



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER

at West Point



Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines:

Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency



Editor:
Jacob Zenn

CHAPTER 1: Boko Haram's Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfir and Jihad as Recipes for Schism

By Abdulbasit Kassim

The jihadi insurgent movement Boko Haram has established itself as one of the relatively few jihadi movements to succeed in the capture, control, and governance of territory in Africa. Over the course of less than two decades, Boko Haram has morphed from a jihadi movement operating within Nigeria to a movement with a regional presence across multiple countries in West Africa and beyond. Since the internal civil war within the group shot into the news following the war of words between Abubakr Shekau and Muhammad Mamman Nur in August 2016, sundry observers have remained puzzled over how to describe the open competition and outright hostility that fractured the group into two factions. What is the current state of Boko Haram's internal civil war in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region? This is the most frequently asked question by policymakers, scholars, and the general public interested in understanding the trajectory of the decade-old insurgency. The answer to this question has often focused on a stationary analysis of the mutual recrimination between Shekau and Nur in August 2016. Nonetheless, many events are taking place behind the scenes that can only be grasped through a close reading of the constant stream of primary sources produced by the two factions. Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's camp together with Nur in the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) holds an advantage over Shekau's faction, which is still known as Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad (The Sunni Group for Preaching and Fighting), but the internal civil war is not yet over.²⁶

Background

In his lecture on March 15, 2009, at the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno State, Muhammad Mamman Nur, who was then considered to be third-in-command in the group that would later be popularly known as Boko Haram, vowed that "whether you [oppositional salafi clerics] like it or not, whether you love them [the secular political rulers] or not, we will commence the jihad! If you choose not to be bellicose and you depart from us, we will be aggressive towards you. This task [jihad] is obligatory. This is the main reason we made it clear that our proselytism is not just verbal proclamation. It is not the type of proselytism of Ibrahim Zakzaky."²⁷²⁸ Nur's lecture, which was delivered three months prior to the July 2009 Boko Haram uprising, was especially filled with incitement and threats. As the leader of the group, Muhammad Yusuf, explained in his address after Nur's lecture, Nur's irascible tone was apparently brought on by the report that one of the members of the group had been killed by the Nigerian security forces and his body dumped in Gwange Cemetery in Maiduguri.²⁹

Unlike the raucous disposition of Abubakr Shekau, who succeeded Yusuf after his extrajudicial killing by the Nigerian security forces in July 2009, Nur maintained a strict sense of secrecy. Nothing was heard directly from Nur after the July 2009 uprising, even when the Nigerian government placed a bounty of \$175,000 on him for his alleged masterminding of the August 2011 United Nations Building

26 Shekau's faction is commonly referred to as Boko Haram in the popular press. Al-Barnawi's faction is commonly referred to as ISWAP or the "ISIS faction," but it is sometimes also still referred to as Boko Haram.

27 Ibrahim Zakzaky is the leader of the Shiite group the Islamic Movement in Nigeria. He has been in detention since the aftermath of the 2015 Zaria massacre where hundreds of his followers were extrajudicially killed for allegedly planning an assassination attempt of Nigeria's Chief of Army Staff Tukur Buratai. For further detail on the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, see Jacob Zenn "The Islamic Movement and Iranian Intelligence Activities in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel* 6:10 (2013), pp. 13-18. See also Alexander Thurston, "Shi'ism and Anti-Shi'ism in Nigeria," *Maydan*, May 15, 2017.

28 See "Returning to the Qur`an and Sunna: Lecture by Muhammad Mamman Nur and Muhammad Yusuf" in Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa eds., *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (London: Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 156.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 159-164.

bombing in Abuja.³⁰ On August 4, 2016, more than seven years after his voice was last heard publicly in the March 2009 lecture, Nur's tactic of reticence inadvertently ended following the public disclosure of his privately recorded two-part audio lecture entitled "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau." In the lecture, Nur launched a scathing attack on Shekau for Shekau's violation of the Islamic ethics of jihad. Nur also presented the inner workings of Boko Haram and portrayed Shekau as a power-drunk, arbitrary, and capricious person who had degenerated into a Joseph Kony-like figure in the way he holds court in the Sambisa Forest, and periodically kills off his relatives, friends, and supporters for trivial offenses and rails against everyone who opposes him. Nur said:

"You were the person that killed Mustapha Chad and Kaka Allai inside your center as well. Go and ask the women about Mustapha Chad and Kaka Allai—they will tell you that they were martyred in battle, whereas the people from within will tell you that they were stoned to death. It is a lie. You were the person that killed them in Fath al-Mubin (Manifest Victory)³¹ ... Were you not the person that killed Mujahid, Mallam Umar and Abu Maryam? Abu Maryam and Mujahid were killed when they went to the area under his [Shekau's] control. What was the crime of these servants of Allah? What did they do to you [Shekau]? Is it that a person cannot tell you the truth? That is the reason why, when we realized that we cannot tell you the truth while we were close to you, lest you kill us, we decided to go far away to tell you the truth [by audio messages]. Now it is impossible for you to kill us, rather we will kill each other. Our reliance is on Allah. If it is about the army, everyone has his own army. If you wish you can send your spy to our gathering to kill us. If you are a spy, you should come to us, and wait for the consequence."^{32 33}

30 "Nigeria Sets \$175,000 Bounty for Mamman Nur, The Alleged UN Office Bomber," Sahara Reporters, September 18, 2011.

31 Fath al-Mubin is possibly a name of the one of Boko Haram's camps.

32 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 453-455.

33 The images of Mujahid, Abu Maryam, Mustapha Chad, and Kaka Allai that follow were extracted during an online ideological altercation between members of Boko Haram and revisionists that parted ways with the group in April 2017. The images of Muhammad Mamman Nur and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi were extracted from the videos of Boko Haram. On December 1, 2015, the United States Department of the Treasury sanctioned Muhammad Mamman Nur and Mustapha Chad pursuant to Executive Order 13224. However, the accuracy of the details provided about Muhammad Mamman Nur can be contested. See "Treasury Sanctions Senior Boko Haram Leaders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, December 1, 2015. On February 27, 2018, the United States Department of the Treasury added Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi to the Office of Foreign Assets Control's Specially Designated Nationals List. See "Specially Designated Nationals List Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, February 27, 2018.

*Mujahid**Abu Maryam**Mustapha Chad**Mamman Nur**Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi**Kaka Allai*

In retrospect, the schisms in Boko Haram's leadership disclosed in Nur's lecture in August 2016 have an extended trajectory that dates back to the ideological infighting over the appropriate time to declare jihad in Nigeria—an infighting that commenced in the early 2000s between Muhammad Yusuf and Muhammad Ali, the latter whom was the first leader of the Nigerian Taliban, the predecessor group to Boko Haram. Nur's revelations also validated the repeated charges of the counterproductive strategy of targeting Muslim civilians leveled at Shekau and the leadership of Boko Haram by Abu Usama al-Ansari,³⁴ the leader of Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands) popularly known as Ansaru, in the video debut of his group delivered on June 2, 2012.³⁵ Through the writings and sermons of the key ideologues that contributed to the ideational capital of Boko Haram, this article examines how rigidity in the interpretation of jihadi ideology prompted Boko Haram's internal civil war. This article chronicles Boko Haram's internal civil war—situating it within the broader spectrum of infighting among other jihadi groups, particularly al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State—and the way both 'parent groups' have managed, or failed to manage, Boko Haram's requests for mediation in its own schisms.

34 Abu Usama al-Ansari is a pseudonym that has appeared in the publications and audio-visuals of Ansaru, but it is unclear if the pseudonym is specific to an individual or generic to anyone who leads the group. However, a prominent salafi cleric who now heads one of the government agencies in Nigeria identifies Abu Usama al-Ansari as Muhammad Auwal Ibrahim Gombe. The salafi cleric claims that Muhammad was killed in Michika, Adamawa State, in July 2013 by the lieutenants of Abubakr Shekau. The salafi cleric also claims that Ansaru produced a document of more than 60 pages at the time they started their campaign in 2012. The document, which explains the objectives, mission, and religious positions of the group, was distributed to selected religious leaders in northern Nigeria in a brown envelope.

35 "Important Message from Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan" Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, June 2, 2012. Nur is believed to have been associated with Ansaru, although not necessarily a member of the group.

Internal Civil Wars within Jihadi-Salafi Ranks

In her book *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction*, Nelly Lahoud argued convincingly that “the rigid nature of the doctrinal framework the jihadis are advocating makes them prone to internal schisms and infighting.”³⁶ Indeed, the ideological fissures in Boko Haram fit into Lahoud’s prophecy. Ideological infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues seem to have become more common in recent years following the split between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State. Jihadi groups and ideologues have participated in heated debates with their brothers-in-arms on various issues related to jihad.³⁷ Different typologies of ideological infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues can be identified as follows.

Infighting over Jihadi Strategy

Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer had previously discussed a new genre of jihadi strategic studies with little theological exegesis and highly pragmatic arguments of why some types of operations and targeting may have a more desirable political outcome than others.³⁸ This genre of strategic literature identifies the political, economic, and cultural factors in jihadism and recommends realistic strategies, some of which have prompted warring factionalism, inter-jihadi fratricide, and jihadi revisionism rather than unity in the jihadi ranks. Some examples of infighting over jihadi strategy include Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz’s (Sayyid Imam) “Denudation of Ayman Zawahiri’s al-Tabria (‘Exoneration’);”³⁹ Sayf al-`Adl, Abu Hafis al-Mauritani, and Abu Walid al-Masri’s criticisms of al-Qa`ida attacks on 9/11;⁴⁰ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s criticism of the brutal tactics of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq;⁴¹ al-Zawahiri’s criticism of al-Zarqawi’s attacks on Shiites in Iraq;⁴² Abu Mus`ab al-Suri critique of al-Qa`ida’s hierarchical structure and his support for the strategy of ‘Nizam la Tanzim’ (System, not Organization);⁴³ Abu Basir al-Tartusi’s critique of suicide operations on both theological and strategic grounds;⁴⁴ the recantation document by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) titled “Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Accountability and the Judgment of People,” which offered a fun-

36 Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2010), p. xvii.

37 For an earlier study of jihadi schisms, see Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 107-109 and 197-199; Vahid Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa`ida 1989-2006* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007), pp. 1-71; Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman eds., *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions Within Al-Qa`ida And Its Periphery* (West Point, NY, Combating Terrorism Center, 2010), pp. 1-257.

38 Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27:5 (2004): pp. 355-375. See also Steven Brooke, “Jihadist Strategic Debates before 9/11,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:3 (2008): pp. 201-226.

39 See the first installment of the “Denudation of Exoneration” available at almasry-alyoum.com. See also Paul Kamolnick, “Al Qaeda’s Sharia Crisis: Sayyid Imam and the Jurisprudence of Lawful Military Jihad,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36:5 (2013), pp. 394-418, and Meir Hatina, “Contesting Violence in Radical Islam: Sayyid Imam al-Sharif’s Ethical Perception,” *Islamic, Law and Society* 23 (2016), pp. 120-140.

40 See “Sayf al-`Adl letter to Khalid Shaykh Muhammad” available at ctc.usma.edu; “Talk to Al Jazeera - Former al-Qaeda Mufti: I condemn ISIL attacks,” Al Jazeera, posted on YouTube, November 21, 2015; Vahid Brown, *A Profile of Abu’l-Walid al-Masri* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, January 1, 2008), p. 13.

41 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “Az-Zarqawi: Advocating and Advising,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, July 2004. See also Joas Wagemakers, “Reclaiming Scholarly Authority: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s Critique of Jihadi Practices,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34:7 (2011), p. 525.

42 “Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi,” *Global Security*, July 9, 2005.

43 Paul Cruickshank and Mohanad Hage Ali, “Abu Mus`ab al-Suri: Architect of the New Al Qaeda,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30:1 (2007), pp. 1-14.

