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Contents

About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

Pledging Bay`a: A Benefit or Burden to the Islamic State?

By Daniel Milton and Muhammad al-`Ubaydi

Upper: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi - first public speech after the formation of the "Islamic State" on July 4, 2014.
Lower: CTC's interactive Islamic State bay`a timeline, found at the CTC website.

Relationships between entities form an important element of warfare. In the current conflict in Iraq and Syria, the military alignment (or lack thereof) of states will likely be a key determinant in the eventual outcome. However, states are not the only actors within Iraq-Syria that are forming and evolving in their relationships with others. Over the past several months, one interesting facet in regards to relationships between actors involved in the conflict has been how the Islamic State has received and accepted a number of pledges from other organizations and groups in its quest to establish and expand its caliphate.

This issue of the *CTC Sentinel* is designed to address this phenomenon by focusing on four of the most complex and challenging regions in which organizations have offered *bay`a* to the Islamic State: the case of Jama'at Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis in Egypt, the crowded environment of actors in North Africa, the longstanding jihadi landscape in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, and the recent acceptance of Boko Haram into the Islamic State's portfolio of actors. This issue also includes a discussion of a more structured manner for thinking about cooperation and relationships among terrorist organizations.

In addition, this special edition of the *CTC Sentinel* is being launched together with an interactive online map showing key events in the progression of *bay`a* being offered to the Islamic State.[1] Designed to be a living resource for those interested in following this issue, it provides specifics

1 The *bay`a* map is available on the CTC's ISIL resource page at https://www.ctc.usma.edu/isil-resources.

regarding who has offered *bay`a,* where such offers have come from, when (if) they were accepted, and other relevant information regarding this process.

The purpose of this article is to examine how the Islamic State is developing relationships with other groups and individuals that have expressed interest in being a part of its "caliphate." The mechanism by which the Islamic State expands its caliphate is either through territories immediately adjacent to those currently under its control or through welcoming groups that pledge allegiance to its "Caliph" that are located in different parts of the world. The latter mechanism is known as *bay`a,* a concept that has roots in the history of Islam and has evolved over time. In addition to understanding how the Islamic State has been collecting *bay`a*, this article also discusses how these relationships do not necessarily strengthen the organization. Over time, these relationships may present just as much challenge as promise to the Islamic State.

Bay` a vs. Support

Before delving into how *bay`a* factors into the current events, it is important to distinguish between *bay`a* and support. In Islamic parlance, the *bay`a* to the Caliph is a pledge of allegiance that, upon being accepted, formally brings the group or the individual making the pledge under the authority of the Caliph. The origins of this practice is tied to early believers that were reported to have pledged *bay`a* to Muhammad.

In 627-628, Muhammad travelled to Mecca to visit the Ka'aba (what is now recognized as one of the most holy sites in Islam). However, the local tribe that controlled access to the area, the Quraysh, had decided to prevent Mohammad and his followers from completing their journey. After negotiations to try to resolve the impasse, Mohammad sent an emissary to meet with the Quraysh. When his return was delayed, Mohammad and his followers feared the emissary had been killed.

In response to the delay and consequent anxiety, the followers who were traveling with the Prophet took a pledge to avenge what they perceived as the death of one of their own and to follow the Prophet.[2] This pledge was solemnized through the joining of hands, with the person offering the pledge physically touching the Prophet. It was said that this show of unity and dedication convinced the Quraysh to negotiate.[3] The fact that the followers of the Prophet made the pledge is significant; the fact that it was done even though they had very few weapons and faced likely defeat if they engaged in a fight against the Quraysh is what makes it such an impactful story.[4] The significance of the pledge of *bay`a* on this occasion led to the first mention of *bay`a* in the Quran:[5]

> Certainly was Allah pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you, [O Muhammad], under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility upon them and rewarded them with an imminent conquest.[6]

This custom continued with Muhammad's successors, the caliphs, as a sign of their political legitimacy. It is worth nothing at this point that a mere pledge of support does not carry the same binding relationship as a *bay`a* . Given this political importance of the *bay`a* in Islamic history, the Islamic State's claim of expansion has thus far been premised on groups pledging *bay`a* to its Caliph and not simply support.

However, there is a lack of unified terminology in much of the public discussion of the Islamic State's relationships with other jihadi actors. Some have conflated the idea of verbal expressions of support to mean the same thing as a pledge of allegiance (*bay`a*). These two concepts are not equivalent and have different implications regarding expected behavior and the future prognosis of such relationships.

What this means is that words of support may not carry the weight ascribed to them in some analyses. Jihadis are sometimes hesitant to openly criticize and fight against each other, especially when new groups emerge or enter into the discussion.[7] This may be due to the fact that there is concern about introducing *fitna* (sedition) into the community, which according to some interpretations of the Quran is considered to be worse than killing.[8] Consequently, even if jihadi groups do not agree with each other, they will still offer generic words of support to opposing groups and their operations. However, such words should not be given greater weight than they actually deserve. They do not imply that a formal relationship exists.

To be clear, even when *bay`a* is given, it might carry different weight in some regions and cultures than in others (see Geoff Porter's article later in this edition for an examination of this idea in the region of North Africa). It is also unclear how durable such pledges will be as time progresses. Nevertheless, the ongoing offering of *bay`a* by jihadis and jihadist organizations and groups, and its subsequent acceptance (or not) by the Islamic State, represents a potentially dangerous development that bears further analysis.

The Expanding Caliphate? The Islamic State and Its Affiliates

The Islamic State has been collecting *bay`a* from individuals and organizations around the world since June 2014. At that point in time, the Islamic State's spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani announced the formation of "the Islamic State" and said that all faithful Muslims, whether

2 Only one person did not pledge *bay`a*on this occasion.

3 Saifur Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*, p. 153. This incident is discussed at length by Abu Jandal al-Azdi in March-April of 2004 in issue number 13 of the jihadist Arabic language magazine *Sawt al-Jihad,* which deals with "Issues of Jihad and the Mujahidin in the Arabian Peninsula."

4 The lack of weapons was a point made by Abu Suhayb al-Maqdisi in a post that appear on the *Shumukh al-Islam Network* on 21 April 2013.

5 It is important to note that this was not the first time that *bay`a* was pledged to the Prophet, although the context surrounding it as well as the number of individuals make it significant.

6 Quran, Surat Al-Fath 48:18.

7 To be clear, jihadi organizations are not immune from criticizing or fighting against each other. Recent events between the Islamic State and other organization (al-Qa`ida and Jabhat al-Nusra) have been marked by periods of heated fights online and violent clashes on the ground. However, in the initial stages, differences at times are deemphasized.

8 Quran al-Baqra 2:191. One jihadhi wrote an article which appeared in October-November 2003 in the 4th issue of the Arabic language magazine *Sawt al-Jihad* titled "Fitna [sedition] is worse than slaughter."

groups or individuals, were required to provide *bay`a* to the new caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[9][10] Despite the fact that there was a significant amount of backlash against the Islamic State and its claim that it was owed *bay`a* , a number of individuals and groups have given *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi since the declaration of the caliphate.[11]

Each of these new *bay`a* is reported by the Islamic State (and in many cases the mass media) as evidence of the Islamic State's global appeal. However, more analysis is needed into the circumstances surrounding these offers and acceptance of *bay`a* before any conclusion can be reached regarding their overall effect on the Islamic State's brand and potential expansion. The rest of this article examines three questions that are critical to understanding the implications of *bay`a* in the current environment: why don't all jihadi groups give *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi; why doesn't al-Baghdadi just accept all pledges of *bay`a* ; and what is the practical impact of having given *bay`a* ? After answering these questions, this article offers a brief examination of the case of Boko Haram and concludes with some recommendations for thinking about the issue of *bay`a* and the Islamic State.

Why Don't Already Established Groups Give Bay`a to the Islamic State?

As previously discussed, there were a number of new groups that emerged in response to the declaration of the Caliphate that pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi. However, the emergence of the Islamic State onto the world stage threw already existing jihadi groups into some level of turmoil as these groups and their members were faced with the decision of continuing with their current affiliation or independent status, aligning with a more established and well-known entity such as al-Qa`ida, or joining with an up-and-coming group like the Islamic State.[12] In general, there are two levels at which the decision to pledge *bay`a* to the Islamic State or not plays out that are worth examining: senior-level leadership or lower-level personnel.

As J.M. Berger has noted, from the perspective of the senior members of already established groups, there is a credibility issue at stake if they have already pledged allegiance to other organizations (such as al-Qa`ida).[13] If they choose to go against the previous *bay`a* that they have offered to someone like Ayman al-Zawahiri, then what does this say to their subordinates about the *bay`a* that they in turn have pledged to those very leaders? Beyond that, many senior leaders of already existing groups have spoken against the Islamic State's declaration of a caliphate. Going back on these pronouncements is a recipe for disunity.

There are other important reasons for senior-level leadership of already established organizations to avoid pledging *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi. For one, leaders of already established organizations may not see eye-to-eye with the Islamic State on matters of ideology and practice.[14] Such disagreements are not easily forgotten, nor can they be simply swept under the rug due to one group's success. This provides an important reminder that the emergence of the Islamic State has not caused others groups or individuals to forget the history its shares with them. In some cases, the Islamic State's willingness to act against the advice of other groups or individuals may create distrust that may never be overcome.

However, the issue is far less clear at the lower-levels of these organizations. It is at this level that the emergence and popularity of the Islamic State poses one of its greatest challenges to already existing jihadi organizations. Outside of the leadership of established organizations, mid- and lower-level members of these groups have been defecting to the Islamic State. We have seen examples of this as members of already established groups have been defecting towards the Islamic State in the Af-Pak region, Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Libya, and elsewhere in North Africa.[15]

This is not to suggest that the Islamic State is immune to the pressure defections. Even now there are some indications that such defections have already been taking place.[16] Indeed, the very fear of defections may be one of the reasons that al-Adnani's announcement of the Islamic State and its Caliph had a section that seemed to be directly addressed towards those who would be faced with pressure to disavow al-Baghdadi's legitimacy at some future point:

> Be very wary of breaking the ranks. For you to be snatched by birds would be better for you than to break the ranks or take part in doing so. And if anyone wants to break the ranks, split his head with bullets and empty its insides, whoever he may be.[17]

Such pressures will only increase as the Islamic State faces more scrutiny and resistance over time. The organization, which has enjoyed operating from a position of strength and momentum,

9 Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "This is the Promise of Allah," *Al-Hayat Media Center*, (2014).

10 To be clear, groups do not simply pledge *bay`a* to "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi." They usually use some longer form of his name. In the case of the recent pledge by Boko Haram, the pledge was given to "the Caliph of Muslims Abubakar Abu Bakr Ibrahim ibn Awad ibn Ibrahim al-Husseini al-Qurashi."

11 Such rejections came from religious figures in many countries. Prominent examples included Mehmet Gormez in Turkey and Abdulaziz al-Sheikh in Saudi Arabia. See Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkey's top cleric calls new Islamic 'caliphate' illegitimate," *Reuters*, July 22, 2014 and "Islamic State is our top enemy: Saudi mufti," *Al-Jazeera*, August 19, 2014.

12 Nelly Lahoud and Muhammad al-`Ubaydi, "The War of Jihadists Against Jihadists in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 7:3 (2014).

13 J.M. Berger, "The Islamic State vs. al Qaeda: Who's winning the war to become the jihadi superpower?," *Foreign Policy*, September 2, 2014.

14 Lahoud and al-`Ubaydi, ibid.

15 Basma Atassi, "Qaeda chief annuls Syrian-Iraqi jihad merger," *Al-Jazeera*, June, 9 2014; Omar Shabbi, "AQIM defectors raise fears of the Islamic State branch in North Africa," *Al-Monitor*, September 9, 2014; Gianluca Mezzofiore, "Syria Isis News: 40 al-Qaida Nusra Fighters Defect to Islamic State with Enslaved Woman Given to Leader," *International Business Times*, October 21, 2014; Brian Todd, "the Islamic Statethe Islamic State gaining ground in Yemen, competing with al Qaeda," *CNN.com*, January 22, 2015; "Islamic State appoints leaders of 'Khorasan province,' issues veiled threat to Afghan Taliban," *Long War Journal*, January 27, 2015; Rawa Jawad, "How strong is Islamic State in Libya," *BBC News – Africa*, February 4, 2015; Rita Katz, Rumours of Pro-Isis Factions within al-Shabaab are not far-fetched," *International Business Times,* March 17, 2015.

16 Tom Coghlan, "Islamic State hit by desertions and disgust at brutality," *The Times*, February 21, 2015.

17 al-Adnani, (2014).

will ultimately have to face the very challenge that has been a boon to it until this point: that of groups picking off some of its members. Such reports of defections are already emerging, although it is too early to say if such defections have reached a critical level.[18]

Why Not Accept All Bay`a Automatically and Unconditionally?

It is important to note that, to be official and valid, *bay`a* must be offered by an organization and then accepted by the Islamic State. And, while the Islamic State has shown itself willing to accept *bay`a* from a wide range of actors, such acceptances have not always come quickly. For example, on October 14, 2014, the spokesperson for the TTP and five other TTP emirs released a message in which they offered *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State. A number of other groups similarly offered *bay`a* before and after this point. The first official round of acceptances came in a speech by al-Baghdadi on November 13, 2014. However, a specific acceptance of the TTP offer was not made. In fact, offers made by organizations in a number of non-Arab countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Philippines, Caucasia, India, and Indonesia) were not explicitly accepted in Baghdadi's November 2014 speech either. The fact that these organizations were not being accepted raised questions about whether there was something wrong with their offer of *bay`a* or whether there was a bias on the part of the Islamic State against individuals and groups in non-Arab countries.

A potential reason for this delay came in the 5th issue of *Dabiq*, the Islamic State's English language magazine that is released on a periodic basis. In this particular issue, a section titled "Remaining and Expanding" appeared. In this section appeared the same language from al-Baghdadi's audio message regarding the formal acceptance of *bay`a* from organizations within Arab states. However, the (unattributed) author of this section of the magazine then went on to discuss "a number of other groups in Khurasan [Afghanistan & Pakistan], al-Qawqaz [the Caucasus region], Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, and elsewhere" that had also offered *bay`a* , but were left off the list of formal acceptances.

In what followed, the author stated that, while the *bay`a* of these other organizations was accepted, formal recognition of them as provinces *(wilayat)* of the Islamic State would have to wait until 1) the appointment or recognition of leadership by the Islamic State and/or 2) the establishment of a direct line of communication between these groups and the Islamic State so that these groups could "receive information and directives from [al-Baghdadi]." The author also noted that this was the case even though some of these organizations were stronger than organizations that had been formally accepted and designated as provinces.

The first non-Arab region in which groups and individuals overcame these hurdles to gain acceptance of its *bay`a* was in Khurasan (Afghanistan-Pakistan), a region from which multiple individuals pledged allegiance on multiple occasions (see Don Rassler's article later in this edition for more on this topic). The first of these pledges was made on October 13, 2014. After a number of other attempts, the *bay`a* from these actors was finally accepted on January 26, 2015, after a period of 105 days. According to the official statement of the Islamic State by al-Adnani, soldiers in Khurasan "have fulfilled the conditions and met the requirements for the declaration of *wilayat* Khurasan."[19] He then proceeded to identify the emir and deputy of this new province. Subsequent pledges to al-Baghdadi in this region have been made to the local emir.

While one should avoid reading too much into the delay between a group's offer of *bay`a* and its formal recognition and establishment as a province of the Islamic State, there are several interesting points that can be made at this stage regarding this process and what it suggests about the Islamic State's strategy for managing these relationships.

First, there is a process by which the Islamic State is attempting to organize its global supporters. The process of accepting *bay`a* and claiming expansion is not going to occur simply for the sake of collecting affiliates. Thus, even though the Islamic State has clearly shown itself to be more willing than al-Qa`ida under Usama Bin Ladin to accept new affiliates, it still is exercising some level of due diligence and concern.[20] It may be that the Islamic State recognizes that making sure affiliates are led by trusted and vetted leaders is critical to maintaining a semblance of unity in its expanding caliphate. This may provide a potential explanation for a rumor that circulated on jihadi forums that a number of members of the Islamic State were dispatched by al-Baghdadi to return to Libya to help organize the emerging group of supporters there.[21]

Second, the fact that the Islamic State is waiting to establish communication and select leaders before officially rebranding them as provinces suggests a point of vulnerability in the lifecycle of these organizations. The Islamic State, particularly as its primary territory in Iraq and Syria comes increasingly under stress, will struggle to maintain communication with outside groups and actors. The need may arise to sacrifice some operational security to maintain communications with these outside groups.

