Its lack of a fixed base made the group harder to track.

Conclusion

The international community needs to understand that the problem of terrorism in Africa can only be countered through structural changes at the governance level of each country where extremist violence is prevalent. Perceived and real differences need to be bridged to reduce the appeal of these groups. The various ethnic affiliations must be considered on a local and country level while these counter-terrorism measures are being laid out as ground realities vary across the country for the same ethnicity. As seen in the case of the Fulani tribe in Mali and Nigeria. The Fulani in Mali are often victims of state ignorance and violence. Whereas in Nigeria as the leadership is Fulani, they are often allowed more leeway to be violent. Both are dangerous when looking through the lens of counter-terrorism and human rights. Ethnic and religious cleaves are the most exploited by IS and its affiliates and ensuring that these tensions do not transform into armed struggles should be a government priority.

While these affiliations are often based on shaky grounds and issues such as leadership disputes, theological disagreement, and local aspirations often bring an end to these relations as seen in the

²⁶ "Mozambique: Civilians Killed As War Crimes Committed By Armed Group, Government Forces, And Private Military Contractors – New Report". 2021. *Amnesty International*.
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case of Boko Hara and IS. Regional efforts are also central to counter the affiliates as the porous borders help these groups hide better and invade the law. This can be seen in the case of Tanzania and Mozambique and the Chad basin in the Sahel. Adopting a flexible yet coordinated counter-terrorism policy is a must to battle the current scenario in the African continent.

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