44 Abu Basir al-Tartusi, “The Dangers of Martyrdom or Suicide Operations,” August 24, 2005; Abu Basir al-Tartusi, “Statement on the Bombings that took place in the City of London,” July 9, 2005.

damental reevaluation of the group's understanding of jihad;⁴⁵ and the ruling issued by al-Shabaab leaders Mukhtar Rowbow (now an ex-member), Hasan Tahir Aways, Abu Bakr al-Zayla`i, Zubayr al-Muhajir, and Abdihamid Hashi Olhaye critiquing the assassination attempt of Abu Mansur al-Amriki (Omar Hammani) and his companions, Khatab al-Masri and Usama al-Britani.⁴⁶

Infighting over 'National' vs 'Global' Model of Jihad

The participants in the ideological debates surrounding jihad—including the leaders of jihadi groups, jihadi ideologues, strategic thinkers, and active militant groups involved in jihad—have also recorded schisms over the divergence of preference between a nation-state-oriented model of jihad or a global jihad. The former focuses on national issues with mere declaratory and rhetorical support for global jihad, and the latter refers to interconnected affiliates fighting for the same objectives and against the same adversaries. Examples of infighting over the two models of jihad include al-Maqdisi's rebuke of Mullah Umar's depiction of the Taliban as an Islamic nationalist movement;⁴⁷ the infighting between Hassan Hattab and Abu Mus`ab Abd al-Wadud of the defunct Algerian GSPC;⁴⁸ al-Maqdisi's denunciation of the methodology of Hamas and the crackdown on the Army of Islam;⁴⁹ Abu Yunis al-Abbasi's criticism of Hamas' neglect in implementing strict sharia law in Gaza;⁵⁰ and Abu `Abdallah al-Maqdisi's criticism of Hamas' participation in democracy, its cooperation with secular Palestinian parties and organizations under the guise of national unity, and its loyalty to 'apostate' Arab regimes, Christians, and Shiites like Iran and Hezbollah.⁵¹

Infighting over the Arab Spring

The turmoil that engulfed the Arab world following the Arab Spring in 2011 created security vacuums that al-Qa`ida leaders sought to exploit through its local affiliates. However, as they filled the security vacuums, the infighting over the approach to be adopted to further the turmoil along a jihadi path split the jihadi movement. Examples of the infighting over the Arab Spring include Abu Basir al-Tartusi's criticism of Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen,⁵² the refutation of Abu Basir al-Tartusi's criticism of Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen by Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti, Abu Zubayr `Adil al-`Ubab, and Abu Hummam Bakr b. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Athari.⁵³

45 This document was authored by `Abd al-Hakim Balhaj (Emir of the LIFG), Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi (Spiritual leader of the LIFG), `Abd al-Wahhab al-Qayed (the elder brother of late Abu Yahya al-Libi), Khalid al-Sharif, Miftah al-Duwdi, and Mustafa Qanaifid. It was endorsed by the Mauritanian salafi Sheikh Muhammad al-Hasan Ould Dedew and the Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi.

46 See "About the Attempted Assassination of Abu Mansur al-Amriki and His Companions Khatab al-Masri and Usamah al-Britani," *Jihadology*, April 30, 2013. See also Christopher Anzalone, "Al-Shabab in Somalia: The Resilience of Al-Qaeda's East African Affiliate," in Aaron Zelin ed., *How al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2017), p. 69.

47 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Questions about the statements attributed to the Emir of the Faithful Mullah Omar in the `Id al-Fitr Message," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, September 24, 2009.

48 Gwendal Durand, *L'Organisation d'Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique: Réalité ou Manipulations?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011), p. 23-24. See also Anneli Botha, "Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism," *Institute for Security Studies Monographs* 144 (2008).

49 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Hamas: correct the basis and fear God, not people," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, December 29, 2008; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "We and Hamas are not upon the same methodology," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, June 28, 2009; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Refutation of the statements of al-Astal, the Mufti of Hamas," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, August 19, 2009.

50 See Scott Sanford, "When Hamas is not Islamic Enough (Part 1)," *Jihadica*, May 27, 2009.

51 Abu `Abdallah al-Maqdisi, "The Fundamental Proclamation in the Government of Hamas," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, April 19, 2009.

52 See Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "To the Brothers in Ansar al-Shari`a in Yemen," March 10, 2012.

53 Joas Wagemakers, "Al-Qaida advises the Arab Spring: Yemen," *Jihadica*, June 5, 2012; Cole Bunzel, "Jihadism's Widening Internal Divide: Intellectual Infighting Heats Up," *Jihadica*, January 29, 2013.

Infighting over the Islamic State's Declaration of a Caliphate

Since the open rivalry between al-Qa`ida's leadership and the Islamic State began in 2013, several jihadi movements have declared their allegiance to one side or the other, splitting the jihadi-salafi movement into two competing factions.⁵⁴ Examples of the internal civil war that ensued following the declaration of a caliphate by the Islamic State include the dispute between Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the Islamic State and Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani of Jabhat al-Nusra (now Hay`at Tahrir al-Sham);⁵⁵ the disavowal of the Islamic State by al-Qa`ida;⁵⁶ the civil war of words between the Ghuraba' Media Foundation and Minbar al-Tawhid wa`l-Jihad;⁵⁷ the civil war of words between Abu Qatada al-Filistini, `Umar Mahdi Zaydan, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi;⁵⁸ the condemnations of the beheading of journalists and foreign aid workers by Abu Qatada, al-Maqdisi, and Abu Mahmud al-Filistini;⁵⁹ al-Maqdisi's war of words with the Islamic State over the death of the Jordanian pilot al-Kasasbeh;⁶⁰ and more recently, the Hay`at Tahrir al-Sham and al-Qa`ida dispute as explained in the testimonies of the Jordanian jihadi jurist Sami al-Oraidi, Abd al-Rahim Atoun, Abu al-Qassam al-Urduni, Abu al-Harith al-Masri, Abu Malek al-Shami, and Abu Humam al-Shami.⁶¹

Other Miscellaneous Infighting

Other examples of jihadi infighting include the 'copyright controversy' between Abu Harith Mihdar al-Shadhili, the administrator of Madad al-Suyuf, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi⁶² and the 'copyright controversy' between al-Fajr media and Madad al-Suyuf over the distribution of the second issue of the Arabic language magazine Turkistan al-Islamiyya produced by the Uighur jihadi group Turkistan Islamic Party.⁶³

Infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues have weakened jihadism from the inside, thus rendering impossible the emergence of a unified jihadi movement.⁶⁴ In recent years, jihadis have been weakened not only by government counterterrorism operations but also by their own squabbles and internal disputes. In view of these internal and potentially endless disputes, Lahoud was right when she argued that "jihadism may well be on the path of self-destruction."⁶⁵ In the next section, this article will situate Boko Haram's internal civil war within some of the typologies of infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues outlined above.

54 See J.M. Berger, "The Islamic State vs. al Qaeda: Who's winning the war to become the jihadi superpower?" *Foreign Policy*, September 2, 2014; Daniel L. Byman and Jennifer R. Williams, "ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism's Global Civil War," Brookings Institution, February 24, 2015; Daniel L. Byman, "Will ISIS and al-Qaida always be rivals?" Markaz Brookings, May 27, 2016; and Barak Mendelsohn, "Jihad's Civil War: The Battle Between ISIS and al Qaeda Simmers On," *Foreign Affairs*, June 16, 2016.

55 Cole Bunzel, "Introducing the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria," *Jihadica*, April 9, 2013; Cole Bunzel, "The Islamic State of Disobedience: al-Baghdadi Triumphant," *Jihadica*, October 5, 2013.

56 Aaron Zelin, "Al-Qaeda Disaffiliates with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," Washington Institute of Near East Policy, February 4, 2014. See also Ahmed Hamdan, "Methodological Difference Between ISIS and Al Qaida: Who are the ones that deviated?" Al-Muwahideen Media, 2015.

57 Cole Bunzel, "The Ghuraba' Media Foundation and Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad," *Jihadica*, October 21, 2014.

58 See Cole Bunzel, "Caliphate Now: Jihadis Debate the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, November 25, 2013.

59 See Joas Wagemakers, "IS's beheadings of Western hostages: Jihadi ideologues speak out," *Jihadica*, September 22, 2014.

60 See Abdullah bin Khaled al-Saud, "The Spiritual Teacher and His Truants: The Influence and Relevance of Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2017).

61 See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-al-Qaeda Dispute: Primary Texts (I-VI)," aymennjawad.org, December 15, 2017.

62 See Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "al-Maqdisi's response to Madad al-Suyuf," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, January 28, 2009.

63 Thomas Hegghammer, "Infighting over Distribution of New Uighur Magazine," *Jihadica*, February 20, 2009.

64 See Cole Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms," *Islamism and the International Order Working Group*, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, May 17, 2017, pp. 8-11.

65 Lahoud, p. 24.

Boko Haram's Route to Jihad: Doctrinal Cracks in the Foundation

The petri dish in which the ideological fissures in Boko Haram's leadership were created can be traced back to the warring factionalism that ensued between Muhammad Yusuf and Muhammad Ali over the appropriate time to declare jihad in Nigeria. Before leaving his studies at the International University of Africa in Khartoum, Muhammad Ali reportedly met Osama bin Ladin during his stay in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, during which time bin Ladin asked Ali to organize a cell in Nigeria with a budget of 300 million naira (approximately \$3 million).⁶⁶ Around the same time, an Agence France-Press intelligence report relayed that bin Ladin had ordered the dispatch of aid to Philippine jihadis who in the 1980s had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan with bin Ladin, including possibly a sum of \$3 million.⁶⁷

The channeling of funds to Ali for setting up a jihadi infrastructure in Nigeria was consistent with al-Qa`ida's interest in sub-Saharan Africa. Al-Qa`ida has always made explicit its long-term goal of establishing a jihadi battlefront in Nigeria as illustrated in a tape released by bin Ladin in 2003 where Nigeria was mentioned as a country where Muslims needed to be liberated.⁶⁸ Similarly, Abubakr Naji in *Idarat al-Tawahhush* (Management of Savagery) classified Nigeria as a region of priority together with Jordan, the countries of the Maghreb, Pakistan, and the countries of the Haramayn (Saudi Arabia and Yemen) as a result of the readiness of their people to accept the initiative of jihad, the weakness of their ruling regimes, and the existence of a history of jihadi expedition.⁶⁹

When Muhammad Ali arrived back to Nigeria in 2002, he traveled to many states in Nigeria preaching his newfound ideology with selected religious leaders, particularly in Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe, Borno, and Yobe states.⁷⁰ With the help of the funding from bin Ladin, Ali exerted much effort toward the establishment of a solid foundation for jihad and "the revival of a jihadi culture in the hearts and minds of Muslim youths in Nigeria."⁷¹ He did not record a substantial level of success in his attempt at winning the support of Nigerian religious leaders, most of whom, at that time, supported jihad in Muslim lands considered to be under occupation like Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq, and Afghanistan but took a cautious approach in the declaration of jihad in Nigeria.⁷² Nonetheless, Ali gained the audience and support of Muhammad Yusuf, a prominent critic of the secular political system in Nigeria, an advocate for the implementation of sharia law in northern Nigeria, and a one-time member of the Borno State Sharia Implementation Committee under Governor Mala Kachallah (1999-2003).⁷³

The first schism in the circle of Muhammad Ali broke out when his teacher and mentor, Abu al-Bara al-Daurawi (from Daura in Katsina State), out of his fear of being arrested at that time, fled to Saudi Arabia with the funds provided by the members of al-Qa`ida residing in the Arabian Peninsula, which were initially intended to support the jihad in Nigeria.⁷⁴ Despite this setback, Ali migrated with his

66 "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," *Crisis Group Africa Report N°216*, April 3, 2014, p. 23.

67 See Ray Arquiza, "Interpol Alerts RP on Bin Laden's Men," *Philippine Star*, July 10, 2001, and Jim Gomez, "Philippine Rebels, bin Laden Linked," Agence France-Press, June 20, 2000.

68 See Neil MacFarquhar, "Tape Ascribed to bin-Laden Urges Muslims to Stand with Iraq," *New York Times*, February 12, 2003.

69 Abubakar Naji, *Idarat al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhala Sa-Tamurr bi-ha al-Umma* (2004), translated by William McCants as *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass* (Cambridge, MA: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, 2006), p. 37.

70 Isa Ali Pantami, "Theology and Jurisprudence in the Ideological Framework of Current Insurgencies: Towards an Alternative Islamic Discourse," paper presented at the Regional Conference on "Islam, Youth Militancy and the Challenges of Peace-Building," International Conference Center, Abuja, Nigeria, August 10-11, 2015, p. 5.

71 Abu Usama al-Ansari, "A Message from Nigeria," *Al-Risala*, Issue 4, January 2017, p. 19.

72 See Andrea Brigaglia, "Ja'far Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf, and Al-Muntada Islamic Trust: Reflections on the genesis of the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 11 (2012): pp. 39-40.

73 "Curbing Violence in Nigeria," p. 7.