Third, as has been noted in the course of this examination, not all *bay`a* are accepted uniformly. Several pledges from members of the TTP were not accepted right away; in addition, although Boko Haram's pledge was finally accepted, it has been suggested that it was in the works for some time. Indeed, the Islamic State appears to have started by accepting the *bay`a* of smaller (but possibly easier to manage)

18 Erika Solomon, "Isis morale falls as momentum slows and casualties mount," *Financial Times,* December 19, 2014; Heather Saul, "Suicide bombers 'defecting from Isis' and fleeing to Turkey or rival militant groups," *The Independent*, February 9, 2015.

19 Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "Say, 'Die In Your Rage'" *Al-Hayat Media Center,* (2015).

20 For more on Bin Ladin's concern over affiliates, see Nelly Lahoud, Stuart Caudill, Liam Collins, Gabriel Koehler-Derrick, Don Rassler, and Muhammad al-`Ubaydi, *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?* (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012).

21 Although the possibility of the Islamic State sending operatives to Libya was raised online previously, it was only recently confirmed in media reporting regarding the Islamic State in Libya. Catherine Herridge, "Sources: More than a dozen ISIS operatives in Libya, but no US authority to strike," *FoxNews.com*, March 3, 2015.

groups.[22] This is a potential weakness that can possibly be exploited. These smaller organizations that have been formally recognized and branded as "provinces" of the Islamic State may be more vulnerable to counterterrorism forces. If these smaller provinces can be picked off, the optic of a "state" that is unable to defend its expanded territory may be bad for the leadership of the Islamic State. Such a blemish on the Islamic State's image would doubtless serve both as a boon to those opposed to the Islamic State and potentially as a deterrent to those on the fence that are considering joining it.

What is the Practical Impact of Bay`a?

The long-term impact of *bay`a* for the Islamic State has yet to be determined. For many of these affiliates, the time that has elapsed since their acceptance into the fold of the Islamic State has been less than a year. Based on observation of what these satellite organizations have done since declaring *bay`a*, the results at this point are far from convincing when it comes to the overall prognosis of the Islamic State's expanding caliphate. Without a doubt, some organizations that have pledged *bay`a* to the Islamic State have been able to carry out operations and appear to have effective propaganda wings. This is particularly the case in Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, and the Af-Pak region. For example, on January 29, 2015, Jama'at Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis (*Wilayat* Sinai) carried out an operation which resulted in dozens of casualties and later released a statement on the attack (Nelly Lahoud's article in this issue explores the IS in the Sinai in more detail).[23] In this section, I offer a few examples that illustrate some of the struggles and challenges of some the Islamic State's recent affiliates.

In the case of Jund al-Khilafa fi Ard al-Jaza'ir (Algeria), the allegiance with the Islamic State, combined with the execution of a French hostage broadcast to the world, brought a significant reaction from the Algerian government. About a month after being formally accepted into the Islamic State by al-Baghdadi, the leader of Jund al-Khilafa fi Ard al-Jaza'ir was shot dead by Algerian security forces.[24] The group has been quiet since that point, only releasing one message on March 9, 2015. Prior to this message, some analysts had wondered if the group may have effectively ceased to exist. Another possibility is that the group (or what remains of it) has simply moved away from the public spotlight to plan its next moves. Either way, the brash presentation of the group's allegiance to the Islamic State seems to have taken a backseat for the time being.

For other organizations, it seems that while pledging *bay`a* resulted in a fair amount of media attention, there was no appreciable change in their ability to carry out operations in the short-term. For example, Jund al-Khilafa fi Tunis (Tunisia), after offering *bay`a* in an audio message on December 5, 2014, did not appear to do anything after this point. There were no media messages or claims of operations forthcoming from this organization. However, 100 days later, on March 15, 2015, a group using the same name posted a statement online in which is claimed to be organizing itself for a formal pledge to al-Baghdadi:

> Wait for the glad tidings of what will bring you joy and bring joy to the Muslims in general, soon… You know that the stage of sifting and building takes time. For the sake of continuing to build the structure and solidifying it, the foundations and pillars must be strong.[25]

On March 18, 2015, 3 days after this statement appeared, news of an attack at the Bardo Museum in Tunis emerged.[26] To be clear, at the time of this writing there has been no claim of responsibility for the attack and it may be unrelated to the aforementioned pledge. It bears repeating, however, that the lack of media or military activity on the part of some of these emerging organizations on behalf of IS at one point in time is not conclusive regarding the possibility of future activity and operations.

One other possibility is worth mentioning regarding the perceived lack of operations carried out in regions in which groups have pledged support to the Islamic State. Judging the efficacy of these groups based on their ability to carry out operations or create propaganda materials alone assumes that the execution of violence is the purpose of these relationships. However, it may be that the organizations in some regions are more useful to the Islamic State for their logistical contributions. In Indonesia, for example, a number of videos have shown pledges made to al-Baghdadi and parades in support of the Islamic State.[27] Nevertheless, no public announcement of an affiliate in the region has occurred, nor have attacks in the country been attributed to the Islamic State or its supporters. However, reports about an increasing flow of fighters coming from Indonesia have emerged.[28] While such reports are anecdotal, it is important to remember that the Islamic State may use support and *bay`a* from outside organizations for a variety of ends (recruiting, fundraising, etc.), not just the execution of violence.[29]

Finally, it does not appear that *bay`a* is a panacea for the traditional challenges faced by terrorist or insurgent organizations: finances, logistics, leadership, etc. Shortly after the offer and acceptance of *bay`a* rom a number

22 This may be the Islamic State's way of trying to deal with the classic principal-agent problem, in which the principal undertakes certain actions to increase its ability to monitor its agent's behavior.

23 Patrick Kingsley and Manu Abdo, "At least 32 killed in Egypt as militants attack army and police targets in Sinai," *Guardian*, January 30, 2015.

24 "Algerian army 'kills jihadist behind Herve Gourdel beheading'," *BBC News – Africa*, December 23, 2014.

25 SITE Intelligence Group, "Tunisian Fighters Respond to IS Fighter Urging They Pledge Allegiance to IS," March 18, 2015.

26 Greg Botelho and Mohammed Tawfeeq, "Tunisia museum attack kills at least 19; three gunmen sought," *CNN*, March 18, 2015.

27 George Roberts, "Terrorism expert Sidney Jones says Indonesian jihadists celebrating IS victories in Iraq, pledging allegiance online," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, June 12, 2014.

28 "The Muslim nation where ISIS is free to recruit," *CBS News*, October 6, 2014; Erin Banco, "Number Of ISIS Recruits In Indonesia More Than Tripled In Recent Months," *International Business Times*, December 9, 2014.

29 The use of different spaces for different purposes is not uncommon for terrorist groups. While the group Hezbollah has facilitated attacks in Latin America, it seems mostly now to rely on the region for other purposes, especially fundraising. Matthew Levitt, "South of the Border, A Threat From Hezbollah," *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, (2013); Arthur Brice, "Iran, Hezbollah mine Latin America for revenue, recruits, analysts say," *CNN*, 3 June 2013.

of jihadists in Libya, and the creation of three *wilaya* (provinces) in Libya, a message appeared on Twitter from an individual claiming to reside in the region. While offering some praise for the organization, he highlighted some problems that the group was facing and suggested that the Islamic State take measures to remedy these problems. Among them was the need for money and leadership within the nascent organization.[30]

The Case of Boko Haram

Boko Haram, which has been carrying out a sustained level of violence in northeastern Nigeria since 2009, first mentioned al-Baghdadi in a July 2014 message of support for the broader jihadi movement.[31] In fact, al-Baghdadi was mentioned alongside al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and Taliban head Mullah Omar. Despite some claiming that this first message was a pledge of loyalty to al-Baghdadi, it was actually only a show of support and unity for him and his organization. The fact that it mentioned other jihadi leaders reinforces this fact.

However, as time progressed, Boko Haram's demonstration of support for al-Baghdadi increasingly transitioned into a much closer affinity between the two groups. The most recent evidence of this has been the rising level of sophistication in Boko Haram's media campaign, to include videos that mimic the style utilized by the Islamic State.[32] Such developments culminated in the public pledge by Abubakar Shekau to al-Baghdadi in an audio statement released by Boko Haram's media wing on March 8, 2015 and the acceptance of this pledge by the spokesman of the Islamic State on March 13, 2015.[33]

While Jacob Zenn offers a more detailed analysis of the history of the budding relationship between Boko Haram and the Islamic State elsewhere in this issue, a brief analysis of the potential motivations and hesitancies of both actors in entering into this relationship reemphasizes the importance of looking at *bay`a* in terms of potential advantages and drawbacks. Such an analysis also provides a view into potential fissures that may arise between these organizations over the long-term.

On the part of the Islamic State, being able to add a group of Boko Haram's size and celebrity is a large boon to its portfolio. This addition might be especially useful to the Islamic State's ability to continue its narrative of "remaining and expanding" in the face of ongoing offensives, especially in Iraq.[34] For the Islamic State, however, the risk of accepting Boko Haram is not insignificant. The chance that a significant boost to its manpower or capabilities will come from Nigeria seems small. And the Islamic State runs the risk of being overshadowed by an affiliate which it cannot control.[35] Shekau has shown himself to be wild, crude, and seemingly erratic in some decision making.[36] To make matters more difficult, Boko Haram's organizational structure has been described as one that is decentralized, with internal divisions taking place not all that infrequently, especially when it comes to significant decisions.[37] The optics for the Islamic State of being the reason behind the fracturing of an organization or being unable to control an organization that acts contrary to its desires would cast a shadow over the Islamic State's caliphate. Despite the acceptance of this pledge, these issues will not go away and may only increase over time.

On the part of Boko Haram, the benefits of joining the Islamic State at this time are not obvious and incontrovertible. While the Islamic State can offer its brand, it is unclear what the tangible benefits of that association would be.[38] It is unlikely that already established fighters are going to be flowing from the Islamic State to Boko Haram in Nigeria. And, despite al-Adnani's call for new fighters to come to Nigeria, it remains to be seen if association with the Islamic State will serve as a significant draw.[39] Finally, given the increasing financial pressure under which the Islamic State finds itself, it is not a sure bet that financial support would be forthcoming and enduring. Finally, while Boko Haram might not have to change much if accepted into the fold of the Islamic State, it would presumably have some smaller measure of autonomy as opposed to what it is used to while operating on its own. As time passes, some of these issues may become more and more pressing for Boko Haram.

In sum, there are positives and negatives for both the Islamic State and Boko Haram in drawing into a closer relationship. That said, the acceptance by IS of the formal pledge of *bay`a* offered by Boko Haram may expose both organizations to increased risk from each other, not to mention the possibility of increased counterterrorism cooperation against them. These issues, illustrated in the case of Boko Haram, are present to varying degrees in all the relationships the Islamic State is forming with these organizations.

Conclusion

In the business world, expansion is not necessarily synonymous with

30 Message posted by user Abu Irhayim al-Libi on Twitter on January 15, 2015. The message included a link to an article titled "The Land of Caliphate in Libya Between the Calls for Hijra and the Reality's Challenges." The article can be accessed at https://justpaste.it/libi.

31 "Boko Haram voices support for ISIS' Baghdadi," *Al-Arabiya*, July 13, 2014.

32 Tim Lister, "Boko Haram + ISIS = Marriage from Hell," *CNN.com*, February 25, 2015.

33 For more on the allegedly budding relationship between the Islamic State and Boko Haram, see Cahal Milmo and Tom Witherrow, "Boko Haram closes in on its dream of an African caliphate – and Isis gives its blessing, and advice on strategy," *Independent*, (2014). On the pledge itself, see "Nigeria's Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Islamic State," *BBC News*, March 7, 2015.

34 The idea of "remaining and expanding" headlined issue #5 of the Islamic State's English language magazine, *Dabiq*.

35 Which is, oddly enough, the same predicament al-Qa`ida found itself in with the Islamic State's predecessor organizations al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

36 Robert Windrem, "Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau: the Man Who Would Be Africa's Bin Laden," *NBC News*, May 18, 2014; Rukmini Callimachi, "In Newly Sophisticated Boko Haram Videos, Hints of Islamic State Ties," *New York Times*, February 20, 2015.

37 "Boko Haram: Growing Threat to the U.S. Homeland," report prepared for the *U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security*, September 13, 2013. The decentralized structure of the group came into play during negotiations with the Nigerian government. Roddy Barclay and Thomas Hansen, "Nigeria's Frayed Ceasefire With Boko Haram," *Forbes*, October 22, 2014.

38 Some may point out that the aforementioned improvement in Boko Haram's media presentation was a tangible benefit that came at the hand of IS personnel who were sent to Nigeria to help the organization. This is certainly possible, but not confirmed. It is equally likely that Boko Haram elevated its media campaign on its own to appear more capable to IS.

39 "IS Accepts Boko Haram Pledge of Allegiance," *ABC News*, March 12, 2015.

success. Many companies have done more damage than good to themselves because they expanded too fast or too much.[40] Expansion can be an indicator of success and strength, but only if properly managed over the short- and long-term. The Islamic State's expanding portfolio of affiliates throughout the world should be viewed in a similar light. While potentially a boon to the organization, the mismanagement of such a portfolio leaves the Islamic State open to significant criticisms regarding its capabilities, legitimacy, and strategy. This issue of the *CTC Sentinel* represents an effort to provide deeper understanding of what the Islamic State is doing with regarding to those offering *bay`a* and what the implications of these actions are for the future.

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The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

40 Consider, for example, Krispy Kreme doughnuts. The value of the company's stock, which was at its highest level in 2003-2004, shed over $40 a share and bottomed out above $1.00 a share by 2009 due to "[overexpansion] during the donut heyday of the 1990s." Rick Newman, "15 Companies That Might Not Survive 2009," *U.S News and World Report*, February 6, 2009; "Krispy Kreme's future might not be so sweet," *WRAL*, March 9, 2009.

Situating the Emergence of the Islamic State of Khorasan

By Don Rassler

In March 2014, nine members of al-Qa`ida, who were active with the group in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, defected to the group that now calls itself the "Islamic State."[1] The defections took place months before the Islamic State formally announced its Caliphate and at that time little public attention was given to the shift in allegiances of those al-Qa`ida men, despite one of them being the brother of famed jihadi ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[2] The defections, at the time, seemed more like an outlier, but in hindsight they were an early sign of broader developments affecting Afghanistan's and Pakistan's militant landscapes. The Islamic State's formal declaration of its "Khorasan" chapter in January 2015 is another indicator of the changes that are taking place. These changes are being pushed by what currently appears to be a fairly loosely configured, but noteworthy, network of groups and individuals who are trying to alter the direction of South and Central Asia's multiple jihads.

This article provides an overview, to the extent possible given the evolving and dynamic nature of this problem set, of the network of actors who are currently supporting the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK) in Afghanistan and Pakistan and are present there.[3] It concludes with an analysis of the opportunities and limitations that are likely to affect the actions and survivability of ISK over the short- to mid-term.

The Early Development of the Islamic State in Khorasan Network

Defining the ISK network is a difficult task. The network is dynamic and changes occur weekly, if not more frequently. The creation, spread, and development of the ISK network is also clouded in rumor and speculation, fanned by informational wars being waged by Islamic State supporters, the Afghan and Pakistani government, and their respective agents. The number of militant groups operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the diversity of their agendas, and the shifting and at times unclear nature of their allegiances often obscures things even further. Thus, what follows is an attempt to describe the contours of the ISK network in Afghanistan and Pakistan as it currently exists. It does not claim to be comprehensive.

The Recognized

A useful starting point are those individuals and groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan who have publicly pledged *bay`a* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State's self-described "Caliph," and whose pledge has been officially recognized by the Islamic State. The individual appointed in January 2015 as ISK's leader is Hafiz Khan Saeed, a former Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) commander responsible for that group's operations in Orakzai, an agency in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that is very close to the important city of Peshawar.[4] After the death of Hakimullah Mehsud, Khan Saeed was also considered a

1 This group included: Abu `Ubayda al-Lubnani, Abu al-Muhannad al-Urduni, Abu Jarir al-Shimali (Abu Tha'ir), Abu al-Huda al-Sudani, `Abd-al-`Aziz al-Maqdisi, `Abdullah al-Banjabi, Abu Younis al-Kurdim, Abu `A'isha al-Qurtubi, and Abu Mus`ab al-Tadamuni, March 2014, CTC Library.

2 For additional background see "An Interview with the Mujahid Brother Salah-al-Din al-Maqdisi," Al Battar Media Establishment, April 24, 2014.

3 First, for analytical clarity and to bound complexity, the author has decided to limit his analysis of the development of ISK to Afghanistan and Pakistan, with a stronger emphasis placed on the latter. The author recognizes that the term "Khorasan" extends beyond the physical boundaries of these two countries. However, the author prefers to provide more precision with respect to these two countries, vice covering more geographic ground. Thus, the influence of the Islamic State in Central Asia and India are beyond the scope of this article. Second, this author also made an intentional decision to focus his analysis on the network of individuals and groups whose home base is either Afghanistan and Pakistan, and not on the dynamics associated with the flow of foreign fighters to and from either Afghanistan and Pakistan to Syria and Iraq. These two issues are clearly connected, but – due to length limitations – are also beyond the scope of this article.