74 Abu Usama al-Ansari, "A Message from Nigeria."

followers to Zaji-Biriri in Tarmuwa Local Government Area and then later to Kanamma in Yunusari Local Government Area of Yobe State where they engaged in religious proselytism and the preparation for jihad in Nigeria under a new group called the ‘Nigerian Taliban.’⁷⁵

Shortly after his first schism with his teacher al-Daurawi, Ali engaged in his second schism with Muhammad Yusuf, who at that time had become one of his disciples. Ali and Yusuf both argued against two positions that other salafi clerics in the region commonly accepted. First, Ali and Yusuf argued against the position that ruling by any source other than God’s laws or replacing the sharia with secular laws was only ‘minor unbelief.’ It was, according to them, a major unbelief and polytheism that can lead to excommunication from Islam. Second, Ali and Yusuf argued against the position that *takfir* cannot be declared on political rulers who govern by secular laws until the Islamic scholars investigate (*tafsil*) to confirm whether the rulers have made their acts of legislation permissible or whether they consider ruling by secular laws to be superior or equal to God’s laws. It was acceptable, according to them, to declare *takfir* prior to *tafsil*.⁷⁶

However, unlike Ali, Yusuf further argued that although the political rulers who govern by secular laws can be declared apostates (*murtaddun*), it is imperative to take into consideration the objections to declaring *takfir* (*mawani al-takfir*) on them by taking off the potential excuse of ignorance (*al-`udhr bi-l-jahl*) that political rulers can invoke to defend themselves. Yusuf reasoned that before fighting the apostate rulers through jihad, Islamic evidence should be established (Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja) against them through proselytism. For his part, Ali argued that it is not obligatory to establish the Islamic evidence on the political rulers before declaring jihad against them because none of them can claim to be ignorant of God’s command to rule with His laws as opposed to secular laws.⁷⁷

The schism between Ali and Yusuf on the topic of *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* and Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja has been discussed in detail by virtually all jihadi-salafi scholars. Among the jihadi-salafi scholars who support Ali’s argument, there is a consensus that the present-day political rulers cannot use the excuse of ignorance to account for their ruling with secular laws because none of them can claim to be oblivious of the impermissibility of ruling according to something other than what God has revealed. For example, the British-Syrian jihadi scholar Abu Basir al-Tartusi argues⁷⁸ that the scholarly debates on *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* and Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja do not apply to the secular political rulers, and any attempt to include them as a category in the debate is a mockery of the religion.⁷⁹ Similarly, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi also argues that the authentic opinion from the classical Islamic scholars rules out the right of establishing evidence for infidels who fight against Islam like the present-day political rulers.⁸⁰

75 The best treatment of the Kanamma episode and the Nigerian Taliban is the article written by Andrea Brigaglia where he brilliantly argued that the Nigerian Taliban should not be viewed as a group of youths who migrated into local commune but as an extension of the salafi network mainly in Yobe and Borno states. See Andrea Brigaglia, “The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram,” *Diritto & Questioni Pubbliche* 15 (2015): pp. 193-197.

76 *Takfir* is the ability or willingness to designate an apparent Muslim to be an unbeliever. For a detailed study of *takfir*, see Camilla Adang, Hassan Ansari, Maribel Fierro, and Sabine Schmidtke eds., *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on Takfir* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), pp. 1-17. See also Abdulbasit Kassim, “Defining and Understanding the Religious Philosophy of jihadi-Salafism and the Ideology of Boko Haram,” *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 16 (2015): pp. 177-179.

77 See “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 37. See also “History of the Muslims by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 96-97.

78 For the biography of Abu Basir al-Tartusi and his role in the construction of the jihadi-salafi ideology, see Joas Wagemakers, “Between Purity and Pragmatism? Abu Basir Al-Tartusi’s Nuanced Radicalism” in Rüdiger Lohlker and Tamara Abu-Hamdeh eds., *Jihadi Thought and Ideology* (Berlin: Logos Verlag Berlin, 2013), pp. 16-36.

79 Abu Basir al-Tartusi, “The Excuse of Ignorance and the Establishment of Evidence,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, November 20, 2001, pp. 140-143.

80 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “Misconception: Exempting the Political Rulers based on Ignorance and Coercion,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, n.d. See also Joas Wagemakers, “An Inquiry into Ignorance: A Jihadi-Salafi Debate on Jahl as an Obstacle to Takfir,” in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers eds., *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), pp. 301-327.

Tellingly, Ali's position is in line with the mainstream belief system in the jihadi-salafi community, while Yusuf's position was more lenient than the standard of the ideology in that community. Unlike Ali, Yusuf believed that by establishing the Islamic evidence on the political rulers through proselytism, it would attract a large followership and support communities that would be ideologically immune to the arguments put forth by the salafi clerics in their defense of the political rulers. These communities would then be better indoctrinated to fight jihad against the secular rulers. In an interview conducted in April 2017 for a documentary on Boko Haram, Abu Aisha—who was then the leader of the group in Zaria, Kaduna, Kano, and Katsina before he was arrested by the Nigerian Security Service and later released—also recounted the dispute between Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Yusuf over the appropriate time to declare jihad. Abu Aisha said:

“We encountered differences of opinion when we started the struggle. Some of us understood that it was not yet the appropriate time to declare jihad while those who fought in Kannama during the administration of Obasanjo believed it was the appropriate time to declare jihad. Our reason for postponing the declaration of jihad at that time is because we reason that the people are yet to fully understand the religion, and we thought they should be given an excuse since our main goal is the elevation of the religion. So, we considered it as a necessity for us to propagate the religion and convince the people with evidence from the sharia until the time when they have no excuse before what should happen happens.”⁸¹

After all attempts to convince Yusuf on the issue of al-`udhr bi-l-jahl and Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja failed, the Nigerian Taliban declared *takfir* on Yusuf and the group moved ahead by migrating to local communes and making preparation for the declaration of jihad. Yusuf recounted how the Nigerian Taliban declared him an apostate for delaying jihad against an ‘infidel’ government in an audio lecture entitled “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars,” which was recorded in Kano State around late 2006 or early 2007.⁸² From December 2003 to September 2004, the Nigerian Taliban launched a jihad starting with the attack on police stations and government buildings at Kanamma, the burning down of the local government secretariat and a government lodge at Babbangida town, and raids on police stations in Damaturu, Gwoza, and Bama before fleeing to the Mandara Mountains along the Nigeria-Cameroon border.⁸³ The Nigerian troops engaged the group in series of battles, killing scores and arresting those who did not escape. After the death of Ali, his followers dispersed throughout the various northern Nigerian cities, while others migrated to join the Algerian fighters of the Salafist Group for Preaching Combat (al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb's, or AQIM's, predecessor) operating in the Sahara Desert.⁸⁴ During this period, Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia after the Nigerian police declared him wanted for his connection to the Nigerian Taliban.

While in Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Yusuf held a series of discussions with salafi clerics including Ja`far Adam (d. 2007), Muhammad Sani Rijiyar Lemo, and Ibrahim Jalo where they charged him with sowing discord among the Sunni followers in Nigeria. During his discussion on the Nigerian Taliban with Ja`far Adam at Mina in Saudi Arabia, Adam advised Yusuf to narrate all that transpired between him and the Nigerian Taliban to the Nigerian security agencies, but Yusuf did not act upon the advice and thought it was a trap, about which he had been forewarned by a Maiduguri-based cleric, Muhammad Abba Aji (d. 2009).⁸⁵ While taking precautions not to be identified with Yusuf, who was declared wanted back home in Nigeria, the salafi clerics came to his rescue, trusting that he was

81 Author's translation of a colleague's interview, Abu Aisha, April 2017.

82 “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 35-41.

83 “Curbing Violence in Nigeria,” p. 10.

84 Abu Usama al-Ansari, “A Message from Nigeria,” p. 19.

85 “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 39. Ja`far Adam also spoke about his engagement with Yusuf in his lecture “I-Me Yasa suke cewa book Haram ne?-Sheikh Ja`afar Mahmud Adam da khabir Gombe.wmv,” YouTube, July 26, 2016.

innocent of the violence initiated by the Nigerian Taliban. Ja`far Adam advised Yusuf to hire a lawyer and write a letter to prove his innocence. With the help of the Deputy Governor of Borno State, Adamu Dibal, who was also in Saudi Arabia at the same time as Yusuf for pilgrimage, Yusuf was granted the permission to return to Maiduguri.⁸⁶

Shortly after his return to Maiduguri, Yusuf called for an internal truce between the dispersed members of the Nigerian Taliban in December 2004, and they later pledged their allegiance to hear and obey Yusuf's commands and to support him upon the proselytism to which he called.⁸⁷ From this time forward, Yusuf followed an incremental process of proselytism that would eventually lead to the July 2009 uprising. Yusuf continued his debates with the salafi clerics, wrote the first and second edition of a book expounding the creed of his group, established the Islamic evidence for ruling by God's laws for the 'apostate' political rulers, and extolled the fortitude of Abdallah Azzam,⁸⁸ bin Ladin, and the Muslims imprisoned in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prison while simultaneously training his followers upon spirituality, preparation for jihad, and the virtues of martyrdom.⁸⁹

For example, in his lecture on the exegesis of Qur`an 9 verses 9-16 delivered around early 2008, Yusuf said, "By Allah, we want to wage jihad even if we do not reach that stage; if we see those who have reached the stage we will join them in the jihad. There is nothing we hide from you. The *taghut*⁹⁰ should know, and you, too, (the salafi clerics) should know."⁹¹ Elsewhere in another lecture, "History of the Muslims," delivered around December 2008, Yusuf stated the clear goal of his group:

"What will stop them from insulting the Prophet or killing the Muslims is jihad. But how are we going to carry out the jihad? With whom are we going to carry out the jihad? Allah made me to understand that first and foremost, we must embark upon the preaching towards Islamic reform. Then, we will have to be patient until we acquire power. This is the foundation of this preaching towards Islamic reform. It was founded for the sake of jihad, and we did not hide this objective from anyone."⁹²

In the same lecture, Yusuf went further to explain that the requirements of establishing Islamic evidence on the political rulers and officials of the Nigerian security agencies has been fulfilled:

"We establish *iqamat al-hujja* for them, but you might not know since you have never gone to the presence of the Divisional Police Officer to discuss this issue. On the other hand, I have been called several times to their office. There was a time I was invited by the Director-General of the State Security Service—look at Ibrahim and others were the people who escorted me. I went to their office, and we sat with him to discuss the mission of our preaching towards Islamic reform ... Anyone about whom we are certain to have establish evidence upon is an apostate from Islam. If it is the *taghut*, you should present evidence to him, but once you present your evidence, it is over."⁹³

By the end of 2008, Yusuf and his deputies had reached a verdict that the Nigerian political rulers

86 Ibid., p. 39. See also "Curbing Violence in Nigeria," p. 10.

87 See "Curbing Violence in Nigeria," p. 10. See also Abu Usama al-Ansari "A Message from Nigeria," p. 19.

88 For detailed analysis of Abdullah Azzam and some of his intellectual works cited by Muhammad Yusuf, see Youssef Aboul-Enein's reports in "The Late Sheikh Abdullah Azzam's Books," including "Part I: Strategic Leverage of the Soviet-Afghan War to Undertake Perpetual Jihad," "Part 2: Remedy for Muslim Victimization," and "Part III: Radical Theories on Defending Muslim Land through Jihad," Combating Terrorism Center.

89 See *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 27-33, 49-57, and 67.

90 Originally in the Qur'an the name of an idol, but in salafi terminology, meaning "illegitimate ruler, authority, one associated with an intrinsically evil system," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. xvi.

91 "Exegesis of Surat al-Tawba (Qur`an 9 Verses 9-16) by Muhammad Yusuf," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 55.

92 "History of the Muslims by Muhammad Yusuf," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 94.

93 Ibid., pp. 94-97.

understood Yusuf's proselytism and could no longer invoke the excuse of ignorance. The opposing salafi clerics were well-informed of the trajectory of Yusuf and his group, and they exerted all efforts to counter the growing acceptance of his ideology among the youths. For instance, prominent Kano-based salafi cleric Muhammad Sani Rijiyar Lemo delivered a lecture on April 2, 2009, entitled "History of Jihadi Movements" in Maiduguri, the nerve center of Yusuf's proselytism and followership. Rijiyar Lemo presented a detailed history of jihadi movements from Palestine, Kashmir, Afghanistan to Egypt, their past mistakes, infighting among jihadi groups as well as statements of revisionism from jihadi leaders such as Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz and Abbud al-Zumar of 'Tanzim al-Jihad'⁹⁴ in Egypt.⁹⁵ Rijiyar Lemo went as far as to strip Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz, Ayman Zawahiri, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and those who follow a similar ideology in Nigeria of their salafi credentials and affiliation to salafi clerics, while arguing that their ideology stemmed from youthful exuberance, deficient knowledge of Islam, a reductionist interpretation of jihad confined only to warfare, and the experience of torture from the Tora Liman prison⁹⁶ in Egypt.

Rijiyar Lemo's denunciation of jihadi-salafi ideology is in line with the global pattern of counter-arguments developed by other salafi clerics, and without any doubt, he had a good command of the jihadi literature. In his lecture, he stated that, "I studied the history of jihadi movements seven years ago (2002) in Saudi Arabia without knowing that I will be confronted with the same ideology in Nigeria."⁹⁷ Rijiyar Lemo argued that the desired Islamic change would not be achieved through revolution from the top, which failed to achieve any positive result, but rather through the path of seeking Islamic knowledge and reformation of Muslims from the grassroots:

"Did the combat executed by Abdulsalam Faraj, Yahya Hashim, and Khalid al-Islambouli⁹⁸ change anything? No, it did not change anything. They killed so many youths for no cause. This is not the goal of Islam. It is not the objective of Islam that we should be killed arbitrarily. This is not our objective. This is not the reason why jihad was mandated. Jihad was mandated for you to be more honored and become more powerful."⁹⁹

Scholarly Paradigms on Intra-Salafi Debates between Yusuf and Mainstream Salafis

At this juncture, it is important to review the two major scholarly paradigms in the literature on the intra-salafi debates between Muhammad Yusuf of Boko Haram and the mainstream salafis. The first paradigm is presented by scholars like Alexander Thurston who argued in his book on Boko Haram that Muhammad Yusuf "tried to smuggle jihadist thought into a Salafi community that had originally been oriented more towards non-jihadi Salafism."¹⁰⁰ But is this really the case? Was the salafi community originally oriented toward non-jihadi salafism? Thurston may have been right if he was referring to the fact that Yusuf was the first salafi figure who preached the jihadi ideology as espoused by scholars like Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Nonetheless, the weakness of Thurston's paradigm lies in what appears to be the subtle dismissal of the oscillation of the mainstream salafi clerics, particularly Yusuf's mentor Ja`far Adam, in the support of al-Qa`ida's global jihad against the far enemy and their call for restraint in the declaration of jihad against the near enemy (i.e., the Nigerian state), which was

94 Tanzim al-Jihad, also known as Egyptian Islamic Jihad, is an Egyptian jihadi group established in 1980 but merged with al-Qa`ida in June 2001. For detailed history of this group, see Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 29-73.

95 See "Kungiyoyin Jihadi" in the series "Dawla Uthmaniyya," available at dawahnigeria.com.

96 Tora Liman Prison is a maximum-security prison complex in Tora, Egypt, for criminal and political detainees.

97 Author's translation of "Kungiyoyin Jihadi."

98 Abdulsalam Faraj, Yahya Hashim, and Khalid al-Islambouli were members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

99 Author's translation of "Kungiyoyin Jihadi."

100 Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 109.

judged as a “hypocritical double standard” by Muhammad Yusuf.¹⁰¹ Thurston would have captured some of the nuances in the intra-salafi debates if, like other scholars who use the same paradigm, he did not depend mostly on sources that date after the mid-2000s when the split between Muhammad Yusuf and the salafi clerics had already clearly emerged. The attempt to remedy this weakness is the reason why the following second paradigm seems plausible and more accurate.

The second paradigm on the intra-salafi debates between Muhammad Yusuf and the mainstream salafis is presented by Andrea Brigaglia who argued that the rift between the two parties should be viewed “as a gradual process that probably involved complex strategic considerations as well as local and global negotiations.”¹⁰² Brigaglia’s paradigm challenges the one postulated by scholars like Thurston where Muhammad Yusuf and his followers are portrayed as the actors who made a gradual movement toward jihadism while the mainstream salafis are assumed to have maintained a stable, quietist persuasion. For his part, Brigaglia argued that it was indeed the mainstream salafis who withdrew from their flirtation with the jihadi project and that Yusuf and his followers should not be viewed as the actors who abandoned the quietist strategy for jihadism.¹⁰³

Brigaglia’s paradigm is more plausible and accurate on account of the audio lectures that have recently been unearthed affirming that the mainstream salafis previously preached the type of jihadism that would later be embraced by Yusuf and his followers. Indeed, it is ironic that as early as 2001, when the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Abd al-Aziz bin Abdullah Al Ash-Shaykh condemned the use of suicide bombing as a warfare tactic by Islamic countries subjugated through occupation, some Nigerian salafi clerics like the Kano-based Aminu Daurawa, who now serves as the Commander General of Kano’s Hisbah board, preached vehemently in support of suicide bombing to the extent that he described God as a suicide bomber.¹⁰⁴ By preaching in support of suicide bombing as early as 2001, Aminu Daurawa and his salafi colleagues laid the ideological framework that Muhammad Yusuf would later implicitly sanction in his last public lecture in 2009. More recently, Abubakr Shekau who succeeded Yusuf, also unearthed one of the old lectures of Yusuf’s mentor, Ja`far Adam, where Ja`far Adam stated that “the jihad in Nigeria is coming; either they, the infidels chase us out of Nigeria or we chase them out.”¹⁰⁵ Shekau used this statement from Ja`far Adam to make the point that it was indeed the mainstream salafi clerics who backtracked from the jihadi project they had previously supported.

Whatever the case may be, by 2009 the majority of the mainstream salafi clerics could rightly be described as jihadi revisionists, but despite their revisionism and denunciation of jihadism, Yusuf and his followers had already grown deaf to their counter-arguments. Rather than responding to his critics, Yusuf advanced to the next stage on his checklist before the declaration of jihad, which involved observing the level of preparedness of his followers so that they could grasp the stakes that would await them once the jihad was declared. This next stage presented itself on June 11, 2009, when the Nigerian security forces associated with the anti-crime initiative called Operation Flush indiscriminately shot some members of Yusuf’s group during a funeral procession at Gwange cemetery in Maiduguri for their noncompliance with the law instructing all motorcycle drivers and passengers to wear helmets as a safety precaution.¹⁰⁶ Yusuf’s followers had not complied with the law due to their belief that obeying it was an affront to God equivalent to polytheism.

In his last official lecture before the July 2009 uprising, “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government,”

101 Yusuf lamented extensively about the “hypocritical double standard” of the mainstream salafis in his exegesis of Surat al-Baqara (Q2:284-286). See *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 111-116.

102 Brigaglia, p. 193.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 194.

104 See Abdulbasit Kassim, “Shaykh Aminu Daurawa, Boko Haram and the Theological Discourse on Suicide Bombing,” available at “Shaykh Aminu Daurawa, Boko Haram and the Theological Discourse on Suicide Bombing,” Medium, August 19, 2017.

105 Author’s translation of “Audio Lecture on the Book of Monotheism,” Abubakr Shekau, October 2017.

106 See “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government by Muhammad Yusuf (Part 2),” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 161-164.

Yusuf decried the iniquitous treatment of his followers in Maiduguri and other cities in northern Nigeria such as Argungu, Sokoto, Kaduna, and Bauchi where they were arbitrarily arrested by the State Security Service (SSS) and banned from preaching. While all these events were taking place, Yusuf was satisfied with the reaction of his followers and their level of preparedness for the stakes of jihad ahead. He said:

“Glory be to Allah—this is a lesson to us. We had initially thought that our brothers have not reached this stage, but I can confirm they have reached it. When I approached the brothers, I asked each of them when they were shooting, “Where were you?” One of them replied me, “I was here, I took this brother, and that brother.” I asked him, “Did the brothers flee?” He replied me that no, rather than fleeing they were advancing towards them [the security forces]. You never know when brothers have reached this level except in a state of oppression. This is a lesson and a gift from Allah. It is a sign of progress.”¹⁰⁷

Conceivably, the perceived satisfactory level of preparedness of Yusuf’s followers inspired his “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government.” The proximate cause of the July 2009 uprising was the indiscriminate attack on Yusuf’s followers by Operation Flush, but this was merely a pretext. Yusuf had already issued an implicit call for jihad in his “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government” with exact instructions to his followers:

“Whatever you are instructed to do, even if you will die, go and do it, do not return and say, “When I went...?” No! When you go, even if you will die, go and do it. Do you not see how they [suicide bomber masterminds] put bombs on people, instructing them to go and explode and yet they are happy? You should be like that. Whatever they [the leaders of his group] prohibit you from doing, even if you will die, do not do it.”¹⁰⁸

From July 26-29, 2009, approximately 1,000 Nigerians, mostly members of Yusuf’s group, were killed in Maiduguri as well as other cities, and their complex at the Ibn Taymiyya Center in Maiduguri was destroyed. Yusuf was taken captive and interrogated on July 30, 2009, before his extrajudicial killing by the Nigerian security forces.¹⁰⁹

‘Our Only Problem Right Now is the Imamate of Abubakr Shekau’

This subtitle is the closing statement of a letter written in early 2011 as a critique of the ideological deviations of Abubakr Shekau, which strongly echoed the themes that were later broadcasted in August 2016 by Muhammad Mamman Nur in his lecture “Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau,” mentioned at the beginning of this article. This 2011 letter was addressed to the sharia advisor of AQIM, `Abdallah al-Shinqiti, from would-be leaders of Jama` at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, popularly known as Ansaru, including Khalid al-Barnawi, Abu Muhammad al-Hawsawi, Abu Ahmad al-Kishnawi, Abu al-Bara’ al-Nurini al-Akinawi, Abu `Ubayda al-Kanawi, Abu `Abdallah al-Imam, Abu Muslim al-Ibrahimi, Abu Khalid al-Yerawi, Abu Nusayba al-Bushawi, Abu Maryam al-Ya`qub, and Abu `Asim al-Hasani. The context of this 2011 letter stems from the aftermath of Yusuf’s final interrogation with the Nigerian security forces, where he confirmed Abubakr Shekau as his second-in-command. Before his death, Yusuf nominated Abubakr Shekau, Muhammad Auwal, and Salisu Wudil as those who were qualified to succeed him. Muhammad Auwal died in the 2009 uprising while the whereabouts of Salisu Wudil remain unknown, leaving Shekau as the only choice among the people nominated by Yusuf. Shekau was therefore elected by the Consultative Council to succeed Yusuf and assume the leadership position of the group, which he named Jama` at Ahl al-Sunna

107 Ibid., p. 185.

108 See “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government by Muhammad Yusuf (Part 5),” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 196.

109 See “Interrogation of Muhammad Yusuf by Nigerian Security Forces,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 199-201.

li-Da`wa wa-l-Jihad, or JAS, but which remained popularly known as Boko Haram.

Several scholarly reports and analyses of Boko Haram's undertakings between the period of 2009 to 2011 are crowded with conspiracy theories and inaccurate speculations.¹¹⁰ Before 2016, it was difficult to explain the inner workings of Boko Haram between the period immediately after the July 2009 uprising and the first Boko Haram attack on the Bauchi Federal Prison on September 7, 2010, where 721 prisoners were set free, among whom approximately 150 were members of Boko Haram.¹¹¹ This mystery can now be properly unraveled from three documents: two files in "Bin Laden's Bookshelf" released in August 2016 and January 2017 by the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence – "Letter from `Abdallah Abu Zayd `Abd-al-Hamid to Abu Mus'ab `Abd-al-Wadud" and "A Letter to Osama Bin Laden"—and, most importantly, one file titled "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction by Abu al-Hasan Rashid al-Bulaydi to the Fighters in Nigeria," which was released on April 13, 2017, by a representative of AQIM, Abu Num`an Qutayba al-Shinqiti.¹¹²

The letter dated August 24, 2009, from `Abdallah Abu Zayd `Abd-al-Hamid ('Abu Zayd,' leader of Tariq Ibn Ziyad Battalion¹¹³) to Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud (leader of AQIM), stated that Abubakr Shekau sent three members of Boko Haram—Khalid al-Barnawi, Abu Muhammad, and Abu Rayhana (except Abu Rayhana, the other two were signees of the 2011 letter)—to AQIM requesting a union between the two groups with the establishment of a safe house in Niger, training for Nigerian fighters in the Malian desert, weaponry and financial support, and advice on how to carry out jihad in Nigeria.¹¹⁴ In his response dated on September 30, 2009, Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud welcomed the arrival of Shekau's delegation, saying that "we see it as an initiative for good towards a new era which will confound the Crusader Jewish plan of aggression towards Islam and its people in the Sahelian [African] nations and in Africa generally."¹¹⁵ Thereafter, Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud affirmed his willingness to effectuate Shekau's request and promised "to distribute the speeches and communiques of the group," but he cautioned against a hasty declaration of jihad without adequate preparation:

"The question of the proclamation of jihad in Nigeria, we advise you not to take any decision or to proclaim anything under the influence of shock, but to put it off until the time is ripe from all perspectives with calm nerves, together with a comprehensive consultation with the jihad leaders in the Islamic world. The present stage is one of good preparation, watching and planning. It is necessary to mobilize the Muslim community in Nigeria to embrace the mujahidin; then it is necessary to prepare well by training and educating the mujahidin, and gathering all the requisite military equipment, especially explosive materials."¹¹⁶

During this same period, Shekau wrote another letter where he implicitly sought an al-Qa`ida imprimatur: "There is nothing remaining than for us to know more about your order and organization, because the one who does not know his path will be helpless after the journey."¹¹⁷ The letter was not addressed to anyone in particular, but Jacob Zenn argued that by the context of the letter, it was likely

110 For a detailed analysis of the conspiracy theories on Boko Haram, see Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," in Abdul Raufu Mustapha ed., *Sects and Social Disorder: Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (Suffolk, United Kingdom: James Currey, 2014), pp. 157-166.

111 See "Letter from the Bauchi Prison Break," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 225-226.

112 See "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction by Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Rashid al-Bulaydi to the Fighters in Nigeria," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 209-213 and 235-239.

113 The Tariq ibn Ziyad Battalion is one of the battalions that formerly operated under the leadership of AQIM. It was named after Tariq ibn Ziyad who led the conquest of Iberia in 711. For further detail on the battalion, see Jeffrey Halverson, "The Tariq ibn Ziyad Master Narrative," Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, July 7, 2011.

114 "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 210.