4 "Say Die in Your Rage: An Address by the Spokesman for the Islamic State the Mujahid Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami," January 26, 2015; for some background on the TTP's activity in Orakzai see Raheel Khan, "The Battle for Pakistan: Militancy and Conflict in Orakzai," New America Foundation, September 2010; Tayyab Ali Shah, "Pakistan's Challenges in Orakzai," *CTC Sentinel,* 3:7 (2010).

front-runner–along with Maulana Fazlullah, then the TTP head for Malakand–to replace the deceased TTP leader. Fazlullah, as is well known, won out and assumed the TTP's leadership position in November 2013. Close to one year later, in October 2014, Khan Saeed and four other prominent TTP commanders, as well as the group's main spokesman, Shahidullah Shahid, left TTP and pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State.

The other commanders who did so at the time were "Hafiz Quran Daulat, TTP chief in Kurram Agency; Gul Zaman, TTP chief in Khyber Agency; Mufti Hassan, TTP chief in Peshawar; and Khalid Mansoor, the TTP chief in the Hangu district."[5] These were significant losses for the TTP, and a win for the Islamic State, as in one fell swoop al-Baghdadi's group gained the allegiance of the individuals the TTP had designated to control the central FATA, a strategic block of land that stretches from the settled city of Peshawar to the Khyber pass and the immediate areas surrounding it.

Then on January 10, 2015, presaging things to come, these six individuals appeared in a video where they again pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. This time they were also joined by an expanded network of individuals, all of whom pledged *bay`a* to the Islamic State's leader. This group included Saad Emirati, a former Taliban commander allegedly active in Afghanistan's Logar Province; Ubaidah al-Peshwari, leader of the al-Tawhid and Jihad Group in Peshawar; the Deputy to Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Khorasani;[6] Sheikh Muhsin, a commander from Afghanistan's Kunar province; Talha, a commander from Lakki Marwat; and Omar al-Mansur, from Pakistan's infamous *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque).[7]

According to the statement, an even broader network of groups–which ranges from the Qambar Khel tribe in Khyber and the Hudhayfah group in Dir to Qari Harun's group in Kunar province–have also pledged their support for Hafiz Khan Saeed and his position as the Amir of the mujahideen of Khorasan.[8] Less than one week after the release of the video, the ranks of Khan Saeed's group in Pakistan were also bolstered by "50 hardcore militants of the Amr Bil Maroof group, led by Commanders Haya Khan and Waheed Khan," from Khyber joining.[9] Then on January 26 the Islamic State's spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, released a statement in which he formally announced the creation of ISK with Hafiz Khan Saeed serving as its leader. Unfortunately, despite these pronouncements and recent arrests of several alleged Islamic State members in Lahore, and the death of another one in Karachi, not much is known about ISK's activities in Pakistan or its capabilities.[10] The same can be said for the linkages between ISK elements in Pakistan and the Islamic State, as well as South Asian foreign fighters who are operating on behalf of al-Baghdadi's group in Syria and Iraq.

ISK also claims a presence in Afghanistan–even if small and somewhat developmental–in what analysts are describing as a toe-hold for the group in the country.[11] The leadership of ISK's Afghanistan cell consists of a handful of commanders, some of whom, like Saad Emirati, have known operational experience, but who also appear to have never really fit in with the Taliban or were ousted from it. The individual initially assigned as ISK's deputy leader in the Khorasan region was former Guantanamo Bay detainee Abdul Rauf Khadim, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in southern Afghanistan shortly after the Islamic State announced ISK's formation.[12]

There is limited information about ISK's presence in other parts of Afghanistan. Another former Guantanamo detainee, Abdul Rahim Muslimdost, is reportedly serving as a representative of the group in Kunar and Nuristan, but other accounts suggest that Muslimdost is only based in Pakistan.[13] ISK itself claims that it also has a presence in Kunar, Nuristan, Logar and Nangahar provinces through individual commanders loyal to its group, although it is unclear how active or large these groups are, or what kind of capabilities they have. There also appears to be an Islamic State-linked group active in Farah province, led by two brothers, Abdul Malek and Abdul Razeq.[14] As noted by researcher Borhan Osman, the challenges ISK has faced in setting up shop in Afghanistan are best reflected by the fact that "so far no influential personalities, with an actual presence on the ground, have emerged in the east," a presence which will be key to bridging the Afghan and Pakistani components of ISK's network.[15]

That isn't to say that there aren't potential opportunities or that this will not change. One interesting note also raised by Borhan Osman is that: "According to an aide to [Abdul Rauf] Khadem, Mansur Dadullah, the brother

5 Amir Mir, "Pakistan Now has a Native Daesh Amir," *The News*, January 13, 2015.

6 Approximately two weeks after the establishment of the Islamic State in late June 2014, the Abtal al-Islam Establishment – which is led by Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Khorasani, initially pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, and did so independently. See "Alleged TTP Faction Official and Abtalul Islam Media Pledge to IS," SITE, July 11, 2014.

7 "Pledge of Allegiance by Amirs of the Mujahidin in Khurasan to the Amir of the Believers, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi, May God Protect Him," January 10, 2015; for background on the commanders / individuals who are reported to be active in Afghanistan see Borhan Osman, "The Shadows of 'Islamic State' in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?", Afghanistan Analysts Network, February 12, 2015.

8 "Pledge of Allegiance by Amirs of the Mujahidin in Khurasan to the Amir of the Believers, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi, May God Protect Him"; for a complete review see "Islamic State Appoints Leaders of 'Khorasan Province,' Issues Veiled Threat to Afghan Taliban," *Long War Journal*, January 27, 2015.

9 The full name of the Amr Bil Maroof group is Amar Bil Maroof wa Nahi Anil Munkir (Suppression of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue). For background on this issue see Amir Mir, "50 Amr Bil Maroof militants join Daish," *The News*, January 20, 2015.

10 Mubasher Bukhari, "Pakistan Arrests Local ISIS Commander," *Al-Arabiya*, January 21, 2015; An article about the arrest of four individuals who were allegedly acting in support of the Islamic State by a newspaper in Bangladesh claims that the group's ring leader had ties to a militant named "Sajjad" who – before his death in a police crackdown - reportedly served as an the Islamic State leader in Karachi. See "4 IS Militants on 5 Day Remand," *The Daily Star*, January 19, 2015.

11 Borhan Osman, "The Shadows of 'Islamic State' in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?" Afghanistan Analysts Network, February 12, 2015.

12 "Say Die in Your Rage: An Address by the Spokesman for the Islamic State the Mujahid Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami,"; see also Ari Shapiro, Leila Fadel and Philip Reeves, "How ISIS had Expanded Beyond its Syrian Stronghold," *NPR*, February 18, 2015.

13 Borhan Osman, "The Shadows of 'Islamic State' in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?" Afghanistan Analysts Network, February 12, 2015.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

of the fearsome Taleban commander Mullah Dadullah, had also pledged allegiance to Saeed Khan and had been in contact with the late Khadem. Mansur, who inherited his brother's network after the killing of Dadullah in 2007, was dismissed by the Afghan Taleban's leadership for his defiance soon after he succeeded his brother."[16] If this claim is true, and Mansur Dadullah were to openly side with ISK, it would give their Afghan efforts added steam.

The Extenders: Other Pledges and Noteworthy Expressions of Support

The ranks of the ISK network are bolstered by a second category of groups and individuals who have also publicly pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi, but whose *bay`a* has yet to be officially acknowledged or accepted by the Islamic State's leadership. At this point these entities are best understood as self-affiliated actors who extend the reach, influence and capabilities of the Islamic State.

Ansar-ul-Khilafat Wal-Jihad. The first Pakistan-based organization to publically pledge *bay`a* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi after he announced the creation of the Caliphate is Ansar-ul-Khilafat Wal-Jihad (Helpers of the Caliphate and Jihad, or AKWJ). The group, which was formerly known as Tehrik-e-Khilafat-o-Jihad (Movement for the Caliphate and Jihad), initially pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi in July 2014, and then did so again that September.[17] This second pledge was then followed in January 2015 by a public *bay`a* pledge which AKWJ offered to ISK leader Hafiz Khan Saeed.[18]

While not much is known about the group, it claims to have conducted a number of small-scale operations in Hyderabad and Karachi since at least May 2014. These attacks targeted police and prison officials, a lawyer defending an alleged blasphemer, and Shi`a mosques.[19] According to AKWJ, its recent round of operations in Fall 2014 were designed "for the purpose of helping the caliphate, but…also to avenge the killings of hundreds of mujahideen who were taken out of their prisons and torture cells in the darkness of the night in recent days and killed under the false pretense of having been killed in fake police encounters, in various areas of Karachi and Khyber Agency…."[20]

A November 2012 video released by AKWJ hints at more things to come, as the video privileges a quote made by Islamic State spokesperson al-Adnani, in which he calls upon Muslims to act individually and to "dedicate your efforts to killing an American or a French infidel, or any of their 'allies.'"[21] While it is possible these claims could be just bluster or propagandistic opportunism, AKWJ's decision to highlight this statement could also be a hint that this small but active group could expand its target set in the near future, most likely by targeting foreigners in Pakistan.

Pakistani Jundullah. A second Pakistan-based entity that has reportedly pledged public *bay`a* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the TTP splinter group Jundullah.[22] Details about the alleged *bay`a* are slim. Despite the existence of several Pakistani press articles on Jundullah's pledge, the author was only able to find an unofficial statement released on November 19, 2014 by Shumukh forum member Muhib Hakimullah Mehsud, which claims that Jundullah has officially pledged itself to al-Baghdadi.[23] A Pakistani press article released one week earlier referenced a statement made by Jundullah's spokesman, claiming that an Islamic State delegation recently met with Jundullah leaders in Baluchistan province to discuss ways to "unite various Pakistani militant groups."[24] These reports have not been confirmed elsewhere and, like AKWJ's pledge, the *bay`a* offered by Jundullah has yet to be publicly acknowledged by the the Islamic State. While Jundullah does not appear to be a strong actor, the group has targeted Shi`a shrines in Sindh and polio workers in Quetta, illustrating that Jundullah possesses some limited capabilities and geographic reach.[25]

Representatives of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa. The creation of ISK has been given an additional symbolic boost by controversial cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz, the leader of Pakistan's infamous Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) and the brother of Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi, who died at the complex in 2007 after it was raided by the Pakistani military.[26] The Lal Masjid complex, which includes a female seminary named Jamia Hafsa, is highly symbolic for many of Pakistan's jihadist groups. The Pakistani government's operation to gain control of the facility is viewed by entities like the TTP as a central, if not *the* central, turning point in their war against the state.[27] Since 2007 Lal Masjid has become an iconic symbol for many local jihadists of Pakistan's overreach and, given the stand made by those holed up at that facility, of resistance.

16 Ibid.

17 Tehrik-e-Khilafat-o-Jihad video, July 14, 2014; Tehrik-e-Khilafat-o-Jihad video September 17, 2014.

18 CTC Library, January 30, 2015.

19 For background on AKWJ's claimed attacks see "The Lies and True Reality of Usama Mahmood, Spokesman of Al-Qa'ida in the (Indian) Subcontinent", Ansar-ul-Khilafat Wal-Jihad video, January 4, 2014.

20 "Statement from Ansar-ul-Khilafat Wal-Jihad congratulating those whose pledge of allegiance to the Caliph of the Muslims has been accepted, and an ardent appeal to target the armies of the apostate tyrannical forces in order to support the caliphate," Ansar-ul-Khilafat Wal-Jihad video, November 22, 2014.

21 Ibid.

22 Some analysts refer to this group as the Ahmed Marwat group. The group should not be confused with the Iranian Jundullah movement, which was active in the late 2000s before the capture and death of its leader. For background on Iranian Jundullah see Audun Kolstad Wiig, "Islamist Opposition in the Islamic Republic: Jundullah and the Spread of Extremist Deobandism in Iran," FFI report, July 2, 2009.

23 The posting was titled: "Glad Tidings: A New Bay`a to the Islamic State"; see also "Jundullah Vows Allegiance to the Islamic State," *Reuters*, November 18, 2014.

24 "IS Visits Militants in Baluchistan: Jundullah Spokesman," *Dawn*, November 12, 2014.

25 See Aamir Iqbal, "Suicide Blast Targets Shikarpur Imambargah," *Newsweek Pakistan*, January 30, 2015; Haseeb Bhatti and Shakeel Qarar, "TTP Claims Attack on Rawalpindi Imambargah, Three Killed," *Dawn*, February 19, 2015; "Jundullah claims responsibility for attack on polio workers in Quetta," *Express Tribune*, November 28, 2014; For background on attacks on polio workers see Animesh Roul, "The Pakistani Taliban's Campaign Against Polio Vaccination," *CTC Sentinel* 7:8 (2014).

26 For background on the Lal Masjid operation and the Ghazi brothers see Qandeel Siddique, The Red Mosque Operation and its Impact on the Growth of the Pakistani Taliban," FFI report, October 8, 2008; Hassan Abbas, "The Road to Lal Masjid and its Aftermath," *Terrorism Monitor* 4:2 (2007); "The Lal Masjid Report," *Express Tribune*, April 28, 2013; on the development of the Punjabi Taliban see Mujahid Hussain, *Punjabi Taliban: Driving Extremism in Pakistan* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2012).

27 For example see "An Interview of Respected Ameer Omar Khalid Khorasani with Ihya-e-Khilafat," *Ihya-e-Khilafat*, October 2014, pg. 36.

As a result, the facility has been used by many Pakistan-based militants as a central image around which to craft their anti-state propaganda.

All of that is to say that the symbol of Lal Masjid, at least as a key jihadist reference point, matters–and that the activity of its leader, Abdul Aziz, matters to TTP-affiliated networks as well. When asked about his views on the Islamic State in an interview during the summer of 2014, Abdul Aziz offered the following: "We want a caliphate across the whole world, including Pakistan. The caliphate is the solution to the problems [sic]. These arab mujahideen have started the process of creating a caliphate, and we think this is good news for the Muslim Ummah. God willing, if their order continues, we will see it flourish all over the world."[28] This statement was followed in November 2014 when a collection of female students from Jamia Hafsa released a video supportive of the Islamic State, which Abdul Aziz has publically defended.[29] While Abdul Aziz himself is not a barometer of change, he is a key touch point on the dynamics of Sunni militancy in Pakistan, and so his public embrace of the Islamic State is an important indicator.

Groups Playing the Middle

ISK is also benefiting from another category of groups who have not publicly pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi, but whose key members are openly supportive of the Islamic State and appear to be taking steps to provide indirect support to the Islamic State's agenda. These types of groups are typified by Jamaat ul-Ahrar (JuA), a TTP splinter faction which announced in mid March 2015 that it plans to re-merge with the main TTP faction led by Mullah Fazlullah.[30] While JuA has not pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi, and Fazlullah's faction has remained outwardly loyal to Mullah Omar, the behavior of JuA is best characterized as being both hedging and opportunistic.[31] As the group has been walking a fine line between maintaining the status quo (i.e. support for Mullah Omar), while also praising the Islamic State and mirroring its messaging and content.

The title of the group's English language magazine *Ihya-e-Khilafat*, and its content reflects how the group has been positioning itself. The most recent (2nd issue) of *Ihya-e-Khilafat* features several articles that reference the creation of a Caliphate, including one that calls for the spread of the Caliphate to Pakistan. Perhaps most telling though is the language used in that issue's opening editorial, which states: "On the other hand good news have started to come…. Caliphate had [sic] been announced in Iraq and Syria under the leadership of Khalifah Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi HA and brave mujahidin of Islamic Emirate led by Mullah Muhammad Omar HA are giving strong blows to the fleeing Crusaders and local hirelings."[32] Here JuA has made an editorial decision to identify Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the Caliph, while not using a similar honorific title – Emir al-*Mu'minin* – to describe Mullah Omar.[33] It is also worth noting that the editor of *Ihya-e-Khilafat* is believed to be a former member of Pakistan's military who, before joining JuA, tried to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.[34]

Sunni Sectarian Outfits

Lastly, there have also been rumors and unconfirmed speculation about the potential allegiance of other groups, particularly Pakistan's sectarian outfits, which are predominantly anti-Shi`a in orientation. For example, according to a militant with knowledge of Islamic State negotiations with Pakistani militant groups, "All anti-Shi`a groups in Pakistan will welcome and support the Islamic State in Pakistan, though most of them will not announce it openly due to their allegiance to Mullah Omar."[35] Further, a report reportedly sent to Islamabad by the Home and Tribal Affairs Department of Baluchistan, claims that "Daish [the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State] has offered some elements of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Ahl-e-Sunnat Wai Jamat (ASWJ) to join hands in Pakistan."[36] At this point these reports are just rumors. Given the sectarian orientation of the Islamic State, there is likely synergy and shared interest between the Islamic State, LeJ, SSP and ASWJ. But just because they have shared interests does not mean that they will openly collaborate.

Conclusion: Obstacles and Opportunities

The two primary challenges that ISK faces over the short-term is surviving and maintaining momentum, as the visibility and popularity the group currently enjoys will not have staying power unless it is able to make gains and be more than just a talking head. Operations a steady supply of resources will be necessary to keep the movement alive and motivated, but the potential long-term staying power of the group lies in the ideological domain, and its ability to convince others that those who currently "own" Asia's jihads are corrupt. There are many significant obstacles on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border that plague ISK's path–and provide opportunities that might aid its success.

West of the Durand Line in Afghanistan, ISK faces a less fractured militant landscape, and a military entity, the Afghan Taliban, that actually holds territory and has institutional experience governing. The Afghan Taliban has faced threats from ISK-like defectors, who were disgruntled by their dealings with the Taliban's leadership and the lack of progress. And it apparently

28 Interview with Maulana Abdul Aziz, Bab ul-Islam, July 28, 2014.

29 Although this video claims to be on behalf of the female students of Jamia Hafsa writ large, it is not known how representative this pledge of support is. "Message From the University of Hafsa To All Mujahideen," as posted by Twitter user @MehrAdeeb.

30 Bill Roggio, "Pakistani Islamist Groups, Lashkar-i-Islam Merge into the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan," *Long War Journal*, March 12, 2015.

31 For example, when asked, before the group's recent re-merger with Fazlullah's TTP faction, about whether JuA will join the Islamic State JuA's spokesman had the following to say: "We will see whether we can fight better for the cause on our own or by joining IS… if the offer is serious, the matter will be decided by our political shura." Ali Akbar, "From TTP to IS: Pakistan's Terror Landscape Evolves," *Dawn*, no date; for background on Fazlullah's position see Tahir Khan, Pakistani Taliban Only Loyal to Mullah Omar, Says TTP Spokesperson," *Express Tribune*, October 6, 2014.

32 "Editorial," *Ihya-e-Khilafat*, October 2014, pg. 2.

33 This could have just been an editorial oversight, but given JuA's choice of articles it could have also been intentional, and it suggests that the newly remerged TTP could leverage JuA's plays in these areas and take a more nuanced position on the Islamic State.

34 Amir Mir, "Jamaatul Ahrar Video to be Probed," *The News*, October 20, 2014.

35 "Jundullah Vows Allegiance to the Islamic State," *Reuters*, November 18, 2014.

36 "IS Visits Militants in Baluchistan: Jundullah Spokesman," *Dawn*, November 12, 2014.

has dealt with them rather swiftly.[37] Further, if the Afghan Taliban has proven anything over the last decade, it is that it is resilient, is militarily effective, has operational staying power, and can withstand exogenous shocks. All of that means that it is going to take more than just a relatively small ISK network, which up until this point has remained untested, to go militarily toe-to-toe with the Taliban for any extended period of time.

There is also the issue of whether certain segments of Afghan's public will even support an entity as radical and brutal as ISK, which seems unlikely. In addition, as the targeting and recent death of ISK Deputy Abdul Rauf Khadim illustrates, the continued presence of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan will likely complicate ISK's staying power in Afghanistan.

All of this has led many analysts to speculate or conclude that ISK's chances of making in-roads in Afghanistan and eventually out-competing the Taliban are slim to none. This is certainly the safe bet to make. Yet, such a view does little to account for the wild card factor and it is predicated on several unknowns. For example, while the Afghan Taliban is good at publically projecting a united front, not much is known about who within the Taliban is also disgruntled, frustrated by progress, and might also desire something new. There are also the issues and questions that Islamic State supporters have raised about the state of Mullah Omar, and concerns about his life status and ability to publically lead; concerns which are also shared by the author. Thus, while the Afghan Taliban's grip on the Afghan jihad seems firm, ISK has been smart to sow speculation about the Taliban's own leader and to try and puncture the invincibility of the Taliban by attacking the central figure or symbol that ties that movement together. The Afghan Taliban will need to respond with clear evidence to these charges, as if it does not, ISK might have planted the seeds of that movement's unraveling, or at least evolution. As the newcomer, ISK in Afghanistan faces an uphill road and the odds are not in its favor. But, just as it might be easy to write ISK in Afghanistan off, what we do not know is how quickly momentum and allegiances might shift.

East of the Durand Line, ISK faces a different Pakistani military than the one that existed in 2007, when the TTP was formally announced. Given what it has suffered, what it appears to have learned from its more recent dealings with the TTP, and how ISK's supporters are trying to undercut and delegitimize Pakistan's more reliable jihadi proxies, the Pakistani military is more inclined and has more incentives to go after ISK leaders, and to do so quickly. The Pakistani military's primary challenges, however, will be overcoming some perpetual problems. Specifically, how it conducts operations in the tribal areas and in bridging the gap between the Army's ability to "clear" an area to responsibly "hold" it over time, and do so in a way that is viewed as acceptable to locals without fostering additional anti-state activity. These are tall orders and over the mid-term could created additional opportunities for ISK to exploit, and to revive and to interject new life blood into their movement.

Second, the Pakistani public also appears to be in a different position than it was several years ago, as the recent Peshawar school massacre has illustrated the brutality of the TTP. One strategy that ISK could employ to deal with this issue, and to consolidate and broaden their support base, will be to conduct attacks that aim to deepen the divide between classes in Pakistan, and between those that live in the FATA and other areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with those that live in Pakistan's more "settled" areas (i.e. Punjab, Sindh, etc.). One should remember that stoking class divisions was a key part of the TTP's strategy during its heyday in Swat.[38]

Unless ISK takes a less antagonistic and more measured approach, a third challenging issue the group might need to deal with is the capabilities and influence of Pakistan's old jihadist guard, groups, as typified by Lashkar-e-Taiba and Harakat ul-Mujahidin, who have long had deep ties to the State. While there might not be open warfare between ISK and the old guard, Pakistan's institutional jihadists will likely either be pushed or have their own incentives to subvert or limit ISK's growth and development, even if only done indirectly or behind the scenes. A key indicator of change will be whether, and to what extent, ISK is able to gain a presence in Pakistan's Punjab province, the main powerbase of Pakistan's institutional jihadis.

While a lot of attention has been focused on the development of ISK as an organization, the broader and more lasting challenge for Pakistan's and Afghanistan's jihadist landscapes is more about how and in what direction the emergence of ISK pushes other militant groups in the region. If the ISK movement is to survive and gain strength, that direction will likely be more sectarian, anti-state and more bold. In the short-term the group will also likely make a number of predictable plays, such as making attempts to: attack military outposts and international borders (even just for symbolic affect); seize, hold and control territory, and apply Sharia there; kidnap Westerners; and target Shi`a and other minorities.[39] With the help of the Islamic State, ISK will also likely up its media game, and with the use of future releases it will likely attempt to shift the narratives that have long driven the Afghan and Kashmir jihads in its favor.

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The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

37 The case of Mullah Dadullah Lang is a case in point.

38 See Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah, "Taliban Exploit Class Rifts in Pakistan," *New York Times,* April 16, 2009.

39 JuA's recent attack against Pakistan's Wagah border crossing with India, which killed over 50 people, could be mirrored by ISK and a sign of future attacks to come; for a view into the Islamic State's potential plans see also "IS Visits Militants in Baluchistan: Jundullah Spokesman."

The Province of Sinai: Why Bother with Palestine if You Can Be Part of the "Islamic State"?

By Nelly Lahoud

On November 10, 2014, the Sinai-based group, Jama'at Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem Group - JABM), was one of several jihadi groups that declared allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi after he was designated as "Caliph" by the group that calls itself the "Islamic State."[1] In doing so, JABM responded to Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, the Islamic State's spokesman, who had called upon all Muslims, including jihadi groups worldwide, to unite behind the Islamic State when he proclaimed its establishment on June 29, 2014.[2] On November 13, 2014, al-Baghdadi accepted JABM's *bay`a* (and those of others who did so on the same day). By virtue of accepting (*qubul*) the pledges, al-Baghdadi claimed "the expansion of the Islamic State to new countries." This action annulled the names of the groups and declared them to be new provinces for the Islamic State. [3] Accordingly, JABM's name was dropped, replaced by "*wilayat sina,*" the Islamic State's province of Sinai (PS).[4]

This article examines the evolution of the Sinai-based group, its Gaza connections, and the way in which the direction of its operations shifted as it sought a formal affiliation with the Islamic State. It argues that ever since the group began to extend its support to the Islamic State, its operations and rhetoric noticeably shifted from being directed against Israeli targets to focusing on Egyptian targets. The plight of Gazans appears to have taken a backseat in the group's statements, with greater emphasis on serving as the "Caliph's soldiers" to create a universal and borderless Islamic state.

Negotiating the Bay`a ?

The fact that five groups from five different countries pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi on the same day followed by his acceptance of all five three days later suggest a level of coordination between all. But on the Sinai side, the process was not without glitches. JABM appears to have attempted to rush its affiliation with the Islamic State when a member of the jihadi website *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam* published a *bay`a* on November 3, 2014 bearing the official logo and exact statement formatting of JABM.[5] Swiftly, JABM denied the authenticity of the statement on its Twitter account, tweeting that the statement "attributed to us … has anything to do with us."[6] A week later, its official *bay`a* was made as an audio statement.

Given that JABM's statements began to extend amity to the Islamic State since at least January 2014 (when it was still the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant),[7] it is unlikely that it was having second thoughts about its *bay`a* when it denied the authenticity of the November 3 statement. Judging by the content of the latter, it is likely that JABM wanted to be the first Arab group outside Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State and more importantly to be seen as the catalyst that caused the other Arab groups to pledge allegiance, which it must have known were about to do so anyway.

This is most transparent in the structure of the November 3 statement: the paragraph calling "upon our brethren in Egypt, Gaza, Libya and the rest of the countries … to pledge allegiance to the leader of the faithful" preceded the paragraph in which JABM made its own *bay`a*.[8] The close reader of the statement may question the flaw in the structure of the statement, for a more coherent statement would have the order of the paragraphs reversed. In other words, the group should make its own *bay`a*before calling on others to follow suit. Further, the tone of the statement was not limited to a formal investiture in the form of the oath of loyalty,[9] but it went on endorsing al-Baghdadi by "confirming that your *bay`a* is a lawful one."[10] From the Islamic State's perspective, the *bay`a* is meant to show potential supporters that the legitimacy of its Caliph and of its state is assumed rather than be reminded that it is contested. The official *bay`a* was properly crafted, possibly with the editorial help of the Islamic State offices.

The Authority of the Province of Sinai

If one were to assume the legitimacy of the Islamic State, it follows that JABM, upon being declared as the province of Sinai (PS), is meant to exercise authority over the territory of Sinai under the supreme sovereignty of al-Baghdadi. It also follows, as al-Baghdadi put it in his acceptance statement, that members of the Islamic State should "hear and obey the governor (wali) appointed by us."[11] Yet, to date, the "authority" that PS is meant to exercise over Sinai is at best ambiguous.

To start with, there is no "officially" appointed governor. A certain "Sheikh Abu Usama al-Misri" features in many of the group's audio and video releases, but in the latter his face is not

1 JABM, "Kalima Sawtiyya li-Jama'at Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis bi-Mubaya'at Khalifat al-Muslimin wa-Indimamiha li-al-Dawla al-Islamiyya," CTC Library, November 10, 2014. The other groups that pledged allegiance on the same day are based in Algeria, Yemen, Libya and Saudi Arabia. My gratitude to my colleague Muhammad al-'Ubaydi for collecting the primary sources for this article through his diligent monitoring of Arabic jihadi websites and social media.

2 Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, "Hadha Wa'du Allah," June 29, 2014, CTC Library.

3 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "Walaw Kariha al-Kafirun," November 13, 2014, CTC Library. Unless otherwise stated, translation from Arabic in this article is made by the author.

4 Ibid.

5 JABM, "bi-Khusus Mubaya'at Amir al-Mu'minin Abi Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurashi al-Husayni," November 3, 2014, CTC Library.

6 JABM, Twitter, November 4, 2014, CTC Library.

7 See for example the transcript of the video that JABM released in which it documented its first operation from Sinai, *Malhamat al-Furaqan: Tawthiq Tafasil Ghazawat Umm al-Rashshash al-Kubra*, July 2014, CTC Library. The last lines of that release uttered by one of the leaders of the group warns the Israelis to prepare to receive "the armies of the jihadis [attacking you] from Egypt, Iraq and the Levant." Note that the operation was carried out in August 2011, and the group claimed responsibility for this operation in September 2011 in a statement posted on *Shabakat al-Shumukh al-Islamiyya*. Another clearer extension of amity is made by Abu Usama al-Misri in his 'Id sermon when he concluded with a prayer "to make our brethren in the Islamic State victorious;" by acknowledging the name of the group, he was effectively endorsing its legitimacy. See JABM, "Khutbat al-'Id min Sina'," transcript of the video released in August 2014, CTC Library.

8 JABM, Twitter, November 4, 2014, CTC Library.

9 I am here borrowing the explanation of bay`a by Wafaa H. Wahba (trans.) of Al-Mawardi, *The Ordinances of Government*, Reading: Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 1996, p. xiv.

10 JABM, "bi-Khusus Mubaya'at Amir al-Mu'minin …"

11 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "Walaw Kariha al-Kafirun."

made visible. Although his demeanor projects leadership, one of JABM's videos features Abu Usama delivering the sermon of Eid al-Fitr in 2014 in which the first of several messages is addressed "to the leader of JABM" advising him "to fear God" who "has selected him" to shoulder the burden of this responsibility.[12] It is likely then that Abu Usama is the spokesman for the group and not its leader.

Beyond the obscurity surrounding the leadership of PS, the group does not enjoy authority over the jihadi landscape of Sinai, let alone over the territory as a whole. Indeed, the territory is crowded with jihadi groups and its landscape is not entirely organic to Sinai. Many of these groups, including JABM, have originated in the Gaza Strip,[13] and their presence in Sinai is likely a result of Hamas tightening its grip on their activities.[14] Since at least 2006, several groups split from Hamas when it participated in the Palestinain Authority's legislative election of 2006, a move that in effect meant that Hamas accepted the legitimacy of the Oslo Accords[15] – the series of agreements beginning in 1993 which led to the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

Foremost among jihadi groups based in Gaza is Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), which tried to make some overture to al-Qa`ida as early as 2006,[16] but did not succeed in receiving al-Qa`ida's public support let alone its praise. The influence of Jaysh al-Islam on JABM has been reported,[17] but a stronger connection exists between JABM and al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad, which originates in Gaza. This is made clear in a JABM statement in which it eulogizes one of its founding members, Tawfiq Muhammad Farij. The eulogy describes him as a close companion of the first two leaders of al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad and "was one of the founding members of JABM;"[18] this implies that the two groups are at least closely connected or even possibly that JABM is a new name for al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad, now based in Sinai.

Since none of the jihadi groups in Gaza and Sinai managed to secure an "official" recognition by al-Qa`ida, JABM may pride itself on having succeeded where others failed, albeit with the Islamic State's recognition and not that of al-Qa`ida.[19] But given that none of the jihadi groups based in Sinai is yet to "hear and obey" the PS's governor, whose identity remains unknown,[20] it cannot be said that PS or the Islamic State enjoys a territorial jurisdiction in Sinai in the same way that the Islamic State controls parts of Syria and Iraq.

Operational Shift: From Israeli to Egyptian Targets

Although PS has little to show by way of territorial jurisdiction over the Sinai Peninsula and does not enjoy the obedience of all jihadis in the region, it is nevertheless the most operationally active group in Sinai and across Egypt. Prior to becoming PS, it claimed responsibility for launching rocket attacks against Israel,[21] and since the ousting of Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi in July 2013, it has claimed responsibility for attacks inside Egypt. The group has documented what it considers to be indiscriminate attacks by the Egyptian military against several villages in Sinai,[22] and claims to have mounted several operations against the Egyptian military in response.[23] Among others, in September 2013 the group claimed responsibility for the attack against the Egyptian Interior Minister, and apologized to the public for not having killed him.[24]

Among other noteworthy attacks, the group claimed responsibility for the assassination of Muhammad Mabrouk, an Egyptian lieutenant colonel tasked with combating the activities of religious extremist groups.[25] It also claimed responsibility for targeting the Egyptian air force intelligence base in Isma'iliyya and called on "our people in Egypt to stay away from all military and

12 JABM, "Khutbat al-'Id min Sina'," transcript of the video released in August 2014, CTC Library.

13 See Nelly Lahoud with Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, *Jihadi Discourse in the Wake of the Arab Spring* (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2013) pp. 77-86.

14 See "The Jaljala Phenomenon in the Gaza Strip," *Israeli Security Agency*; and "Involvement of Operatives Who Returned from Syria in the Terrorist Campaign against the Egyptian Regime," *The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center*, May 4, 2014. My thanks to Elad Popovich for drawing these articles to my attention.