115 Ibid., p. 211.

116 Ibid., p. 212.

117 See "A Letter to Osama bin Laden's Deputy by Abubakar Shekau," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 234.

intended for Abu Mus`ab Abd al-Wadud to forward to Atiyatullah al-Libi and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Zenn further explains that al-Zawahiri had been more open than bin Ladin to enlisting new affiliates, which was evidenced by al-Zawahiri's acceptance of the GSPC's affiliation with al-Qa`ida in 2006 when bin Ladin presumably could have done so himself and of al-Shabaab's affiliation with al-Qa`ida in 2012 when bin Ladin declined to do so publicly before his death in May 2011. This may be the reason why Shekau was advised to communicate with al-Zawahiri instead of bin Ladin on matters of "joining the organization" of al-Qa`ida. However, a loyal courier may have nonetheless delivered Shekau's letter to bin Ladin, which is why it was found in his compound in Pakistan in 2011.¹¹⁸

In a letter dated July 5, 2010, Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud wrote to Abu Zayd instructing him to disburse the sum of 200,000 Euros to Shekau's group.¹¹⁹ There is strong evidence to conclude that this initial funding played a major role in the first Boko Haram attack on the Bauchi Federal Prison on September 7, 2010.¹²⁰ As Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud earlier promised, al-Andalus Media of AQIM also published Shekau's `Id al-Fitri sermon, which was the first AQIM dissemination of an official message attributed to a group other than al-Qa`ida or an affiliate. This was followed by the release of three videos from al-Qa`ida affiliates offering condolences for the extrajudicial killing of Muhammad Yusuf and other members of the group including al-Andalus Media's "The Raid of al-Damous,"¹²¹ al-Kata`ib Media's (al-Shabaab) "A Gift to the people of Tawhid in Nigeria,"¹²² and al-Furqan Media's (al-Qa`ida in Iraq) "Fursan al-Shahada."¹²³ An article titled "The Misery of Muslims in Nigeria" also appeared on the back cover of the 16th issue of Sada al-Malahim Magazine produced by al-Malahim Media of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula and distributed by al-Fajr Media Center.¹²⁴ The article described the conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, precisely Jos, as an organized "Crusader attack against Muslims sponsored by the International Union of Churches in Nigeria with the support of U.S. Microsoft corporation." The article ended with an outline of five duties of Muslims toward the Muslims in Nigeria, which included the provision of support with money and weapons, the preparation of the Muslims on a military and faith level, and the spread of the culture of martyrdom.

On October 7, 2010, Shekau responded to Abu Zayd with a letter of gratitude for the financial generosity and training offered by AQIM.¹²⁵ The relationship between Boko Haram and AQIM flourished until Shekau began to manifest signs of deviation on the issues of *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* and *takfir al-Muthlaq*¹²⁶ by declaring the entire Muslim population of Nigeria as infidels on the basis that they did not disbelieve in *taghut*, their children still attended government schools, and they participated in democratic elections.¹²⁷ Shekau's farthest level of extremism on the issue of takfir spurred his launching of an indiscriminate campaign of violence and confiscation of the wealth and properties of the Muslim population that did not pledge allegiance to him, according to the 2011 letter.

At this juncture, it is important to explain the ideological schisms between Shekau and the previously mentioned would-be leaders of Ansaru, as explained in the latter's 2011 letter of appeal to AQIM, some of which are related to the typologies of infighting among jihadi groups outlined in the second section

118 Jacob Zenn, "Demystifying al-Qaida in Nigeria: Cases from Boko Haram's Founding, Launch of Jihad and Suicide Bombings," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11:6 (2017), p. 179.

119 "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 213.

120 See "Letter from the Bauchi Prison Break," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 225-226.

121 Video was uploaded to YouTube but has since been removed.

122 Video was uploaded to YouTube but has since been removed.

123 "Id Gift – Knights of Martyrdom #8," *Jihadology*, November 18, 2010.

124 "Sada al-Malahim Issue 16," *Jihadology*, February 15, 2011.

125 "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 213.

126 *Takfir al-Muthlaq* is a general statement of takfir in regard to an action. For example, "Whoever vote in an election is an infidel" or "the Shiites are infidels" without specifying the individual.

127 Abu Usama al-Ansari, "A Message from Nigeria," p. 20.

of this article. In the letter, the following ideological deviations of Shekau were listed:¹²⁸

1. Labeling (Muslims) who participate in elections as infidels while disregarding the principles and rules of *takfir*, where it said, “Shekau embraces an uncompromising stance on al-`udhr bi-l-jahl and he relies on the writings of `Ali Khudayr al-Khudayr, Diya` al-Din al-Qudsi and Bashir `Abdallah. The latter previously debated with Muhammad Yusuf and later declared *takfir* on him before his death.”¹²⁹ The letter also equated Shekau’s extremism to the fanaticism exhibited by Antar Zouabri of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria.
2. Shekau’s claim to be treated as a Caliph in addition to his demand for obligatory obedience, his abuse of leadership, and the impermissibility of travel by his followers to the lands of jihad like Somalia and Algeria without his permission, a violation of which would attract a death sentence from Shekau.
3. High-handedness and complete rejection of the group’s Consultative Council.
4. Spreading secrets, and even betraying confidences, withholding money, and refusing to prepare for battle.
5. Loose morals, dividing families, incorrect religious practices, and encouraging lying and deceit.

According to the 2011 letter, instead of paying attention to these issues, Shekau spent his time “proclaiming *takfir* rather than cleaning up the behavior of his supporters.”¹³⁰ The would-be leaders of Ansaru inveighed Shekau privately, but not only did Shekau maintain his intransigence on *takfir al-Mutlaq*, but he also went further to declare as apostates those who opposed him or chose to leave Boko Haram. The intervention of AQIM sharia scholars like `Abdallah al-Shanqiti and Abu al-Hasan Rashid al-Bulaydi, both of whom wrote a lengthy letter of advice to Shekau, failed to influence Shekau.

However, none of these criticisms of Shekau should downplay the jihadism of his critics. Prior to the official announcement of Ansaru, early signs of the group’s evolution manifested in the kidnapping of western expatriates in Nigeria. On May 12, 2011, a British expatriate and an Italian expatriate, Chris McManus and Franco Lamolinara, were kidnapped in Kebbi State and later killed on March 8, 2012, in Sokoto State after a failed rescue attempt by British and Nigerian forces.¹³¹ On January 26, 2012, German expatriate Edgar Fritz Raupach was kidnapped in Kano. AQIM claimed the kidnapping with a video filmed in Kano and produced by al-Andalus media¹³² in which they explained that Raupach would be freed only if the German government freed Umm Saifullah al-Ansariya (Filiz Gelowicz) from a German prison.¹³³ Raupach was later killed on May 31, 2012.¹³⁴

On June 2, 2012, Ansaru officially announced its formation in a video debut released on YouTube in Hausa and English.¹³⁵ The group reiterated its critique of Boko Haram’s attacks on Muslims, and it presented itself as a vanguard to defend the Muslims. The kidnapping of western expatriates continued

128 “Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 235-239. Some of the ideological deviations mentioned in the letter were also responsible for the split between the followers of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi starting from the mid-1990s during the period al-Maqdisi wrote “Al-Risala al-thalathiniyya fi’l-tahdhir min al-ghuluw fi’l-takfir” (An Epistle Warning Against 33 Types of Exaggerations in Takfir) and “Waqafat ma’a thamarat al-jihad” (Reflections on the Fruits of Jihad). See Eli Alshech, “The Doctrinal Crisis Within the Salafi-Jihadi Ranks and the Emergence of Neo-Takfirism,” *Islamic Law and Society* 21:4 (2014), pp. 425-449.

129 Al-Maqdisi has a section for this topic in his book. See Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi “Al-Risala al-thalathiniyya fi’l-tahdhir min al-ghuluw fi’l-takfir,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, 1999, pp. 312-320.

130 “Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 238.

131 See “Nigeria rescue bid: Kidnapped Briton and Italian killed,” BBC, March 8, 2012.

132 See “Save my life: Appeal of the German Prisoner to his Government,” *Jihadology*, March 23, 2012.

133 See “To the German Government: Release ‘Umm Saifullah Al-Ansariya,’ We’ll Release Your Prisoner,” *Jihadology*, March 23, 2012.

134 See “On the Killing of the German Prisoner in Nigeria,” *Jihadology*, June 12, 2012.

135 Video was uploaded to YouTube but have since been removed.

unabated with the abduction of Frenchman Francis Collump¹³⁶ and the killing of seven foreign hostages.¹³⁷ However, the fate of Ansaru took a new turn with France's intervention in Mali, code-named Operation Serval, in 2012, which cut short Ansaru's connection to AQIM. But despite an Ansaru attack on Nigerian soldiers heading to Mali, the transnational link between the group and AQIM weakened over time.¹³⁸ This negative condition for Ansaru expedited the rapprochement between some members of the group and Shekau, but there were other members who remained in Ansaru and from time to time dissociated themselves from Boko Haram's attacks on Muslims via statements from Ansaru.¹³⁹

What's Old is New Again: Shekau's Mutual Recriminations with Nur and al-Barnawi

A new wave of schism emerged with the audio lecture of Mamman Nur "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau" in August 2016, discussed at the beginning of this article. Although Nur swore his allegiance to the Islamic State, the old voice of Ansaru also echoed in his Exposé, but with a predilection toward al-Qa`ida consistent with the publication of the article "A Message from Nigeria" in January 2017 in al-Risalah, a magazine produced by Jabhat Fath al-Sham (which rebranded itself as Hay`at Tahrir al-Sham in February 2017 and was originally al-Qa`ida's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra). The prelude to Nur's Exposé commenced with the announcement of Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi as the new Governor (wali) of Islamic State's West Africa Province (Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiya) (ISWAP) in the Islamic State's al-Naba newspaper Issue 41 published on August 3, 2016.¹⁴⁰ The sudden announcement of Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi as the new governor of ISWAP gave an early indication that the actors in the upper echelon of the group were not united. As Nur himself revealed, the path of the group's transmutation from Boko Haram to ISWAP was fraught with newfound agreements at the Consultative Council on issues of ideology and strategy as well as the persuasive efforts intended to discipline the megalomaniac idiosyncrasy and highest level of extremism of Shekau.

Evidence suggests that a Consultative Council meeting was held on February 9, 2015, when the decision to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State was scheduled to be agreed upon by factional leaders of Boko Haram.¹⁴¹ Less than a month after the Consultative Council meeting, Shekau pledged allegiance to the Islamic State on March 7, 2015, and from then on, he assumed the position of Governor of ISWAP, while Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi maintained his position as the official spokesman of ISWAP, which was first announced in a video released on January 27, 2015, through a Twitter account called al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa coordinated with media representatives of the Islamic State.¹⁴² It now seems clear that all the parties that converged to support Shekau's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State withheld their unsettled ideological differences, which were otherwise bound to threaten the marriage of convenience of the leaders of the new ISWAP group.

One frequently finds assumption in the research on Boko Haram that the primary motivation for

136 See "Open Letter to the Governments of France and Nigeria," *Jihadology*, September 27, 2013.

137 See "Killing the Christian Prisoners As A Result of the Joint Nigerian-British Military Operation," *Jihadology*, March 9, 2013.

138 See "Claiming Credit for Targeting Nigerian Soldiers Heading to Mali," *Jihadology*, January 22, 2013.

139 See "Innocence of the Mujahidin From the Blood of the Innocent Muslims," *Jihadology*, May 14, 2013; and "Al-Hidayyah Foundation presents a new video message from Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin Fi Bilad al-Sudan: 'God Is Our Master,'" *Jihadology*, January 29, 2015. See also Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate: How Al Qaeda Helped Islamic State Acquire Territory," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2018), pp. 10-20.

140 Al-Naba interview with Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi. See al-Naba Issue 41, *Jihadology*, August 2, 2016, pp. 8-9. See also Alexander Thurston, "Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's Interview with the Islamic State's Al-Naba Magazine," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 36 (2018): pp. 257-275.

141 "Boko Haram Communiqués with African Media," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 351-352.

142 "Interview with Official Spokesman Abu Mus`ab Al-Barnawi about the Events in the City of Baga," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 369-372.

the group's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State was weakness.¹⁴³ Although there is a possible coincidence in timing, the assumption that Boko Haram's pledge was on account of its own weakness does not take into account the communication between both groups, which commenced through a go-between named Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad¹⁴⁴ in 2014 when Boko Haram was at its peak of territorial expansion. By mid-2014, an earlier indication of Boko Haram's adoption into the larger family of jihadi-salafi groups had been reflected in the inclusion of Abubakr Shekau alongside Nasir al-Wuhayshi of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Abu Zubayr of al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Abu Fadl Iyad Ag-Ghali of Ansar Dine in Mali as recipients of the letter on al-Qa`ida/Islamic State rivalry dated July 4, 2014, and written by Abu Iyad al-Tunisi of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia in which he pleaded that Ayman al-Zawahiri should pledge allegiance to the Islamic State to save the jihadi movement from disarray.¹⁴⁵

Whatever the case may be, starting from November 2014, Boko Haram's territorial conquests were documented with pictorial evidence and forwarded to Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad who in turn forwarded it to the Islamic State. In a document translated in *The Boko Haram Reader*, Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad narrated a reminiscing account of how he facilitated the union between Boko Haram and the Islamic State and how he acted as something of a clearing house in connection with a wide range of West African and European groups, probably because Tunisia during the period 2011-14 allowed freedom to jihadi-salafis.¹⁴⁶ However, al-Hamad's line of communication to Boko Haram came from the circle of Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, and this later played a significant role in the way Shekau's letter to the Islamic State will eventually be stymied.

In his interview with al-Naba newspaper, al-Barnawi discussed jihad in West Africa and how Boko Haram was founded; the reasons for Boko Haram's pledge to the Islamic State; and the nature of the war between ISWAP and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF - coalition forces from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin) and the Civilian Joint Task Force (Civilian JTF, also known as 'Yan Kato da Gora' or 'the men with clubs'). Furthermore, al-Barnawi made clear the group's mission against "Christianizing" activities in Africa and responded to the charge of takfirism being leveled at his group by the oppositional Nigerian Islamic establishment.¹⁴⁷ Although al-Barnawi mentioned Shekau as Yusuf's first successor, he did not comment on Shekau's position following his own emergence as Governor.

On August 3, 2016, less than a day after al-Barnawi's interview was published in al-Naba, Shekau delivered a 10-minute audio speech in Arabic and Hausa under the old group label of Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da`wa wa-l-Jihad (JAS). In his speech, Shekau railed against his demotion as the Governor of ISWAP and the promotion of al-Barnawi to the position. In stating his refusal to follow al-Barnawi, Shekau explained the ideological differences between the two men:

"My brothers in Allah, I received a message you sent regarding the selection of a new Governor. My brothers, Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi and those with him are saying that if a Muslim enters a land of unbelief, but does not manifest his enmity to the unbelievers there, he is not an unbe-

143 Thurston, Boko Haram, p. 271-272. See also Terje Ostebo, "The Virtual Significance of Boko Haram's Pledge of Allegiance to ISIS," *The Conversation*, March 19, 2015.

144 Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad is a former member of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia and a pro-al-Qa`ida poet and writer on prominent jihadi websites, including Ansar al-Mujahidin, al-Fallujah, and al-Tahaddi. He defected from Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia and became pro-Islamic State and subsequently administered the Africa Media outlet that published Boko Haram Daily Communiques from November 18, 2014, to February 9, 2015, and other military reports of Boko Haram's 'General Command' before Shekau's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State. See Jacob Zenn, "Wilayat West Africa Reboots for the Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel* 8:8 (2015): pp. 10-16.

145 The author wishes to thank Jacob Zenn for sharing this document with him.

146 See "Jumbled words and Authentication for the Important Period prior to Shaykh al-Shekwawi's Allegiance which made the Umma Happy by Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 403-405.

147 Takfirism is the act of accusing other Muslims of unbelief and, as a result, condemn them as infidels whose blood is permissible to be shed.

liever. However, we say that such a person is an unbeliever. Afterwards, they said that if he (a Muslim) does not show his enmity to the *taghut* who rules by [something] other than Allah's revealed law, he is not an unbeliever. However, we say that such a person is an unbeliever. We found this in Allah's Book and the Sunna of His Messenger. We wish to follow the Sunna of our Messenger. Patience after patience, O Shaykh! [i.e., al-Baghdadi] It is obligatory upon you to show us the truth of the matter in the Book, the Sunna and according to the understanding of the pious predecessors. Allah knows my brothers in Allah. As a result, we cannot follow a person who commits a major [act of] unbelief or polytheism, knowingly, with an explanation, and not based on misinterpretation. No, this is not possible. **You do not know the condition of this group, yet we have sent you many letters, eight letters [in total], to show us the truth of this matter in the Book and the Sunna** (bold added for emphasis). However, you did not say anything [in response] nor did you answer, except for us to hear this news [of substituting Shekau as governor for al-Barnawi].¹⁴⁸

Three underlying issues typically come up from Shekau's polemical outbursts after the demotion: 1) Shekau's labeling of al-Barnawi's faction with the Murji' a¹⁴⁹ label based on their ideological differences on *takfir*; 2) Shekau's disclosure of writing eight letters between nine to ten pages to al-Baghdadi explaining that the ideology of al-Barnawi is based upon *irja'*; and 3) Shekau's appeal to al-Baghdadi for mediation between him and al-Barnawi. In the first part of a follow-up video released on August 7, 2016, four days after Shekau delivered the audio speech, a masked speaker (Man Chari) known to be Shekau's military head further expounded on Shekau's polemic:

"The news was delivered to us through the infidels' media about the change to a new governor. On this issue, we say the man whom you appointed to this position does not follow a sound doctrine from authentic salafism. On this basis, we will not follow him. **Our leader, Shekawi (Shekau), wrote eight letters to you where he explained that those people follow the ideology of irja'. You asked him about the meaning of irja', and he explained to you in his third message, but you did not respond** (bold added for emphasis). Before these issues, we had already informed you that they split away from us, becoming isolated from us, but you did not do anything. We have also sent you several questions, but did not receive any response from you—except that suddenly, we heard this news. As a result, we say that we are with our Imam, Abu Muhammad b. Muhammad Abubakar al-Shekawi, may Allah preserve him."¹⁵⁰

What really piqued Shekau and Man Chari from the follow-up video is the fact that Shekau provided an explanation for his claim that Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's ideology is based upon *irja'* in his third letter to the Islamic State, but Shekau did not receive further response from the Islamic State. As Nur explained in his "Open Letter," the Islamic State sent theological treatises followed by a command that forbade Shekau from capturing Muslims who engage in actions of unbelief as slaves. Nur's revelation suggests that the contents of Shekau's first two letters to the Islamic State revolved around Shekau's ideological differences with al-Barnawi on the issue of capturing Muslims who engage in actions of unbelief as slaves and declaring *takfir* on refugees fleeing Boko Haram's caliphate.

Nur's claim that the Islamic State sent theological treatises to solve the internal schisms between Shekau's faction and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's faction was later proven to be accurate following the

148 See "Message to the World by Abubakar Shekau," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 442.

149 Murji'a was a group in early Islam that believed in postponing judgment as to the truth of an apparent Muslim's belief or unbelief. Contemporary mainstream salafis are often accused by jihadi-salafis of being Murji'a. See Joas Wagemakers, "Seceders and Postponers? An Analysis of the Khawarij and Murji'a Labels in Polemical Debates between Quietist and Jihadi-Salafis," in Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi eds., *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought* (London: Hurst & Co., 2012), pp. 145-164.

150 See "Message from the Soldiers by Man Chari and Abubakar Shekau," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 468.

official release of the response of Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan) to the questions from Nigeria, specifically from ISWAP.¹⁵¹ The official response of al-Tamimi was dated March 31, 2015, two weeks after Shekau's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State, but the response was officially released by al-Turath Media Foundation of the Islamic State on March 1, 2018. Judging from the tribute to the death of al-Tamimi written by Abu Jarir ash-Shamali in Issue 10 of Dabiq in July 2015, Abu Malik al-Tamimi wrote the response to the questions from ISWAP while he was working in the Office for Research and Studies (Maktab al-Buhuth wa'l-Dirasat), which was previously known as the Committee for Research and Fatwas (Hay'at al-Buhuth wa'l-Ifta'), and before that as the Department of Research and Fatwas (Diwan al-Buhuth wa'l-Ifta'). The Office, headed by the late Turki Bin `Ali, is responsible for preparing the religious texts studied in the Islamic State's training camps, which are published by its printing press, as well as investigating issues of the sharia and replying to questions referred to it by the various bodies and provinces of the Islamic State.

Abu Malik al-Tamimi responded to four questions from ISWAP: 1) the verdict on a Muslim who lives in the land of unbelief; 2) the appropriate policy to employ in waging attacks against jihadi adversaries in markets located in a commercial city without attacking the other traders in the markets; 3) the issue of *takfir* of those who possess national identity papers such as a passport, except in cases of necessity like the jihadis who need passports to travel for jihad (the case for *takfir* here is based on the interpretation that the possession of national identity papers demonstrates an approval of a country of unbelief and its national symbols); and 4) the ruling on targeting Western secular schools.¹⁵² These questions and other issues not touched upon in al-Tamimi's response constitute the major faultlines that fractured Boko Haram into Shekau's faction and al-Barnawi's faction.

According to the response of Abu Malik al-Tamimi to ISWAP, living in the land of unbelief itself is not tantamount to *takfir* except if it is accompanied with the obligation to approve acts of unbelief or declare alliance to the people of unbelief. Al-Tamimi further explains when emigration becomes mandatory, desirable, and permissible. In his response to the second question on waging attacks in markets, al-Tamimi invokes 'the principle of Tatarus' to explain when it is permissible and not permissible to attack jihadi adversaries who immerse themselves within the civilian population that are predominantly non-Muslims or predominantly Muslims.¹⁵³ For the third question, al-Tamimi argues that the possession of national identity papers should only lead to *takfir* if it is accompanied with a show of loyalty and support to the country of unbelief as well as subservience to its laws. This question was most likely prompted by Mamman Nur's accusation that Shekau killed Ba`ana Banki, the Boko Haram leader of the town of Banki in Borno State, due to his possession of a Nigerian identity card.¹⁵⁴ On the question of attacking Western secular schools, al-Tamimi responds that it is permissible to attack them in Europe and other Crusader countries in Africa if the students from the schools are commissioned into military service to fight against the jihadis. He also claims that it is permissible to attack the Western secular schools if the students are non-Muslims, but the benefit of the attack should be determined by the people of authority in the jihadi circle. Al-Tamimi, however, claims that if the students enrolled in the Western secular schools are Muslims, it is best not to attack the schools except when the jihadi adversaries immerse themselves within the schools and there is no available option to attack the jihadi adversaries except by attacking the schools.¹⁵⁵

151 In his tribute to the death of Abu Malik al-Tamimi, which appeared in Issue 10 of Dabiq magazine, Abu Jarir ash-Shamali gave a biographical account of Abu Malik al-Tamimi's jihadi history from his arrival in northern Afghanistan—where he worked as a judge for four years—to his death at the battle in the city of as-Sukhna. See Dabiq, Issue 10, July 13, 2015, available at Jihadology.

152 Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan), "The Nigerian Questions," al-Turath Media Foundation, March 1, 2018, available at Jihadology.

153 The principle of Tatarus is a doctrine rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence and was traditionally used to establish the permissibility of a Muslim army attacking a non-Muslim enemy. See Jack Barclay, "Al-Tatarus: al-Qaeda's Justification for Killing Muslim Civilians," *Terrorism Monitor* 8:34 (2010).

154 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 452.

155 See Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan), "The Nigerian Questions."

The remaining back and forth questions and answers from ISWAP to the Islamic State is left implicit, but it is nevertheless striking that the leadership of the Islamic State had some level of intervention in the management of the internal civil war between Shekau and al-Barnawi at its initial phase just like AQIM's interventions in 2011 between Shekau and the would-be Ansaru members. This claim can be further supported by the statement of Nur: "We do not oppose the Islamic State. We are together with the Caliph. The way we are approaching this issue is by forwarding our objections to the Caliph who is also your [Shekau] leader. **Whatever they tell us is what we will accept as appropriate** (bold added for emphasis). We will forward our objections since you are also expecting their message."¹⁵⁶ It remains unclear why the Islamic State halted its response to Shekau after Shekau's first two letters and proceeded to declare al-Barnawi the new Governor of ISWAP. Perhaps the Islamic State received a report from Shekau's opponents in ISWAP that despite the response to ISWAP from al-Tamimi on behalf of the Office for Research and Studies of the Islamic State, Shekau persisted in flouting some of the religious code of conduct outlined by the Islamic State. This is probably why Mamman Nur claims that Shekau is a rebel for his refusal to obey the instruction of the leaders of the Islamic State.¹⁵⁷ In some cases, Shekau's theological position concurs with the religious ruling issued by the Islamic State. For example, on December 16, 2014, the Islamic State declared travel to the lands of unbelief impermissible generally, and to the lands under the control of the Syrian regime specifically, except on the condition that the traveler openly disavow and show hatred toward the unbelievers.¹⁵⁸

More importantly, however, it is critical to note that al-Barnawi's faction had closer proximity to communication channels with the Islamic State than Shekau's faction. Following the creation of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa media agency in early 2015, which upgraded the quality of video production for Boko Haram before Shekau's pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi, there was clear evidence that the Islamic State provided media support to al-Barnawi.¹⁵⁹ Al-Barnawi himself appeared in the first high-quality video produced under the label of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa on January 27, 2015, when he was addressed as the official spokesman.¹⁶⁰ What seems odd in the video and a subsequent high-quality video produced on January 28, 2015, under the same label of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa is that the two videos made no mention of Shekau.¹⁶¹ During this period of the operation of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa media agency, Shekau featured simultaneously in "A Message to the African Leaders, Specifically, Idriss Déby," a lower-quality video produced on February 9, 2015, under the label of Boko Haram. Shekau appeared in his first video under the label of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa on February 17, 2015, a week after the Consultative Council meeting was held during which the final decision to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State was made by Shekau, al-Barnawi, Nur, and other upper echelon of the group.

From the foregoing, it is also possible to conclude that Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's faction blocked Shekau's letters from reaching the Islamic State after his first two letters. This explains why Shekau did not receive further response from the Islamic State and why the decision was made for al-Barnawi to be the new governor of ISWAP. In the follow-up video delivered by Man Chari on August 7, 2016, after expounding on Shekau's polemic, he went on to hint that there were other private issues that required secrecy and needed to be discussed during the suggested mediation to be presided over by al-Baghdadi:

"There are other issues, but this is not the place to discuss them because they require

156 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 462.

157 Ibid., p. 450.

158 See "32 Islamic State Fatwas," p. 3, available at Jihadica.

159 "The Clairvoyant: Boko Haram's Media and The Islamic State Connection?" *Jihadology*, January 27, 2015.