15 "Al Qaida-inspired jihadi movement growing in Gaza, says group leader," *The Associated Press*, March 10, 2014.

16 See the declassified letter by Atiyyatullah al-Libi that was captured in Abbottabad, SOCOM-2012-0000008. On the analysis of this letter, see Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined* (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012) pp. 21-22.

17 Sami Majdi, "Ma Huwa Tanzim Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis," *Masrawi*, January 30, 2015.

18 JABM, "Bayan Na'I al-Qa'id al-Mujahid (Abi 'Abdallah) Tawfiq Muhammad Farij," posted on *Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya*, March 14, 2014, CTC Library.

19 The article by Mahmoud Nasr in *al-Yawm al-Sabi'* provides a detailed history and internal organization of JABM based on investigations carried out by the Egyptian security apparatus, "Nanshur al-Tafasil al-Kamila li-Insha' 'Bayt al-Maqdis ...,'" http://www.youm7.com, May 12, 2014. The article claims that JABM was liaising with Ayman al-Zawahiri, but this is somewhat doubtful. The article was published in May 2014, by then JABM had begun to show amity to ISIL in its statements even though al-Zawahiri attempted to annul ISIL before AQ officially disowned it in February 2014. JABM's bay'a to the Islamic State in November 2014 further makes it clear that its connections with AQ were at best tenuous. However, another jihadi group originating from Gaza and based in Sinai, Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, may have had some correspondence with al-Zawahiri. For more on this, see Lahoud, *Jihadi Discourse in the Wake of the Arab Spring*, pp. 82-4.

20 To date, none of the groups in Sinai have merged with JABM since it became PS; it is worth noting that within a month of the declaration of PS, the jihadi website *Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya* published a statement by a group called Katibat al-Ribat al-Jihadiyya bi-Ardi Sina' al-Mubaraka (CTC Library). In it, the group denied the legitimacy of al-Baghdadi and stated that jihad in Sinai is not limited to those who pledged allegiance to him. To date, this is the only statement by the group and it is yet to mount and claim an operation.

21 Among others, see Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin, "al-Hamla al-Sarukhiyya," *Shabakat Ansar al-Mujahidin*, Bayan no. 30, November 21, 2012; "Qasf Madinat Umm al-Rashrash al-Muhtalla 'Eilat' bi-Sarukhayn Grad," *al-Shumukh*, April 17, 2013, CTC Library.

22 Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, "al-Jaysh al-Misri 'Amala wa-Ijram," September 11, 2013, *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*, CTC Library; "al-Bayanu al-Thani bi-Khususi al-Hamlat al-'Askariyya al-Muwassa'a 'ala Ahali Sina': Wa-Yastamirru al-Ijram," *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*, September 15, 2013, CTC Libary.

23 See for example its claim of responsibility for the Egyptian security base in southern Sinai, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, "I'lanu Mas'uliyyatuna 'an Istihdafi Mudiriyyati Amn Janubi Sina'," *Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya*, October 9, 2013, CTC Library.

24 Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, "Ghazwatu al-Tha'ri li-Muslimi Misr," *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*, September 8, 2013, CTC Library.

25 "I'lanu Mas'uliyyatina 'an Ightiyali al-Mujrimi Muhammad Mabrouk," *Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya*, November 19, 2013, CTC Library.

police bases for they are lawful targets of the mujahidin."[26] Having documented the Egyptian military's attacks against Muslim protestors and jihadi groups, JABM released a statement in December 2013 in which it made the pronouncement of *takfir* against the Egyptian military and law enforcement community.[27] The pronouncement effectively declares the army to be un-Islamic and makes it lawful from an Islamic perspective to shed their blood.

What is noteworthy about the group is the noticeable operational shift from attacking Israeli targets to Egyptian ones. Indeed, JABM's operational debut from Sinai, as documented by the group itself, was an attack against an Israeli military target in Eilat.[28] Yet ever since it began to extend its amity to the ISIL then the Islamic State, the group's attacks have continued,[29] but they have, for the most part, claimed responsibility for attacks against Egypt, seemingly sparing Israel.

Of course, the Egyptian military's security crackdown in the wake of Mursi's ousting must have been perceived by JABM to be deserving of its attention, but it does not necessarily explain PS's neglect of targeting Israel. The neglect of the plight of Gazans by the PS has not gone unnoticed. One member of *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam* posted a criticism of PS for kidnapping an Egyptian soldier stationed on the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, which led the Egyptians to close it, leaving many sick Gazans stranded in the cold weather and in dire need of basic provisions for their survival.[30] The member makes it known that he is a supporter of the Islamic State, and calls upon "our Caliph al-Baghdadi" to release the soldier to spare the people of Gaza further misery, but his calls were derided by other members for appealing on behalf of a soldier. Perhaps to prove its global jihadi credentials, PS is showing that it is capable of transcending the nationalist "Palestinian cause" and devoting itself to establishing a universal "Islamic State" and aiding its Caliph in his "conquest of Rome."

Concluding Remarks

The PS is a double-edged sword for the Islamic State. On the one hand, the PS's active operational credentials can boost the activity of the Islamic State and its geographical stretch. On the other hand, the PS does not enjoy a territorial jurisdiction over the Sinai Peninsula, and therefore the Islamic State's claim of "expansion" beyond the territories it occupies in Syria and Iraq is tenuous at best. It is also not clear the extent to which the Islamic State is able to lure Palestinians to join the PS. The failure of Palestinian groups and leaders, including Hamas, to secure a state for Palestinians might tempt some to consider that a Caliphate is more within reach than a state of Palestine. But, as it stands, 'wilayat sina' remains a name without a territory, and in this sense, it may well remain for its supporters as poetic as the name Palestine continues to be for Palestinians.

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26 "I'lanu Mas'uliyyatina 'an Istihdafi al-Mukhabarati al-Harbiyyat bi-al-Isma'iliyya," *Shabakat al-Fida' al-Islamiyya*, October 21, 2013, CTC Library. Parts of the above two paragraphs are based on Lahoud with al-'Ubaydi, *Jihadi Discourse in the Wake of the Arab Spring*.

27 JABM, "Risalat ila al-Mujannadin min al-Jaysh wa-al-Shurta wa-Ahalihim," *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*, 22 December 2013, CTC Library.

28 JABM, "Tawthiq Tafasil Ghazwat Umm al-Rash-shash," July 2014, CTC Library.

29 See PS, "Tawthiq Jara'im Tahaluf al-Yahud wa-Jaysh al-Radda didda Ahlina fi Sina'," December 2014, CTC Library; "Hasad al-'Amaliyyat al-'Askariyya li-Shahr Sifr 1436 H. Wilayat Sina'," December 2014, CTC Library. See also "Egypt attack: Profile of Sinai Province militant group," BBC, January 30, 2015.

30 Abu Usama, *Shabakat Shumukh al-Islam*, January 12, 2015, CTC Library.

What to Make of the Bay`a in North Africa?

By Geoff D. Porter

Because of its formal structure and its contractual character, assessing who has pledged the *bay`a* to the Islamic State and whose *bay`a* the Islamic State has accepted appears at first blush to be a handy means to assess the Islamic State's popularity, strength, and reach. However, the *bay`a* in North Africa has a different historical context and contemporary frame of reference than it does elsewhere in the Muslim world and particularly in the Levant and Iraq where the Islamic State has its origins. As a result, the topology of North African jihadi groups resists easy mapping and the convenience of the *bay`a*. The *bay`a* as a metric for gauging the expansion of the Islamic State and the threat of jihadi terrorism in North Africa is useful, but not exclusively so.

The Historical Context of the Bay`a in North Africa

For multiple reasons, both historical and contemporary, the *bay`a* resonates differently in North Africa than it does in the Middle East or Levant and Iraq. North Africa is nearly uniformly Sunni Muslim. There are pockets of Jews and a handful of Christians, but unlike the Middle East, there are no Shi`a. Although there is no concept of the *bay`a* among the Shi`a, the very emergence of the Shi'a as distinct from the Sunni is predicated in large part on the refusal of Husayn, the son of 'Ali, to grant the *bay`a* to the Umayyad claimant to the caliphate, Yazid, at Karbala in 680 C.E. Yazid's soldiers then killed Husayn, or from the Shi`a perspective, Husayn was martyred. This was a foundational moment in the Shi`a tradition, commemorated annually during Ashura. Granting or refusing to grant the *bay`a* has no such pivotal historical equivalent in North Africa. Rather than being a foundational sectarian event, the *bay`a* in North Africa is political, and as with all things political, it flirts with the profane, and it is ultimately mutable. After all, the *bay`a* is a contract and contracts are rarely for perpetuity.

In addition to being almost entirely Sunni Muslim, North African Muslims are almost entirely followers of the

Maliki *madhhab* (pl. *madhâhib*), or school of Islamic jurisprudence (*`usûl al-fiqh*). Maliki interpretation of the *bay`a* is notably flexible. The school's 8th century founder Malik ibn Anas argued that it was permissible (*masmû*) for members of a given community to pledge allegiance to the lesser of two qualified individuals if it was deemed to be in the public's interest (*maslaḥa*) even though "the normal rule requires that allegiance only be given to the most qualified candidate."[1] To be sure, being a jihadi usually entails being a Salafi, and one of the fundamental distinctions of Salafi Islam is the rejection of the uncontested authority of the four Sunni *madhâhib* and blind adherence to them, thus, groups offering the *bay`a* to the Islamic State are not constrained by Maliki interpretations of *sharî'a*. Nevertheless, regional precedent and ongoing regional influence likely factor into the ways in which North Africa groups think about pledging or not pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.

The Bay`a in Modern North Africa

In fact, what began as a term applied to several specific historical instances during the life of the Prophet Muhammad and shortly thereafter became increasingly elastic in the contemporary period as different political leaders have tried to apply it to different circumstances.[2] This has especially been the case with efforts to adapt the practice to modern nation states – or to groups who put themselves forward as alternatives to the modern nation state, like the Islamic State.

The *bay`a* has been regularly used in North Africa in instances that are only tangentially religious since at least the 19th century. For example, with the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, Moulay 'Abd al-Rahmân, the Sultan of Morocco, accepted the *bay`a* of the elite of the Algerian city of Tlemcen, and sent soldiers to counter the French invasion.[3] Moulay 'Abd al-Rahmân occupied Tlemcen until 1832, but ultimately withdrew his forces. A year later, western Algerian "tribal leaders, *'ulamâ`* (scholars) and urban notables" granted the *bay`a* to the populist resistance leader 'Abd al-Qâdir.[4] Moroccan sultans continued the practice of the *bay`a* until the French colonial occupation in 1912 whereupon it was suspended. It was revived after independence by King Hassan II in 1961 when he ascended the throne. During Hassan II's reign, the *bay`a* was renewed (tajdîd al-wala') annually. This practice has continued to this day with Hassan II's son, Mohamed VI. In contemporary Morocco, though, granting the *bay`a* is as much about the *'ulamâ`* legitimizing the monarchy as it is about the monarchy recognizing the elite among the *'ulamâ`*.[5]

In Libya, Muammar Qadhafi also used the *bay`a* in a secular manner over the course of his rule. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Qadhafi received the *bay`a* or a "parallel to the traditional *bay`a*"[6] from different tribal leaders to ensure their loyalty.[7] He maintained the practice until the very end of his regime, having accepted the *bay`a* of tribal leaders as late as the winter of 2010 just prior to the beginning of the February 17 Revolution that led to his downfall.[8]

Political leadership in Algeria and Tunisia do not solicit or accept the *bay`a* as such, but the notion is present nonetheless. In Algeria, the term *bay`a* has cynical overtones and connotations of blind adherence to political leaders. It is ridiculed as an antiquated practice that is in direct contradistinction to democracy and accountability. More often than not it is used as political satire to deride supporters of political leadership.[9]

Jihadi Groups and the Bay`a in Contemporary North Africa

The granting of the *bay`a* in North Africa to the Islamic State then does not happen in a vacuum, sealed off from the term's historic or contemporary usage. In fact, many of the regimes that jihadi groups have deemed to be illegitimate and that they have attacked used the *bay`a* themselves, which may have sullied the term's use. All of this begs the question of what to make of pledges of allegiance or the lack thereof from jihadi groups in North Africa. Some North African jihadi groups have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and have carried out attacks in its name. Other groups have pledged allegiance and done nothing. Still others have stopped short of pledging full allegiance to the Islamic State, but have declared support for the group and have undertaken attacks in its name. And there are still other groups that are openly hostile to the Islamic State, refusing to support it or grant it the *bay`a*. What use, then, is the *bay`a* in gauging Islamic State's expansion or the broader jihadi terrorist threat in North Africa?

For example, a group of jihadis in Libya who had joined together under the Islamic Youth Shura Council in Derna pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. They have subsequently carried out attacks such as the February 20, 2015 attack in Qubbah, Libya that killed almost four dozen people. Earlier, individuals affiliated with the Islamic State in Libya had targeted the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli. The Islamic State in Libya was also responsible for the murder of 21 Egyptians. More recently, the Islamic State has taken control of additional territory in Libya, including Sirte and it has appointed commanders for its three main regions, the Fezzan, Tarabulus, and Barqa. The initial pledge of allegiance and its acceptance by the Islamic State leadership, however, only served to formally establish the group's presence in Libya. The *bay`a* has not accounted for the group's growth, the pace of its operations, or its spread throughout the country.

In Algeria, a small group of members

1 Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "The *Shari'a*: Law as the Way of God," in Vincent J. Cornell ed., *Voices of Islam,* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), p. 194.

2 Elie Podeh, "The bay`a: Modern Political Uses of Islamic Ritual in the Arab World," *Die Welt des Islams,* Vol. 50, Issue 1 (2010) pp. 117-152.

3 Dimitar Bechev and Kalypso Nicolaidis, *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 53.

4 James McDougall, "Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd Edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2014).

5 Abdeslam Maghraoui, "Political Authority in Crisis: Mohamed VI's Morocco," *MERIP*, Vol. 31, (2001).

6 George Joffé, "Civil activism and the roots of the 2011 Uprisings," in Jason Pack, ed., *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the post-Qadhafi Future*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 29.

7 Pete Cole, "Bani Walid: Loyalism in a Time of Revolution," in Peter Cole & Brian McQuinn, eds., *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

8 Philipp Holtmann, "Virtual leadership: How jihadists guide each other in cyberspace," in Rüdiger Lohlker, ed., *New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism: Online and Offline*, (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2012), p. 103.

9 For example, see "3è mandate : la course à la bay`a" *Le Matin.dz*, February 5, 2009.

of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb's (AQIM) core battalion in the Tizi Ouzou region split off from AQIM and declared allegiance with the Islamic State in September 2014, simultaneous to their capture of a French tourist whom they subsequently beheaded. Like their Libyan counterparts, their pledge was also accepted by the Islamic State. Following the Algerian government's rapid unrelenting response to the tourist's murder, the group, Jund al-Khilâfa fî Arḍ al-Jazâ'ir, went silent. For six months, from September 2014 until March 2015, it was neither heard from nor did it carry out any attacks. It has only recently reemerged, but only in the form of a statement praising Boko Haram for pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.

Elsewhere in Libya, there are groups that have expressed support for the Islamic State and have gone as far as carrying out attacks in its name but have thus far refrained from swearing allegiance to it. For example, the Tarek ibn Ziyad Brigade attacked the Mabrouk oil field on February 3, 2015 and killed at least nine individuals and took a further seven hostage, claiming all the while to have done so in the name of the Islamic State.[10] The Tarek ibn Ziyad Brigade, however, has historically been associated with AQIM and it stopped short of granting the Islamic State the *bay`a*.

At the other end of the spectrum are declarations of allegiance to the Islamic State that do not appear to be associated with any group whatsoever. For example, in a 97 second audio recording posted on YouTube, a shaky lone voice declared the existence of a group named Jund al-Khilâfa fî Tûnis,[11] a name clumsily resonant of Jund al-Khilâfa fî Arḍ al-Jazâ'ir. There has been no other mention of Jund al-Khilâfa fî Tûnis in any of the other conventional jihadi channels nor have otherwise accurate analysts of Tunisian jihadi activity identified the group. Importantly, Islamic State leadership has not acknowledged this pledge. Likewise a group called Shabâb al-Tawḥîd, which is potentially linked to the Tunisian Anḍâr al-Sharî'a, endorsed an initiative that it called *Imarat al-Qayrawan: Tûnis al-islâmîya*, or the Emirate of Qayrawan (the historical name of the area in which Tunisia is now located). The name of the group would suggest an affiliation or an attempt to forge a relationship with the Islamic State, but not only has it not officially offered the oath of allegiance to the Islamic State, like Jund al-Khilâfa fî Tûnis it has not done anything that would suggest that the group actually exists beyond the internet.[12] Although the Islamic State has allegedly claimed credit for the March 18 attack in Tunis, Tunisia, there is no indication as this issue was going to press of the extent of the Islamic State's involvement.

Somewhere in the middle are groups that have expressed their support for the Islamic State, but have neither offered it their allegiance nor carried out attacks in its name, but are nonetheless active and dangerous jihadi terrorist entities. For example, the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade in Tunisia, founded by AQIM in Algeria, pledged support for – but not allegiance to – the Islamic State on 14 September 2014. It has subsequently carried out numerous attacks and operations in Tunisia, particularly in the Djebal Chaambi region, but it has never done so in the Islamic State's name.

Further along this continuum are jihadi groups that have not expressed support for nor pledged allegiance to Islamic State. In particular, AQIM in northern Algeria, under the leadership of Abdelmalek Droukdel, continues to be allied with al-Qa'ida. Al-Mourabitoun, the group responsible for the single most-deadly terrorist attack in North Africa in recent years and led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, has likewise not acknowledged Islamic State. A third North African group, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), has also not pledged support.

Finally, there are jihadi groups in North Africa, and particularly in Libya, that are openly opposed to the Islamic State and its regional allies. For example, the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade that is allied with the Derna Shura Council is overtly hostile to the Islamic State.[13] The Islamic State has even gone so far as to claim that members of the Derna Shura Council and the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade have killed members of the Islamic State.

Conclusion

In short, while the offering of the *bay`a* may appear at first glance to be a rough and ready means of gauging the Islamic State's popularity and growth, the case of North Africa shows that it is anything but. First, there is no decisive explanation why some groups offer the *bay`a* and others do not – it is thus far impossible to predict which groups offer the *bay`a* and which do not. Second, offering the *bay`a* may artificially enhance the perceived stature or standing of a group that would otherwise barely register as a threat (most likely because the group probably does not exist beyond the digital realm where the oath took place). Third, offering or not offering the *bay`a* does not seem to be an exclusive factor that determines whether groups support the Islamic State or carry out attacks in its name. And finally, there remain other, active jihadi groups in North Africa who continue to pose a significant threat that are unrelated to the Islamic State.

As the case of North Africa shows, the *bay`a* is a political and a politicized term. It is grounded in the day-to-day rather than floating in heavenly perpetuity. The Islamic State may try to make use of the *bay`a*, but in doing so, it is competing for primacy over a term that has been successfully used in North Africa by political leaders from Morocco to Libya. In fact, North African groups that are entertaining pledging allegiance to the Islamic State may sooner associate the likes of Qadhafi and Hassan II with the practice than the caliphs of yore. But, this does not mean that groups cannot act in support of the Islamic State without the *bay`a*, and it does mean that there is an inherent risk in focusing too closely on the *bay`a* and allowing dangerous jihadi groups to go unnoticed simply because they have not pledged allegiance.

Dr. Geoff D. Porter is an assistant professor with

10 Benoît Faucon & Georgi Kantchev, "Oil Companies in the Cross Hairs of Libyan Violence," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 2015

11 "Audio Recording: the Caliphate's Army in Tunis swears allegiance to the Commander of the Faithful Abu Bakr al-Bahgdadi, December 5, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYD6voadVB0

12 "Da'ash yukhatat l-i`ilan 'Imara fi al-qayrawan'" *al-Akhbariya al-Tunisiya*, November 21, 2014

13 *Taffirat al-Quba al-Juma'a*, February 20, 2015

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The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

A Biography of Boko Haram and the Bay`a to al-Baghdadi

By Jacob Zenn

On March 7, 2015, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau pledged loyalty (*bay`a*) to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an Arabic-language statement with English and French subtitles posted on Boko Haram's official Twitter account, al-Urhwa al-Wutqha.[1] Several days after this, the Islamic State posted videos of militants celebrating Shekau's *bay`a* in Syria, Libya, and the new *"Wilayat Euphrates"* on the Iraq-Syria border, and the Islamic State's spokesman announced that "the Caliph" accepted Shekau's *bay`a* and called on Muslims to "emigrate and join your brothers in West Africa."[2] Although Shekau's *bay`a* and its acceptance was seen as a surprise in some analyst and foreign policy circles, the trendlines for a Boko Haram-Islamic State merger were evident since at least July 2014, and the merger followed the strategic trajectory of both militant groups.[3]

This article traces Boko Haram from its founding in 2002 until Shekau's *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi in 2015. It argues that Boko Haram's merger with the Islamic State was consistent with a broader transnational trend whereby militants formerly loyal to al-Qa`ida have switched sides in favor of the more youthful, social media-savvy, and territorial-focused Islamic State. Specifically, in Boko Haram's case, militants formerly in the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and its successor organization, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), established the contacts necessary to achieve the Boko Haram-Islamic State merger.

In the final section, the article discusses some of the likely outcomes of the Boko Haram-Islamic State merger and suggests that Boko Haram is well-placed to evolve into a revamped "Islamic State version" of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) that is capable of competing for a recruiting pool in an area of operations spanning from Nigeria to Libya.

Boko Haram's Biography

2002-2009: Ideological Foundations of the Islamic State

The founder of Boko Haram in 2002 was Borno, Nigeria native Muhammed Yusuf. He preached that there were "four pure salafists" that Muslims should follow: Usama bin Laden (al-Qa`ida founder), the Taliban (first group to establish an "Islamic Emirate" in the post-Caliphate era), Sayyid Qutb (Egyptian Islamist ideologue who advocated for an Islamic state), and Ibn Taymiya ("godfather" of salafism).[4] Yusuf's third-in-command, the Cameroonian Mamman Nur, may have had a more regional perspective. He cited the fall of Usman dan Fodio's Sokoto Caliphate in West Africa in 1904 as the cause of the poverty and suffering of Muslims.[5] Yusuf, Nur, and Shekau, who was Yusuf's deputy, all agreed that Nigeria—the country where they lived and that shaped their worldview—was illegitimate because it was not an Islamic state.

2009-2011: Al-Qa`ida's Shadow in Nigeria

The Nigerian security forces killed Yusuf and nearly 1,000 Boko Haram members in a series of clashes in July 2009.[6] Shekau assumed leadership and in July 2010 declared a jihad against Nigeria and the United States in a statement that was nearly identical in rhetoric

1 Al-Urhwa al-Wutqha means "Indissoluble Link" in Arabic and is named after a 1880s Islamist newspaper in Paris. Boko Haram and the Islamic State may have chosen this name because its launch coincided with the Charlie Hebdo attack. The account was set up after the attack, which Shekau praised in a video on January 16, 2015."Jama'at _Ahl al-Sunnah lil-Da'wah wal-Jihad_ Pledges_Allegiance_to_Caliph_of_the_Muslims_Abu-Bakr_al-Baghdadi" @urwa_wutqa, Twitter, March 7, 2015; Abubakar Shekau, Faran Cikin Da Abunda Ya Samu Faransa, YouTube, January 16, 2015.

2 Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "So They Slay and Are Slain," Al-Furqan Establishment for Media Production via "Abu-Ali al-Janubi" (@aljanub95), March 12, 2015; "New video message from The Islamic State: The Allegiances Are Coming and the Joys to the Brothers in Nigeria – Wilḍyat al-Furḍt", YouTube, March 16, 2015; "New video message from The Islamic State: "Pleasure of the Muslims With the Bay'ah of Their Brothers in Nigeria – Wilḍyat al-Barakah", archive.org, March 16, 2015.

3 Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram Opens New Fronts in Lagos and Nigeria's Middle Belt", Terrorism Monitor, July 25, 2014.

4 "Tahirin Musilminai" (History of Muslims), YouTube, undated.

5 "MOHD Nur & Yusuf.3gp," YouTube, undated; "Mallam Abubakar Shekau," YouTube, undated.

6 "Boko Haram Leader, Yusuf, Killed," Vanguard, July 30, 2009.

and syntax to al-Qa`ida statements, which suggests that al-Qa`ida may have responded to Boko Haram's public requests for media guidance and assisted in drafting Shekau's script.[7] AQIM, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) (which was an al-Qa`ida affiliate but later evolved into the Islamic State), and al-Shabab also offered condolences to Boko Haram after Yusuf's death.[8]

In September 2010, Boko Haram carried out its first coordinated attacks, and in June 2011 and August 2011, Mamman Nur, who received training from AQIM and al-Shabab, masterminded the first suicide vehicle-bombings in Nigeria's history at the Federal Police Headquarters and United Nations Headquarters in Abuja.[9] Throughout 2011 and 2012, Nur's network coordinated more than 20 suicide attacks in northwestern Nigeria, while Shekau's followers launched a guerilla-style insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. Nur, who lost a power struggle to succeed Yusuf, likely allowed Shekau and his spokesmen to claim all attacks.[10]

In 2012, a new militant group formed in northwestern Nigeria called Ansaru, which differed from Boko Haram ideologically, tactically, and geographically by following al-Qa`ida's *manhaj* (rejecting *takfiri* ideology and the killing of Muslims), focusing on kidnappings and ambushes like AQIM, and operating almost exclusively in the Middle Belt and northwestern Nigeria. Ansaru venerated the late Muhammed Yusuf, and was able to attract defectors from Shekau's faction and other mid-level recruits from Nigeria.[11]

Ansaru's leadership council (*shura*) appeared to feature three main networks, two of which were transnational networks.

The first Ansaru network was the "GSPC network," which included Nigerians, such as Yusuf's close associate and U.S.-designated terrorist, Khalid al-Barnawi, who were GSPC militants but strayed from AQIM after AQIM succeeded the GSPC in 2007. They did so in order to operate independent of AQIM's bureaucratic oversight and focus on kidnappings and criminal activities in the southern Sahel.[12] Al-Barnawi and others in his network carried out one of the GSPC's most famous attacks on Mauritanian soldiers at Lemgheity barracks in 2005 with militants such as al-Barnawi's longtime comrade, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and a commander who later joined al-Qa`ida's External Operations Unit in Pakistan, Yunis al-Mauritani (non-Nigerian West Africans who were also involved in the Lemgheity attack, such as former GSPC recruiter of sub-Saharan Africans, the Mauritanian Hamadou al-Kheiry, and Belmokhtar's relative, the Malian Oumar ould Hamaha, formed MUJAO at roughly the same time as Ansaru's formation in 2011).[13]

The second Ansaru network was the "AQIM network," which included Nigerians who were AQIM militants or were trained and funded by AQIM (or jointly with AQIM and al-Shabab), such as Mamman Nur and two of Yusuf's other associates, U.S.-designated terrorist Adam Kambar, who facilitated trainings for Nigerians in Mali and was in contact with al-Qa`ida Central in Pakistan (possibly via Yunus al-Mauritani), and suicide vehicle-bombing financier and mastermind Kabiru Sokoto.[14]

The third Ansaru network was the "Middle Belt network," which included mid-level recruits who supported the more experienced "GSPC network" and "AQIM network" masterminds and were often aggrieved Nigerian Muslims from states that experienced Muslim-Christian violence.

2012-2013: GSPC and AQIM Networks Merge with Boko Haram

After the "GSPC network's" first kidnapping and killing of a British and an Italian engineer in Sokoto in March 2012, al-Barnawi reportedly traveled to AQIM and MUJAO-controlled northern Mali.[15] In November 2012, he may have connected with his former GSPC comrades, including MUJAO leaders Hamadou al-Kheiry, who in 2014 pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi, and Oumar ould Hamaha.[16] Al-Barnawi

7 "Periodical Review July 2010 – No. 2," ICT's Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, August 2010; SITE Staff, "Boko Haram Representative Solicits Guidance and Assistance on Jihadist Forums," Insite Blog, December 2012.

8 "Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb: Condolence, Support and Comfort for our Brothers and People in Nigeria 20/08/09," www.ansar1.info, February 1, 2010; "Al Kataib Media People of Tawheed in Nigeria 2.mp4," YouTube, March 12, 2012; "Knights of Martyrdom 8" Video Dedicated to Nigerian Muslims, al-Furqan Foundation, September 22, 2011.

9 Jide Ajani, "UN House Blast: Mastermind, Nur, Declared Wanted," Vanguard, September 1, 2011; UN House: Boko Haram Unveils Suicide Bomber," This Day, September 19, 2011; Michael Olugbode, "Boko Haram Claims Killings in Borno," ThisDayLive, September 22, 2010.

10 "How Nur, Shekau Run Boko Haram," Vanguard, September 3, 2011.

11 "Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges," Vanguard, February 1, 2012.; "Another Islamic Sect Emerges to Counter Boko Haram?" Desert Herald, June 2, 2012;"Boko Haram: Six Killed in Factional Clash," ThisDayLive, February 3, 2012.

12 William McCants, "How Zawahiri Lost al Qaeda," *Foreign Affairs*, November 19, 2013.

13 "Exclusif...Mort des deux otages occidentaux tués au Nigeria: Une source d'AQMI livre quelques details," Agence Nouakchott d'Information, March 10, 2012; "Bin Laden Files Show al-Qaida and Taliban Leaders in Close Contact," *Guardian*, April 29, 2012; "Taking the Hostage Road," Africa Confidential, March 15, 2013; "Barnawi, Kambar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties," *Agence France-Presse*, June 21, 2012; Aboul Maaly, "Entretien exclusif avec Khaled Abou Al-Abass, alias 'Belaouar': 'L'armée de Ould Abdel Aziz au Mali n'a jamais été un obstacle devant nous pour arriver à nos objectifs en Mauritanie,'" Agence Nouakchott d'Information, November 9, 2011; "Leader of Tawhid and Jihad to Alakhbar: 'Our Movement is an Evolution of, and Not a Split from, al-Qa'ida," alakhbar.info, April 28, 2012; "New Qaeda Spin-Off Threatens West Africa," ahram.org.eg, December 22, 2011; "Shaykh Yunis," thought to be Yunis al- Mauritani, appears in one of the Abbottabad documents, where he is referred to as al-Qa`ida's "official responsible for external work in Africa and west Asia." See Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, page 31.

14 "Boko Haram Gets Sponsorship from Algeria, FG Tells Court," Vanguard, May 10, 2013; Lawan Adamu, "The Untold Story of Kabiru Sokoto," *Daily Trust*, February 13, 2012; "Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram's Leaders," *The Nation*, February 14, 2012; "Revealed: Wanted Suspect Arrested, Released in 2007," This Day, September 2, 2011; "Five Nigerians on Terror Charges," *BBC*, November 27, 2009; "Exclusive: Boko Haram Targets Julius Berger, Dantata & Sawoe Expatriates," *Premium Times*, March 12, 2012; Udumu Kalu, "Al-Qa`ida-Boko Haram Links in Kano Since 2009," Vanguard, December 24, 2011.

15 Midat Joseph et al., "Kidnappers - Why We Killed Briton, Italian Hostages," Leadership, March 13, 2012; "Boko Haram Looks to Mali," Africa Confidential, November 30, 2012.