160 "Interview with Official Spokesman Abu Mus`ab Al-Barnawi about the Events in the City of Baga," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 369-372.

161 "Message from a Mujahid," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 373-374.

secrecy (bold added for emphasis). We say that we are still in accord with our allegiance, nor do we remove our hands from the pledge of allegiance to the Caliph, but we will not follow the one who does not follow the doctrine of the Sunnis, nor do we want a mediator between us and the Caliph, unless there will be a meeting with you [i.e., al-Baghdadi], or an audio message from you, without a mediator. At that time, we will discuss those private issues that are not discussed at this moment.¹⁶²

Undeniably, the private issues that could not be discussed because they required secrecy were part of the shocking revelations in the “Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakr Shekau” delivered by Nur, which also had a follow-up speech by Abu Fatima, who was a former Ansaru member and, like Nur, sided with al-Barnawi in his conflict with Shekau. Some contents of Nur’s lecture are examined in the next section, but it will suffice to mention the nine ideological deviations Nur accused Shekau of introducing into the group: 1) declaration of *takfir* on refugees; 2) fighting the ‘protected’ civilians; 3) interpretation of Qur’anic verses based on personal opinions and fabrication of hadiths; 4) execution of un-Islamic punishments; 5) killing without a just cause; 6) uncaring attitude toward the welfare of Boko Haram soldiers and weak people in his caliphate; 7) non-compliance with orders from the Islamic State; 8) issuing rulings that contradict the sharia; and 9) withholding the materials of war.

All the ideological deviations Nur mentioned in his lecture echo the same deviations stated by Ansaru in 2011. Four months after Nur’s “Exposé,” on December 18, 2016, Shekau delivered a private audio lecture in which he refuted Nur’s allegations, specifically that he murdered close associates for trivial offenses. As far as Shekau was concerned, the close associates he killed undermined his authority and they violated the laws that they all pledged to follow in the group. While reaffirming that he was on the right path, Shekau lamented the previous schisms that took place inside the group: “You want us to focus on this type of back and forth explanation so that the infidels can hear, right? You want us to preoccupy ourselves with this type of conversation, and abandon the study of tawhid, right? This was the same thing they did in the past.”¹⁶³ The mutual recriminations between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi did not end with the war of words; it progressed into the textbooks, guidance literature, and indoctrination materials circulated by both factions to win over the mid-level and foot soldiers of the group as well as new recruits.

The Struggle for Jihadi Authority in the West African Islamic State

From the end of 2016 until April 2018 as this article was finalized, Abubakr Shekau faced a crisis of legitimacy with the other top echelons of ISWAP and Boko Haram. The competition by factional leaders to win the support of the mid-level and foot soldiers of the group as well as new recruits was also quite evident. In addition to the constant production of videos and images showing the resilience of both factions and their battlefield gains in their war against the Nigerian Army, the competition for the hearts and minds of Boko Haram followers also influenced the production of internal study sessions where textbooks, guidance literature, and indoctrination materials published by the factional leaders or republished from *Maktabat al-Himma* of the Islamic State and *al-Naba* newspaper also of the Islamic State were directed towards the group’s followers. These study sessions provide an extraordinary window to further understand the ideological differences of both factions through their own lenses and a unique knowledge of how the factional leaders mold the thinking of their followers to endure in the group’s campaign. Most importantly, the study sessions reveal the educational training the factional leaders provide to their followers in an attempt to attenuate the competing narratives that target the followers of the group and other counter-messaging campaigns offered by the opposi-

162 “Message from the Soldiers by Man Chari and Abubakar Shekau,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 468.

163 “Shekau Responds to His Critics,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 477.

tional mainstream Islamic establishment as well as the deradicalization programs sponsored by the Nigerian government.

The study sessions of Abubakr Shekau are produced by Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan, an online publishing press and a media center with an office in the territory controlled by Shekau. Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan issued its first release on January 17, 2017, through an audio lecture delivered by Abubakr Shekau in which he claimed the suicide bombing at the University of Maiduguri that killed Professor Aliyu Mani, the director of the university's Veterinary Teaching Hospital, and four others.¹⁶⁴ After its initial release, Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan also published the sermons and guidance literature authored by Abubakr Shekau where he reinforced Boko Haram's ideology, situating it within the canons of salafism, specifically the literary tradition of the scholars of Najd. The literature published by Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan also extensively cited the literature of Uthman Dan Fodio and other pre-colonial Muslim leaders in northern Nigeria on the issues of jihad, *takfir*, and Dar al-Islam/Dar al-Kufr (abode of Islam/abode of unbelief). The literature also covered the critique of the ideological differences between Shekau and his rivals in ISWAP, specifically on issues of *takfir* and the verdict on those who live outside the Boko Haram's controlled territory.



Images of Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan

ISWAP, whose governor is Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, produces study sessions, most of which are based on Hausa and Kanuri translations of theological books from Maktabat al-Himma of the Islamic State and al-Naba newspaper also of the Islamic State. The ISWAP media center also produces Hausa versions of the bulletins released by Amaq News Agency affiliated to the Islamic State. There is also a possibility that the media center operates a shadowy radio station, al-Bayan radio station 92.5 FM, modeled after al-Bayan Radio of the Islamic State. Whether or not the radio station is functional in territories controlled by the group could not be ascertained at the time of the research for this article, but the flyer of the radio station was shared online by ISWAP members. ISWAP is specifically unique for its Islamic State-ization program through which a unity of ideology is fostered between the members of ISWAP in West Africa and the Islamic State.¹⁶⁵ The Islamic State-ization program of ISWAP is potent evidence that the leaders of the group are in constant communication with the Delegated Committee of the Islamic State (al-Lajna al-Mufawwada), "a select group of knowledgeable, upright individuals with perception and leadership skills delegated by the caliph for the supervision of all the Islamic State's provinces, departments, committees, and offices."

164 Ibrahim Sawab, Omirin Olatunji, Isiaku Bara'u, Zakka, Maiduguri, and Isiaka Wakili, "Suicide bomber kills Prof, 4 others in Maiduguri," *Daily Trust*, January 17, 2017.

165 For the meaning of Islamic State-ization program and analysis of the guidance literature produced by the Islamic State, see Jacob Ollidort, "Inside the Caliphate's Classroom: Textbooks, Guidance Literature and Indoctrination Methods of the Islamic State," Washington Institute of Near East Policy, August 2016.



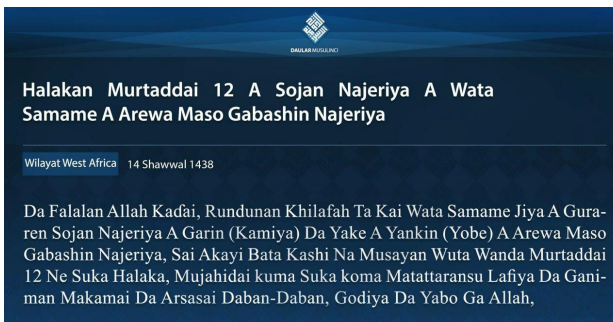
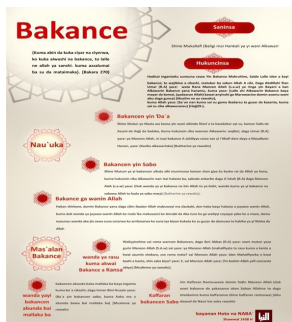
Critique of al-Qa`ida/Taliban



Radio al-Bayan IS



Radio al-Bayan ISWAP



Selected Hausa Translations of al-Naba Newspaper Issue 89 and Amaq Bulletin

Unlike Shekau’s faction that has now been reduced to a ‘jihadi loner’ with no significant ties to other transnational jihadi movements, be it al-Qa`ida or the Islamic State, ISWAP still maintains its ties to the Islamic State. The attacks, ambushes, and battlefield spoils of ISWAP are publicized by Amaq News Agency affiliated to the Islamic State, al-Naba Newspaper as well as the official Telegram channels of the Islamic State. For instance, the Islamic State reported in Issue 92 of its al-Naba newspaper that ISWAP was responsible for the killing of nearly 70 apostates in an attack on an oil exploration team in northeast Nigeria on July 25, 2017.¹⁶⁶ Four lecturers from the University of Maiduguri were abducted during the attack on the oil exploration team,¹⁶⁷ but they were later released on February 10, 2018, following the payment of ransom and mediation from the Swiss government and the International Committee of the Red Cross.¹⁶⁸ The Islamic State also publicizes other news from ISWAP such as the group’s harvest of crops in the Lake Chad region and the obituaries of its members who have died in battles against the Nigerian Army. On April 9, 2018, one of the leaders of ISWAP, Abu Bashir, also confirmed in an audio statement that they released the Dapchi schoolgirls who were abducted on February 19, 2018, based on the instructions from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps the real advantage ISWAP has over Shekau’s faction is the fact that the group is being led by leaders who do not personalize their jihad like Shekau, who possess better governance and propaganda capabilities, and who are camera-shy

166 “Ambush Near Lake Chad in West Africa killing 70 apostates,” al-Naba, Issue 92, August 2017, p. 11, available at Jihadology.

167 “One Of 4 UNIMAID Lecturers in Boko Haram Captivity Writes, Laments FG’s Failure to Rescue Them,” Sahara Reporters, September 4, 2017.

168 “Boko Haram ‘Frees’ 10 Abducted Police Women and UNIMAID lecturers,” Sahara Reporters, February 10, 2018.

169 “Boko Haram Gives Reason For Release Of Dapchi Girls, Denies Ceasefire Talks With FG,” Sahara Reporters, April 9, 2018.



Harvest of ISWAP in Lake Chad and obituary of one of ISWAP's media representatives published by the Islamic State

and savvy in the way they appeal to their followers to befriend the local communities within and outside the areas of their control.¹⁷⁰

Brothers at War: The Hazimis and Bin`alis in the West African Islamic State

The debate on the subject of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi is akin to the debate between the followers of Turki al-Bin`ali, one of the Islamic State's foremost religious authorities killed on May 31, 2017, in an airstrike carried out by the U.S.-led coalition in Mayadin, Syria and the followers of the Meccan-born Ahmad ibn `Umar al-Hazimi, a Saudi salafi scholar imprisoned by the Saudis since April 28, 2015.¹⁷¹ Like the Hazimis, Abubakr Shekau argued that ignorance is no excuse for *takfir* and those who excuse people on the basis of ignorance are themselves infidels. The 2011 AQIM letter previously mentioned and Nur's "Exposé" mentioned this position of Shekau as part of the ideological deviations Shekau introduced into Boko Haram. But how did Shekau arrive at the same position as the Hazimis? The 2011 AQIM letter mentioned that Shekau relies on the books of `Ali Khudayr al-Khudayr 'al-Mutammima' and Diya' al-Din al-Qudsi 'La `udhr bi-l-jahl fi al-shirk al-akbar' in his understanding of *takfir*. Nonetheless, Shekau's position will be better understood by examining the contents of his Friday sermon, which he delivered on May 19, 2017, and was published by Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan. In the sermon, Shekau extensively cited classical Islamic literature written by Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Abd al-Rahman b. Hassan, Abd al-Latif b. Abd al-Rahman, Ishaq b. Abd al-Rahman, and other scholars of the Najd to prove the point that a Muslim who falls into major polytheism is not excused due to ignorance or misinterpretation except when he is coerced by the enemies.¹⁷²

The implication of Shekau's understanding of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* shapes his interpretation that the people who participate in democracy, elections, or any affairs related to ruling by other than God's laws are infidels and there is no excuse of ignorance for them. Not only are they infidels whose blood is permissible to be shed according to Shekau, but those who doubt their unbelief are also infidels based on the principle "Whoever does not make *takfir* against an infidel is himself an infidel." Prior to Shekau's civil war of words with Nur and al-Barnawi on the issue of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl*, the would-be leaders of Ansaru had previously engaged Shekau on this issue as stated in their letter to AQIM in 2011. Ansaru leaders were in agreement with Shekau that democracy and elections are

170 This claim can be supported with the press statement issued by the spokesperson of the Nigerian Army Sani Usman Kukasheka on January 8, 2018. See Abdulkareem Haruna, "Boko Haram: Shekau alive but 'in a terrible state of health' – Nigerian Army," *Premium Times*, January 8, 2018.

171 Tore Hamming, "The Extremist Wing of the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, June 9, 2016; Cole Bunzel, "Caliphate in Disarray: Theological Turmoil in the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, October 3, 2017.