16 Lars Inge Staveland, "New Islamist Group May Be Affiliated With Al-Qa`ida," *Aftenposten*, February 22, 2013; "Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali's Rebel Seize Gao," *Agence France-Presse*, April 9, 2012; Baba Ahmed, "Leader of al-Qaida Unit in Mali Quits AQIM," *Associated Press*,

may also have met with Belmokhtar, who was reportedly in Gao with some Ansaru militants, and Shekau, who reportedly escaped from Kano, Nigeria to northern Mali in 2012 and formed an alliance there with al-Barnawi.[17]

Al-Barnawi and Shekau may have agreed for Shekau's faction to be responsible for most of Yobe and Borno States in Nigeria, while al-Barnawi's faction, now also known as Harakat al-Muhajirin, would operate in northern Cameroon and northern Borno and along the logistics routes from Libya through Niger, Chad, and Cameroon that supplied Boko Haram in Nigeria.[18] Al-Barnawi, like Nur, likely gave Boko Haram credit for his own faction's raids on military barracks in northern Borno and kidnappings-for-ransoms of dozens of Nigerian officials and more than 15 foreigners in Cameroon in 2013-2014, which funded Boko Haram's operations.[19] Harakat al-Muhajirin likely also featured Shekau look-alikes in propaganda videos when the communication lines to Shekau were delayed or cut, such as in the split-screen video with the kidnapped seven-member French Moulin-Fournier family in February 2013 and possibly also the May 5, 2014 video of "Shekau" announcing that he kidnapped more than 250 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria.[20]

With al-Barnawi outside of Nigeria, Ansaru's "AQIM network" kidnapped eight foreign engineers in two operations in Katsina and Bauchi, ambushed Mali-bound Nigerian troops south of Abuja, and broke into a prison in Abuja to free Boko Haram members (another kidnapping and killing of a German engineer in Kano was claimed directly by AQIM and likely coordinated with al-Qa`ida's External Operations Unit).[21] The "AQIM network" also issued relatively high quality propaganda videos and statements claiming these attacks.[22] Yet the praise of the prison break in Abuja came in the prologue of a November 2012 Boko Haram video statement from Shekau called "Glad Tidings to the Soldiers of the Islamic State in Mali," which was likely filmed in Mali and, based on the syntax, written by AQIM or MUJAO. It included praise of ISI founders Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Omar al-Baghdadi (al-Baghdadi's predecessors), and may have been one of the first signs of the developing merger between Shekau's faction and Ansaru's "GSPC network" and the "AQIM network."[23] However, Boko Haram only first announced that it "coordinated" an operation with Ansaru remnants when it kidnapped a French priest in Cameroon in November 2013.[24]

Ansaru's "AQIM network" likely disbanded as a result of the Nigerian security forces' raid on its *shura* in Kaduna in 2012 and the French-led intervention in northern Mali in early 2013, which severed the "AQIM network's" contacts to MUJAO militants in northern Mali, as well as Belmokhtar's new al-Mourabitun Brigade, which incorporated MUJAO and Ansaru members.[25] Key Ansaru supporters, such as MUJAO's Oumar ould Hamaha, and trainers, such as AQIM southern command's Abu Zeid, and their couriers to Boko Haram, such as the Beninese Abdullah Abdullah and Mauritanian Hacene Ould Khalil (alias Jouleibib), were killed. Belmokhtar reportedly retreated to Libya, and one of his main recruiters of Boko Haram members, Beleid Abdel Salam, was captured in Algeria.[26] The "AQIM network's" isolation likely expedited its reintegration with Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, even though some militants, like their former AQIM patrons, may have disagreed with Shekau's *takfiri* ideology and been reluctant to accept his overall leadership.[27]

Meanwhile, the "Middle Belt network" of Ansaru lost virtually all of its connections to AQIM and MUJAO, but continued to carry out attacks in Ansaru's name on military checkpoints outside of Boko Haram's area of operations in Jos and Bauchi. It may also have continued to coordinate kidnappings and other operations with Harakat al-Muhajirin in Cameroon and northern Adamawa State in Nigeria.[28] Nonetheless, once Ansaru's "GSPC network" and "AQIM

December 3, 2012; Lemine Ould M. Salem, "Portrait. On l'appelle 'Barbe rousse,'" *Telquel*, January 17, 2013.

17 Taiwo Adisa, "Shekau, Boko Haram Leader, Escapes Arrest in Kano - Wife Arrested - Security Operatives Probe 2 Top Politicians over Sect's Funding," *Nigerian Tribune*, March 5, 2012.

18 Fulan Nasrallah, "Short Post And Open Thread," fulansitrep.wordpress.com, October 4, 2014.

19 Ola Audu, "How Boko Haram Turned to Kidnapping to Raise Funds in Borno," *Premium Times*, May 20, 2013.

20 For more details on the Moulin-Fournier kidnapping, see section on "Evidence of Ansaru's Presence in Borno" in Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Evolving Tactics and Alliances in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel* 6:6 (2013): p. 13; Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau: Dead, Deposed Or Duplicated?" Militant Leadership Monitor, Volume V, Issue 5, May 2014.

21 Jacob Zenn, "Nigerian Hostage Situation Indicates Ties Between North African and C. Asian Jihadists," Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, June 27, 2012.

22 "Declared of Jama`atu Ansaril Muslimina Fibiladis Sudan Garki II Abuja," November 30, 2012. Aminu Abubakar, "German Hostage Killed in Nigeria During Rescue Bid," *Agence France-Presse*, May 31, 2012; Aminu Abubakar, "Nigeria Detains 5 with 'Al Qaeda-links' over German Kidnap," *Agence France-Presse*, March 27, 2012. "AQIM network" contributed to attacks that included the kidnapping of a French engineer in Katsina in November 2012, who escaped in 2013, an ambush on Mali-bound Nigerian troops south of Abuja in January 2013, the kidnapping and killing of seven foreign engineers in Bauchi in February 2013, and a prison break that freed Boko Haram members in Abuja in November 2012

23 Abubakar Shekau, "Glad Tidings, O Soldiers of Allah," November 29, 2012. Two days after appearing on popular jihadist websites, the video was posted to the Ana al-Muslim network website.

24 "Boko Haram Holding Kidnapped French Priest," Vanguard, November 15, 2013; Guibai Guitama, "Cameroun – Libération du père Georges Vandenbeusch: Le négociateur désigné de Boko Haram réclame son argent," *L'Oeil du Sahel*, January 6, 2014.

25 "Le Mujao revendique le double attentat et promet qu'il y en aura d'autres," *Radio France Internationale*, May 24, 2013.

26 Remi Caravol, "Belmokhtar, the Sahelistan Godfather," *Jeune Afrique* January 15 – 31, 2015; "Judge's Absence Stalls Trial of Mali-based Boko Haram Suspect," *Premium Times*, May 8, 2013; Adam Nossiter, "New Threat in Nigeria as Militants Split Off," *New York Times*, April 23, 2013; "Algerian court sentences Belmokhtar aide to eight years in prison," Ennahar el-Djadid Online, December 30, 2014.

27 Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti, "Question-and-Answer with Abu-al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti: Question Number 7618: Is it Permissible to Target a Regime-Sponsored School That Recruits its Students to the Army After They Complete Their Studies?" Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, July 18, 2013; "Mallam Abubakar Shekau," YouTube, undated; "Abul Qaqa Confession Shows Bloodletting and Fear as Instruments of Control Within Boko Haram," *Sahara Reporters*, February 6, 2012.

28 Fulan Nasrallah, "A Break Down Of Current Boko Haram/Yusufiyya Factions And Organizational Structure," fulansitrep.wordpress.com, October 10, 2014; "Nigerian military kills Boko Haram commander along Jos-Bauchi road – DHQ," *Premium Times*, June 21, 2014; "Gunmen attack Bauchi check point, kill one soldier," *Daily Trust*, January 18, 2015; "Soldiers kill civilians, raze village in Bauchi," *Premium Times*, December 18, 2014.

network" reintegrated with Boko Haram, the "Middle Belt network" effectively became the only network using the Ansaru name.

2014-2015: Former AQIM Network Sets Stage for the Boko Haram-Islamic State Merger

The key factor that set the stage for the Boko Haram-Islamic State merger was the reintegration of Ansaru's "GSPC network" and "AQIM network" into Boko Haram. The longstanding contacts those two networks maintained with North African former AQIM militants who abandoned AQIM in favor of the Islamic State in Syria and Libya may have facilitated the dialogue that was necessary to establish Boko Haram's merger with the Islamic State. For example, AQIM-turned-Islamic State member in Syria, Abu Malik Shaybah al-Hamad, who was the main promoter of Boko Haram's al-Urhwa al-Wutqha Twitter account, which Boko Haram launched as its "official mouthpiece" on January 19, 2015 and used to host Shekau's *bay`a* statement on May 7, featured trailers of al-Urhwa al-Wutqha videos on his own Twitter account before their release on al-Urhwa al-Wutqha. This suggested al-Hamad had inside knowledge about Boko Haram media and direct connections to Boko Haram's media producers, who likely received media production and social media dissemination guidance from the Islamic State. Several Boko Haram videos on al-Urwqa al-Wutqha, for example, featured the distinct introductory "tasmiya," choreography, graphics, lens angles, and special effects of Islamic State videos, including those of British hostage-turned-Islamic State journalist John Cantlie in Aleppo, Syria and the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts in Libya.[29]

There were other examples of Boko Haram collaboration with the Islamic State on al-Urhwa al-Wutqha that suggested that former Ansaru members were paving the way for Boko Haram's formal relationship with the Islamic State. A video called "Message from a Mujahid," which took the name of an Islamic State video series and referred to Boko Haram-controlled territories as the "Islamic State in West Africa," featured an interview of a Boko Haram militant on the Nigeria-Cameroon border regretting Muslim civilian deaths, which echoed the message of militants from Ansaru (and possibly also Harakat al-Muhajirin) in videos and statements in 2012 and 2013.[30]

Other al-Urhwa al-Wutqha videos, including an interview of new Boko Haram spokesman Abu Musab al-Barnawi (likely a pseudonym in deference to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), featured the distinct optics of some Ansaru videos from 2012, including men wearing veils, an office setting, multi-lingual translation, and an overall professional media style, especially in comparison to Shekau's videos at that time. It is possible that the "AQIM faction" of Ansaru that re-integrated with Boko Haram collaborated with the Islamic State on video production and used al-Urhwa al-Wutqha in January and February 2015 to create a mass social media platform in preparation for Shekau's *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi on March 7, 2015. In this regard, former AQIM members now affiliated with the Islamic State may have provided strategic media guidance to Boko Haram through their comrades in the reintegrated "AQIM network" in a similar way that they guided Shekau's first script in 2010 and again in Mali in 2012.

While the Islamic State may have had some of the same concerns as AQIM had in previous years about Shekau's erratic persona and Boko Haram's factionalization, the reintegration of the "GSPC network" and "AQIM network" into Boko Haram's ranks likely provided reassurance to the Islamic State that Boko Haram had come to a consensus behind Shekau as the leader. Moreover, Boko Haram's announcement on al-Urhwa al-Wutqha of a new "General Command" on February 15, 2015, and al-Urwha al-Wutqha's featuring of a composed, professional, and more mature Shekau giving a speech threatening Benin, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria on February 27, 2015, likely confirmed to the Islamic State that Shekau was the sole Boko Haram leader and that he could comport himself in a way consistent with Islamic State propaganda. This likely fulfilled one of the requirements from Boko Haram's side for the merger with the Islamic State. These requirements were detailed in the Islamic State's online magazine, *Dabiq 5*, in October 2014, where it said that the announcement of new *wilayas* (states), including in Nigeria and four other locations (Caucasus, Khorasan, Indonesia and Philippines), would be delayed until the Islamic State apppointed a leader who could pledge *bay`a* and have a direct line of communication to al-Baghdadi. It therefore may have been the Islamic State media assistants to al-Urhwa al-Wutqha who finally decided that Shekau was a suitable enough leader to make the pledge to al-Baghdadi, and they may have connected directly with Shekau via the former Ansaru "AQIM faction." These Islamic State media assistants then featured Shekau on al-Urhwa al-Wutqha for the first time on February 27, 2015 (and again on March 7 for the *bay`a*), after 40 days of running al-Urhwa al-Wutqha as Boko Haram's "official mouthpiece" but, oddly, not mentioning Shekau or any other leader once during that timeframe.

Outcomes of the Boko Haram-Islamic State Merger

The Islamic State's announcement of a "Caliphate" and its desire to expand to Africa and promote a new "*wilaya* West Africa" on equal footing with other *wilayas* already announced enabled Boko Haram to achieve the goal it identified at the time of its founding in 2002: the creation, or joining, of an Islamic state that was legitimated by other "pure salafists." The Islamic State could provide for Boko Haram what al-Qa`ida and its affiliates could not, given the preference of al-Qa`ida's leadership, specifically Usama bin Laden, to avoid state formation in the near-term.

Moreover, while al-Qa`ida Central's leadership rarely showed interest in Boko Haram, or Shekau (although it may have Mamman Nur), especially after bin Laden's death and the arrest of Yunus al-Mauritani in Pakistan in

29 "British hostage John Cantlie appears in new Isis video," *The Guardian*, February 9, 2015; Ian Black, "Isis claim of beheading Egyptian Copts in Libya shows group's spread," *The Guardian*, February 15, 2015; "Introduction to wilayah Borno, al-Urhwa al-Wutqha, February 22, 2015; The Harvest of Spies, al-Urhwa al-Wutqha, March 2, 2015.

30 "Innocence of the Mujahidin From the Blood of the Innocent Muslims," Sanam al-Islam Network, May 14, 2013; "Boko Haram Militants Shows Off Weapons 'Captured' From An Army Barracks," Sahara TV, April 29, 2013; Message from a Mujahid, al-Urhwa al-Wutqha, January 29, 2015.

2011, the Islamic State has elevated Shekau's stature and legitimacy in the international jihadist arena and reaffirmed his role as Boko Haram's sole leader with respect to other factions in Nigeria and West Africa.[31] This is an additional reason why Shekau may have been willing to pledge *bay`a* and subordinate himself to al-Baghdadi in a way that he never did with al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. In addition, Shekau's former rivals who were in Ansaru's "GSPC network" and "AQIM network" before reintegrating with Boko Haram may consider Shekau's *bay`a* a victory in that for the first time since Shekau succeeded Yusuf in 2010, his power is under the authority of another leader, which could keep Shekau in check. The re-emergence of Muhammed Yusuf's ("Yusuf al-Nigeri") sermons and scripts in Boko Haram videos on al-Urhwa al-Urhwa could, for example, serve as a reminder to Boko Haram that Shekau is once again not the primary leader.

The timing of the announcement of the Boko Haram-Islamic State merger was also likely opportune for Boko Haram. It came at a time when Boko Haram was facing setbacks in the wake of a large-scale military offensive by Nigeria and neighboring countries that was launched in February 2015. The offensive forced Boko Haram to abandon territories it had controlled in northeastern Nigeria since mid-2014. In this regard, if Boko Haram is defeated or scatters, the merger could prove to be a setback for Islamic State propaganda and its efforts to portray the Islamic State as "remaining and expanding."

The Islamic State may, however, hedge against this in two ways. First, the Islamic State may encourage Boko Haram to activate its sleeper-cells in northwestern Nigeria and carry out a major attack on foreigners that would garner international media attention, similar to the Islamic State's attack on Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, Libya, or Belmokhtar's attack at a night club in Bamako, Mali on the same day that Shekau pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi on March 7.[32] This type of attack would overshadow Boko Haram's struggles on the battlefield.

Second, the Islamic State's media support to Boko Haram may be preparing Boko Haram for a "retreat" from Nigeria into areas deeper in the Sahel, where various supporting networks are active. Boko Haram's new French language propaganda on al-Urhwa al-Wutqha and the Islamic State's encouragement of Tuaregs, Toubous, and other West Africans, including in the diaspora in Europe, to "migrate" to join Boko Haram in "West Africa" would allow Boko Haram to recruit youths who are intellectually inspired by the Islamic State from areas well beyond Nigeria and the Lake Chad sub-region.

The re-branding of Boko Haram as "*wilaya* West Africa" and the professionalization of its media, to include the taming of Shekau's persona, may allow Boko Haram to shed its "Boko Haram" moniker, which it always rejected and considered derogatory. In addition, the new "*wilaya* West Africa" may appeal to a wealthier class of recruits inspired by the notion of a Caliphate, as opposed to the poor *al-majiri* boys who, lacking any greater purpose other than an attraction to Shekau's "small boy-turned-Oga" self-narrative, have joined Boko Haram simply to pillage. The former Nigerian Chief Justice's son's "migration" to Syria with his family several weeks before Shekau's *bay`a* has already raised concerns about wealthy and educated people joining the Islamic State and its growing regional affiliates.[33]

Conclusion

Boko Haram's merger with the Islamic State and Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi likely do not reflect a sudden tactical decision to affiliate with the Islamic State. Rather, the signs that Boko Haram would desire a merger of this type to legitimate its long-envisioned Islamic state in Nigeria or West Africa were apparent as early as Boko Haram's founding in 2002. Al-Baghdadi's declaration of the Islamic State in June 2014 provided Boko Haram the opportunity to turn this goal into a reality. Al-Baghdadi's declaration was followed by Shekau's first statement of "support" for al-Baghdadi in July 2014 and Shekau's own declaration at that time of an "Islamic State" in northeastern Nigeria. Boko Haram then began using the Islamic State's *nasheeds*, black flag, black clothing, and other Islamic State symbols and choreography in its videos from July 2014 until the launch of the more formal relationship with the Islamic State via al-Urhwa al-Wutqha in January 2015. This suggests that even if part of Boko Haram's motivation may have been an opportunistic desire for financial or other benefits resulting from "supporting" al-Baghdadi, the organization's history and evolution suggests that the merger with the Islamic State was a strategic, calculated, and long-term decision coming from the top of the Boko Haram leadership and communications structure.

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31 Question-and-answer with Abu-al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti; date not given: "Question Number 7618: "Is it Permissible to Target a Regime-Sponsored School That Recruits its Students to the Army After They Complete Their Studies?", Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, July 18, 2013; "Key Al Qaeda agent Younis Al Mauritani captured in Pakistan", *The National*, September 25, 2011.

32 "IS Fighter in ar-Raqqah Advises Boko Haram to Prepare for Attacks Due to its Pledge," SITE Intelligence, March 17, 2015.

33 "Exclusive: Ex-Nigerian Chief Justice's Son Joins Terrorist Group ISIS," *The Will*, March 6, 2015.

Terrorist Affiliations in Context: A Typology of Terrorist Inter-Group Cooperation

By Assaf Moghadam

Affiliation—the focus of this Special Issue of the *CTC Sentinel*—is a prominent way for militant actors to voice ideological support for one another. As Boko Haram's recent pledge of bay`a to the Islamic State suggests, affiliation is a salient feature in the jihadist universe. Among jihadi actors, it is not uncommon for these rhetorical pledges of support to serve as a springboard for more tangible cooperative relationships in the logistical and operational realms. Such inter-organizational collaboration can significantly affect the capabilities, longevity, strategy, and tactics of the cooperating parties.[1]

This article offers some conceptual explorations of cooperation between militant organizations—a topic that, like affiliations, is both understudied and under-theorized. Specifically, the article offers a new typology of terrorist cooperation between established militant groups, arguing that cooperative ties between these organizations span across a spectrum ranging from high-end to low-end cooperative relationships. High-end relationships include mergers—the ultimate form of cooperation—and strategic partnerships. Low-end cooperation includes tactical cooperation and, at the bottom end of the spectrum, transactional cooperation.

The typology presented in this article has important implications for counterterrorism. As each of the four types of cooperation is driven by varying dynamics and exhibits different strengths and weaknesses, each also offers different opportunities for counterterrorist intervention.

Global Jihad and the Problem of Terrorist Cooperation

In the 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism, President Barack Obama described al-Qa`ida and its affiliates as "the paramount terrorist threat we have faced"—one that, he warned, has "continued to evolve."[2] The elusiveness of the threat posed by global jihadist groups is due in no small part to the complex, networked structure of this movement. At its core, the jihadist universe is a movement composed of various actors, including individuals, loose networks, and formal organizations. These actors adhere to a common religious ideology and engage in dynamic cooperative relationships with each other.[3] The ties that bind these jihadist actors can have long-term negative implications on international security, possibly drawing the United States and other countries into future conflicts. A recent article in the *New York Times* highlighted this potential problem with regard to the Islamic State when its authors argued that the group is expanding "beyond its base in Syria and Iraq to establish militant affiliates in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt and Libya … raising the prospect of a new global war on terror."[4]

On the face of it, such new affiliates establish cooperative ties with the Islamic State. Not all cooperative ties, however, are equal. A closer examination of cooperate relationships between militant organizations suggests that such ties can have significant qualitative variations, and hence pose threats of differing magnitudes.

Towards a Typology of Terrorist Cooperation

Typologies of terrorist cooperation should account for the various domains—ideological, logistical, and operational—in which terrorists cooperate, but also for the nature of the relationship between the cooperating entities.[5] Variables affecting the nature of that relationship are, first, the expected duration of cooperation. Thus, cooperation can stretch over a considerable length of time or occur sporadically, and even on a one-time basis.[6] The second aspect is the degree of interdependence between the collaborating entities. While in a merger, for instance, the groups are fully interdependent, a simple transactional cooperation will rarely erode a group's independence.

Third, types and qualities of cooperative relationships can differ significantly in terms of the variety of cooperative activities that groups can engage in. Looser forms of cooperation may be limited to a single domain, such as ideological or logistical support only. Formal partnerships between groups can be expected to extend to a greater number of domains, such as ideological, logistical, and operational realms.

Ideological affinity is the fourth characteristic that can help identify qualitative differences in collaborative relationships between groups. Short-term relationships established for the purpose of specific transactions can obviate the need to find an ideological common ground between the parties. Strategic alliances and mergers, on the other hand, may be dependent upon a shared world view. Finally, cooperative relationships can also be distinguished in terms of the level of trust that the parties expect to accompany that relationship.

Four prototypes of terrorist cooperation can be distinguished based on these five variables. In diminishing order of the strength of cooperative ties, they are mergers, strategic alliances, tactical cooperation, and transactional cooperation. Furthermore, these four

1 See, for example, Ely Karmon, *Coalitions between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists* (Leiden; Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005); Tricia Bacon, "Strange Bedfellows: Why Terrorist Organizations Ally" (Ph.D. Dissertation: Georgetown University, 2013); Michael Horowitz and Philip Potter, "Allying to Kill: Terrorist Intergroup Cooperation and the Consequences for Lethality," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58:2 (March 2013); Brian J. Phillips, "Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity," *International Studies Quarterly* 58:2 (June 2014); and Victor Asal, Gary Ackerman, and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "Connections Can Be Toxic: Terrorist Organizational Factors and the Pursuit of CBRN Weapons," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35:3 (2012).

2 "National Strategy for Counterterrorism, 2011 (Washington, DC: The White House, 2011), p. 1.

3 Assaf Moghadam, "The Salafi Jihad as a Religious Ideology," *CTC Sentinel* 1:3 (February 2008).

4 Eric Schmitt and David Kirkpatrick, "Islamic State Sprouting Limbs beyond its Base," *New York Times*, February 14, 2015.

5 Karmon's typology of terrorist cooperation distinguishes between ideological, logistical, and operational cooperation. Karmon, *Cooperation between Terrorist Organizations*, p. 49. For a typology that accounts for the nature of the relationship, see Bacon, "Strange Bedfellows," p. 756.

6 See also Phil Williams, "Cooperation among Criminal Organizations," in Mats Berdal and Monica Serrano, eds., *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual* (Boulder, CO; London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 73.

prototypes can be grouped into two qualitative categories: mergers and strategic alliances can be considered examples of "high-end cooperation," while tactical and transactional cooperation constitute "low-end cooperation."

High-end Cooperation: Mergers and Strategic Alliances

Mergers are the most complete type of cooperation because they entail the unification of the collaborating groups' command and control structure, the integration of their fighting forces, and the pooling of their resources.[7] The expected time horizon of groups that merge is indefinite, as the groups are essentially forming a single entity. As a result, the merging groups in essence shed their independence, while creating a new entity whose rules are binding to all members. Groups that merge cooperate along the entire spectrum of activities, from ideological to logistical and operational cooperation. Mergers are conditional upon the constituent groups sharing a common ideology. To the extent that ideological differences exist before the merger, the weaker group needs to adopt the ideological guidelines of the senior partner. Failure to do so can jeopardize the success of the merger.

Mergers can be beneficial for militant groups plagued by financial woes, mobilization problems, or identity crises. When smaller organizations merge with larger groups, these organizations can adopt a highly desirable "brand" that can positively affect the group's efforts of recruiting new personnel.[8] As Daniel Byman has noted, mergers and acquisitions—be they in the business world or the universe of militant organizations—can help promote organizational learning as they streamline the flow of ideas and solutions within the newly minted group. As more actors can exploit innovations at a lower cost and at greater speed, research and development will have greater dividends.[9]

Mergers, however, are not free of cost, the most obvious being the full loss of autonomy, which applies especially to the weaker partner. Mergers are also no surefire way that members will establish and adopt a new identity or otherwise overcome divisions. Fractures over strategic, ideological, or tactical questions can remain and can result in a breakup of mergers. The two main Egyptian jihadist groups, Al-Jihad and Gamaa Islamiya, for example, briefly merged in 1980, only to split following the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in October of the following year as a result of divisions over the leadership of the Blind Sheikh, Omar abd al-Rahman.[10]

The most successful mergers can result in the establishment of formidable terrorist organizations. The Lebanese Hizballah, for that matter, was the result of a merger of different factions such as members of Amal, the Muslim Students Union, the Dawa party of Lebanon, and others. As Matthew Levitt explains, the group emerged as the "product of an Iranian effort to aggregate under one roof a variety of militant Shia groups in Lebanon as an umbrella movement."[11] The merger between Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) and Usama bin Laden's al-Qa`ida to form a new group called Qaedat al-Jihad is an additional example.

Strategic alliances are the second type of high-end cooperation. Strategic alliances are relationships in which the collaborating groups share know-how and resources extensively and may exchange fighters, but at the same time (and in contrast to mergers) retain ownership of their respective assets as well as distinct command and control over their organizations.[12] Strategic allies expect their partnership to last for an extended period of time and, like mergers, expect to cooperate in multiple activities, spanning ideological and logistical, and frequently also operational cooperation. The large variety of cooperative endeavors calls for frequent consultations between the leaderships, even though the security environment may not be permissive of frequent face-to-face encounters. As a result of the strong bonds between strategic partners, groups in such relationships may set up specialized infrastructure or point persons to manage the relations with the strategic partner.[13]

Strategic alliances are dependent on a high degree of ideological affinity, although groups may retain slight differences of emphasis in terms of their ideological or strategic agenda. Generally, however, strategic partnerships are marked by a high degree of ideological overlap and a general agreement on strategic issues (which may have prompted the alliance in the first place). As a result of this common vision, true strategic partnerships are characterized by a relatively high degree of trust between the partners. Breakups of strategic partnerships—such as the split between al-Qa`ida and what was then called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)—are oftentimes the outcome of a gradual erosion of trust.

Contemporary examples of strategic alliances include those between al-Qa`ida (Central) on the one hand and its remaining affiliates on the other—al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabab, and Jabhat al-Nusra.

Low-end Cooperation: Tactical and Transactional Cooperation

Low-end forms of cooperation, which range from tactical to transactional cooperation—differ from their high-end counterparts in several respects. First, tactical or transactional collaborations typically have shorter time horizons than mergers or strategic alliances. Although some tactical alliances can endure or evolve into strategic partnerships, such alliances are

7 See also Bacon, "Strange Bedfellows," pp. 753-754. Bacon refers to these relationships as "pooled relationships."

8 Daniel L. Byman, "Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations," *Security Studies* 23:3 (2014).

9 Ibid.

10 Steven Brooke, "Jihadist Strategic Debates before 9/11," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:3 (2008), pp. 205-207.

11 Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), p. 11. See also Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty Year Struggle against Israel* (New York: Random House, 2011), pp. 46-48.

12 Compare Bacon, who terms these relationships "integrated relationships." Bacon, "Strange Bedfellows," p. 754.

13 This also characterizes strategic partnerships between criminal organizations. See Patrick L. Clawson and Rensselaer Lee III, *The Andean Cocaine Industry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Quoted in Williams, "Cooperation among Criminal Organizations," pp. 72-73.

usually beholden to the vicissitudes of shifting interests. Secondly, when compared to high-end cooperative relationships, partners in low-end forms of cooperation retain all or most of their independence. Thirdly, low-end forms of cooperation rarely encompass the full range of cooperative activities. More likely, such forms of cooperation involve collaborations on specific issues or domains. Fourth, in low-end forms of cooperation, pragmatism prevails over ideological similarity. Transactional forms of cooperation can occur between ideologically opposed groups, and even tactical alliances can be formed along ideologically incompatible positions, provided that other mundane interests are served. Fifth, low-end forms of cooperation are rarely characterized by the same level of trust that accompanies high-end forms of cooperation such as strategic alliances and mergers.

Low-end forms of cooperation between militant actors can be either tactical or transactional in character, with the former denoting a more committed and encompassing form of relationship than the latter. Neither of these amount to the level of a strategic alliance or merger in terms of the overall strength of the alliance.

Tactical cooperation differs from strategic cooperation in that strategic alliances are expected to last for a relatively long time, whereas no such expectation is inherent in tactical alliances. Tactical alliances are based on shared interests, as opposed to a combination of shared interest and common ideology that underlies strategic alliances. Since the interests of groups are far from static, tactical alliances can shift, and even end abruptly as the interests of the parties diverge. Tactical alliances may even be established with the express knowledge that such alliances are not likely to endure, provided the parties identify areas of mutual gain in the short term.

Tactical alliances are particularly common between militant groups involved in civil wars and insurgencies, when transitory overlapping interests can result in a temporary "marriage of convenience" that can bring together groups that have divergent ideological orientations. Following the U.S. led invasion of Iraq starting in March 2003, for example, deposed Baathists and jihadists formed a tactical alliance that had the immediate objective of ending the occupation.[14]

Strategic and tactical alliances between groups differ in the strength of the relationship in part because the former involves ideological affinity (e.g. common adherence to Marxist or jihadi ideology), whereas tactical alliances are not predicated upon ideological agreement. This is exemplified in the off-and-on, tactical collaboration between Sunni al-Qa`ida and Shiite Hizballah.[15]

At the lowest end of cooperative relationships between militant groups are transactional relationships. Such transactions can be material or ideological in nature. As far as the material transactional relationships are concerned, the time horizon can vary from short, one-time exchanges to regularized transactions as part of a contractual relationship. Generally speaking, there is no expectation of a longer-term mutual relationship, because cooperative activity is specific to certain exchanges. In such transactional relationships, the cooperating organizations maintain their full autonomy and usually cooperate on a single domain, often involving logistical cooperation such as the transfer of weapons. Actors involved in transactional relationships of the material variety do not need to share similar organizational goals or ideologies, and may not even share a common enemy.

Transactional relationships can involve formal contract relationships, which can specify the regular supply of a specific good or service. Likely more often, transactional forms of terrorist cooperation involve informal arrangements on the exchange of goods. In such barter relationship, one party provides a certain kind of good or service in exchange for the other party providing another kind of good or service.[16] The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka are a good example of a militant group involved in various transactional relationships. At its height, the LTTE became an international arms seller and also offered advice on weapons handling to a variety of groups.[17]

Pledges of allegiance that do not (yet) involve further logistical or operational collaboration—such as Boko Haram's pledge to the Islamic State—can be considered an ideological variant of transactional relationships. Unlike the more tangible goods that are being exchanged in a material transactional relationship, such ideological cooperation revolves around the exchange of immaterial goods. A pledge of general support can be reciprocated, for example, by the pledging group's ability to adopt the brand of the senior partner. A further difference between material and ideological transactional cooperation is that ideological cooperation sends a stronger signal about the groups' intentions to engage in higher forms of cooperation in the future.

Counterterrorism Implications

The above discussion suggests that affiliations can lead to a variety of cooperative ties between groups. Consequently, not every pledge of allegiance necessarily results in a full-fledged strategic alliance between the newly associated groups. This article presented four ideal types of terrorist inter-group cooperation in order to illustrate some of the basic differences between how terrorist and insurgent groups collaborate. There should be little doubt, however, that terrorist cooperation takes many additional forms not covered here. In fact, even the present typology is inherently limited in that it considers only a specific type of actor—formal organizations—that employs terrorism. A more comprehensive typology of terrorist cooperation should

14 Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), pp. 52-54.

15 National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), pp. 240-241.

16 Compare Williams, "Cooperation among Criminal Organizations," p. 70; pp. 74-75.

17 Shanaka Jayasekara, "Tamil Tiger Links with Islamist Terrorist Groups," in Boaz Ganor and Eitan Azani, eds., *The Global Impact of Terrorism 2008 - 8th World Summit on Counter-Terrorism* (Herzliya, Israel: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2010); and Cynthia Balana, "Tamil Rebels Sent Arms to Abus–Sri Lanka Exec," *Inquirer*, August 4, 2007.

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acknowledge the fact that terrorism is increasingly carried out by a diversity of actors—including self-starters and loose networks.[18] Future typologies should account for this "privatization of terrorist cooperation,"[19] rather than limit the scope of analysis to organizations only.

The benefits of a more nuanced approach to analyzing terrorist cooperation, however, are apparent even from the organization-centric typology introduced above. Identifying different types of terrorist cooperation can provide a useful tool for the counterterrorism analyst who seeks to identify insertion points to weaken inter-organizational bonds.[20]

Mergers, strategic alliances, tactical and transactional cooperation all have different characteristics that counterterrorism practitioners can seek to exploit. Mergers, for example, are predicated on a relatively high degree of ideological affinity and agreement over strategy. As a result, they may be most vulnerable to personality rifts, especially between the leaderships of the two merging groups. Strategic alliances usually involve a shared world view but, as the example of strategic alliances between al-Qa`ida and its affiliates suggest, such alliances may feature ongoing divisions over strategic and tactical choices, in addition to possible personality rifts or agency problems. Strategic alliances might therefore be broken up most effectively by deepening strategic and tactical rifts among their enemies.

In a tactical cooperation, on the other hand, the survivability of cooperation is conditional upon the cooperating groups' ongoing perception that the tactical partnership continues to serve the militant groups' core interests. This suggests that states trying to break up tactical alliances may succeed by trying to influence the cost-benefit calculation of groups to remain in such alliances. States may consider both positive incentives and negative sanctions in trying to influence these groups' ongoing rationale for maintaining such a tactical relationship. Transactional cooperative relationships differ in terms of their threat potential. Some material transactional forms of cooperation may be of minuscule importance. Not so some ideological affiliations, such as Boko Haram's pledge of *bay`a* to the Islamic State, which constitute a greater potential threat, and may therefore best be addressed by responses similar to those that apply to higher forms of cooperation.

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The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

18 Assaf Moghadam, *Dangerous Liaisons: Global Jihad and the Evolution of Terrorist Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

19 Assaf Moghadam, "The Privatization of Terrorist Cooperation," Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA), New Orleans, LA, February 20, 2015.

20 This is assuming that the counterterrorism practitioner has concluded that breaking the bonds between terrorist and insurgent organizations serves the counterterrorist's interest. This is an important question that is beyond the scope of this article.