172 Abubakr Shekau, "Is there excuse based on Ignorance in Major Polytheism or Not," Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan, May 19, 2017. See also Tore Hamming's interview with Ahmad Hamdan, "The Increasing Extremism Within the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, November 19, 2016.

major polytheism, but they argued that the rules of *takfir* must be followed before declaring Muslims who engage in democracy and elections as infidels. These rules of *takfir* were previously outlined by the founding leader of Boko Haram Muhammad Yusuf in his debate on June 25, 2006, with salafi cleric Isa Ali Pantami. In the debate, Yusuf said:

“All the followers of Sunna have reached a consensus on the principle of declaring a Muslim as an infidel. Anything that constitutes unbelief, if an unbeliever does it; he is already an unbeliever, no query. He does not have to do it to become an unbeliever. But if a person is a practicing Muslim and he performs the actions of unbelief, then we need to follow the principles [of apostasy]. First and foremost, it should be that the person does not have an interpretation that he hides behind, whether it is a verse or hadith, even if it is weak, as long as he does not know it is weak. Second, it should be clear that he does not have doubt that makes him see his action as good and there is no reason to eliminate that doubt. Third, we also need to be clear that he received no message at all notifying him that his action is wrong. Fourth, there is also the case of doubt, misinterpretation, and coercion.”¹⁷³

Ansaru leaders lamented that Shekau not only flouted the principles of *takfir* as outlined by Muhammad Yusuf, but he also matched his belief with actions by permitting bloodshed and attacks against Muslims, which made him a “graduate of the school” of the Algerian GIA leader Antar al-Zouabri.¹⁷⁴ Shekau’s understanding of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* led him to sanction the January 20, 2012, attack in the city of Kano during which approximately 185 people were killed; the March 18, 2013, attack in Kano during which approximately 65 people were killed; the April 13, 2013, first Baga massacre during which at least 187 people were killed; and many other attacks against the Muslims that were condemned by the leaders of Ansaru.¹⁷⁵

The debate on *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* persisted even after the declaration of the Islamic caliphate by Shekau on August 23, 2014. Mamman Nur and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi became the main antagonists of Shekau, and they followed the arguments previously explained by Ansaru leaders. Like the Bin`alis, Nur and al-Barnawi are in agreement with Shekau that secular political rulers, the soldiers of the Nigerian Army, and the members of the Civilian JTF are all infidels and it is permissible to shed their blood. But they argued that *takfir* cannot be declared on Muslims who do not view these actors (secular political rulers, the soldiers of the Nigerian Army and the members of the Civilian JTF) as infidels except after clarifying the matter with the Muslims regarding the actions of unbelief as stated in the sharia and not until the doubts have been removed and the matter explained to the Muslims. Therefore, for Nur and al-Barnawi, unless the actions of unbelief have been clearly explained to the Muslims and the widespread ignorance on the issue has been clarified with knowledge from the sharia, they cannot be declared as infidels whereas Shekau would instantly declare *takfir* on Muslims who doubt the unbelief of the secular political rulers, soldiers of the Nigerian Army, and members of the Civilian JTF without any need to clarify the matter to the Muslims and remove the doubts. But how does this disagreement lead to infighting and bloodshed between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi?

- Secular political leaders, soldiers of the Nigerian Army, and members of the Civilian JTF are all infidels. There is an agreement on this issue.
- Mamman Nur and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi do not issue *takfir* on Muslims who do not view the actors above as infidels as long as they do not provide active or passive support for those actors in their war against Boko Haram. They excuse the Muslims until the actions of unbelief of the actors

173 See “Debate on the Status of Western Education and Working for the Nigerian Government between Mallam Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami and Mallam Muhammad Yusuf Maiduguri,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 23.

174 For a detailed discussion of Antar Zouabri and the GIA, see Alexander Thurston “Algeria’s GIA: The First Major Armed Group to Fully Subordinate Jihadism to Salafism,” *Islamic Law and Society* 24 (2017): pp. 412-436.

175 See “Disassociation of the Jama`at AnDar al-Muslimin from Targeting Muslim Innocents,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 275-278.

above have been clearly explained to the Muslims.

- According to Shekau's interpretation, Nur and al-Barnawi have also become infidels because of their position. The *takfir* of Nur and al-Barnawi is lawful in Shekau's view based on the permissibility of 'Takfir al-Adhir' (making *takfir* on the one who gives the excuse of ignorance on an individual engaging in acts of polytheism). Therefore, it is permissible to shed the blood of Nur and al-Barnawi and those who follow them in ISWAP. It is also permissible to shed the blood of anyone who doubts the permissibility of killing Nur, al-Barnawi, and their followers in ISWAP.

This chain or endless series of *takfir* (al-takfir bi'l-tasalsul), which runs the risk of fragmenting the group, is exactly what Nur and al-Barnawi aim to forestall. In his "Exposé," Nur lamented how God has tested Shekau with the love of killing people without a 'just cause.' "Did you not hear his cassette where he said: 'I will kill, I will kill' so if you kill, will you also live forever? You are also going to die."¹⁷⁶ Nur also explained that the ruling on *takfir* cannot be dictated by Shekau because Islam is not his personal possession where he can admit or expel whoever suits him. Nur went further to critique Shekau's extremism in *takfir* stating that Shekau's belief that "whoever is not with him is an infidel whose blood is permissible to be shed" is not only erroneous, but Islam has not been understood in that way. Nur said:

"In some cases, they will find the yam-sellers in the towns and detonate bombs amongst them. We are not bothered by the yam-sellers. Rather, we are bothered with killing the *taghut* for now. When we finish with the *taghut*, the yam-sellers will even fetch water for you. O Shekau! You don't have to kill them. Likewise, look at the way they are planting explosives and bombing the people even in the mosques! Look at the churches [as targets]! Look at the [military] barracks! This is a waste of Allah's property because we are not the ones who bought those explosives with our money. That is Allah's property, and He will ask us how it was utilized. Allah will ask you because we have disassociated ourselves from your actions, unless you repent ... Therefore, you should not personalize Islam. You cannot order that someone be killed because that person insulted you. You cannot order that someone be killed because someone criticized you. You cannot order that someone be killed because they narrated a dream to you. Even if he dreamt that you are among the people of hellfire, what is expected from you is to do good deeds, so that they will have another dream where you will be in paradise. Killing them should not be the next line of action. Everyone should practice the religion. We came out solely for the sake of practicing Allah's religion. Those misconceptions of yours and the killings you committed, there is no gain in them."¹⁷⁷

Abu Fatima who sided with Nur and al-Barnawi in their conflict with Shekau also lamented on how Shekau's ideological deviations on the issue of *takfir* has led to the group's territorial losses:

"We are tired of being chased by the infidels. It is because of all these issues that the infidels are chasing us. We have deviated from Allah's path. Are we not the ones that in the past, twenty of us would go out raiding the security centers of the infidels to obtain guns for each one? Something must have happened that for almost a year we are being chased by these animals. We are seeing that if these issues are not resolved, there is no way we will become victorious. Have we become rebels? How come they will fight against the infidels and not achieve victory? Brothers, if we are not animals, we need to sit and think. Why is it that we are being chased? The reason why these things are happening is because of the misconduct of Mallam Abubakar Shekau. If he mends all these issues, the religion's dignity will be restored. If the caliph instructs us to follow him, we will agree to follow him, but he should repent for his actions, and return to the religion. Let him return to This is our Creed (a book written by Muhammad Yusuf) upon

176 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 448.

177 Ibid., pp. 450-457.

which we were all nurtured, and the Prophet's methodology that was laid out by the scholars. If he returns, we will follow him. I hope it is understood."¹⁷⁸

The *takfir* debate between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi will be better understood by briefly examining the competition between the Bin`alis and the Hazimis within the Islamic State. As Cole Bunzel clearly explained in his research, in September 2014, the Islamic State took a harsh position toward the Hazimis with the execution of sharia officials like Abu Ja`far al-Hattab and Abu`Umar al-Kuwaiti who had adopted the Hazimis view of *takfir*. On May 29, 2016, the Central Office for Overseeing the Sharia Departments of the Islamic State (al-Maktab al-Markazi li-Mutaba'at al-Dawawin) published an official statement on *takfir* in which it affirmed that there is no excuse for hesitation in *takfir*, a position the Bin`alis considered to be in support of the Hazimis. On May 17, 2017, the Delegated Committee of the Islamic State published a memorandum acknowledging that *takfir* is an "unambiguous foundation of the religion." On May 19, 2017, Turki Bin`ali addressed a long letter to the Delegated Committee with his critical "observations" of the memorandum that he noted was intended to appease the Hazimis within the Islamic State. On May 31, 2017, Bin`ali was killed in an airstrike. On May 23, 2017, Abu`Abd al-Barr al-Salihi, a Kuwaiti-born Islamic State scholar also refuted the memorandum with advice for the Delegated Committee to withdraw the memo "in its entirety." Abu`Abd al-Barr al-Salihi was imprisoned for his dissent and ultimately died in an airstrike like Bin`ali. The Saudis Abu`Uthman al-Najdi and Khabbab al-Jazrawi also urged the Delegated Committee to retract the memorandum. On July 5, 2017, Abu Muhammad al-Husayni al-Hashimi, a Saudi of Syrian origin, also wrote a letter al-Baghdadi in which he lamented that the Kharijites 'the Hazimis' have taken up the most important positions within the Islamic State. At the end of August 2017, Abu`Abd al-Malik al-Shami also wrote an open letter in which he blamed the territorial loss of the Islamic State on the 'Hazimi extremists.' On September 15, 2017, the Delegated Committee of the Islamic State rescinded the May 17, 2017, memorandum, and al-Baghdadi appointed Abu`Abd al-Rahman al-Shami, a veteran Islamic State scholar and opponent of the Hazimis, to clarify the group's official doctrine on issues of *takfir*.¹⁷⁹

Although the competition between the Bin`alis and the Hazimis within the Islamic State fluctuated on the group's position on *takfir*, this ideological fluctuation did not spill over to the West African Islamic State. Shekau has consistently supported the position of the Hazimis while Nur/al-Barnawi consistently supported the position of the Bin`alis. Both factions have also been unwavering in the way they label each other as Kharijites and Murjites. It is rather strange that even when the Islamic State issued memoranda and statements in support of the Hazimis and while Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi was teaching some of the books of the Islamic State, which have now been withdrawn for their extremist content and perceived ideological leanings to the Hazimis, al-Barnawi interpreted those books not in the favor of Hazimis but the Bin`alis.¹⁸⁰ *Takfir* is not the only issue that divided Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi, however.

Verdict for the People Residing Beyond the Boko Haram's Caliphate

Closely related to the disagreement on the issue of *takfir* is the debate over the verdict for the people residing beyond the Boko Haram's caliphate. Abubakr Shekau explicitly believes that anyone residing beyond the territories controlled by Boko Haram cannot be regarded as a Muslim unless he is actively fighting against Boko Haram's adversaries with complete disavowal from the Nigerian state. In his response to his critics from ISWAP, Shekau said:

178 Ibid., p. 464.

179 Bunzel, "Caliphate in Disarray." See also R. Green, "Dispute Over Takfir Rocks Islamic State," *MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1324*, August 4, 2017.

180 For example, see the 15-parts audio series on the book "You Should Know the Commands of Your Religion" delivered by Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi via ISWAP Media Center in February 2017.

“We believe that it is impossible for a Muslim to reside in the lands of the infidels (Dar al-Kufr) without the public manifestation of his religion, and still claim to be a Muslim. This is not the practice of the Prophet [Muhammad]. Likewise, it is impossible for a Muslim who has not fought against the *taghut* who rules by means of a constitution to claim to be a Muslim or for him not to be labeled an infidel. This is also not possible. These are the type of creeds they wrote to us with the claim that they emanated from the caliphate [Islamic State]. They said I should agree and work with these creeds because that is how the caliphate is governed. Afterwards I said that these beliefs, if I did not hear them directly from the spokesman of the caliphate, I will not accept them as truth nor will I agree to work with them. Whoever accepts these beliefs has committed apostasy. This is my creed.”¹⁸¹

Based on Shekau’s interpretation, since the people living beyond the territories controlled by Boko Haram are infidels, they can also be classified as legitimate targets of attacks by the group. Those who doubt the unbelief of those residing beyond the Boko Haram territories are themselves infidels. Shekau’s position is sterner against the people who were initially living within the territories of Boko Haram and who later fled from the group’s territory to territories under the control of the Nigerian state. These refugees, according to Shekau, are infidels, and it is permissible to bomb their camps, their mosques, markets, or anywhere they reside until they repent and migrate back to Boko Haram’s caliphate. It is only by understanding Shekau’s line of reasoning, which evolved from his interpretation of *takfir*, that one can understand the current trends of mosque attacks in northeast Nigeria. According to Shekau, the attacks on IDP camps and mosques are legitimate because it is an attack against infidels in “Masjid ad-dirar”—i.e., the mosques built not for the purpose of piety but for the purpose of combining the worship of God with the polytheism of calling for the support of democracy, secular constitution, and man-made legislation all of which according to him constitute unbelief.

For his part, Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi argues that the people who were initially living beyond the territories controlled by Boko Haram cannot be declared as infidels as long as they do not provide active or passive support for the Nigerian Army or members of the Civilian JTF in their war against Boko Haram. In his November 19, 2017, lecture based on the article “The Desertion of the Renegade: Rejection of the Filth and the Purification of the Ranks,” which was published in al-Naba newspaper Issue 94,¹⁸² al-Barnawi argues that the difference between himself and Shekau is the fact that Shekau believes that everyone residing in the land of unbelief where sharia is not the ultimate source of law is an infidel, and there are no monotheists residing in the lands of the infidels. Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi explains that Shekau’s interpretation is akin to the interpretation of the Kharijites. He further states that only those who were initially living within the Boko Haram’s caliphate and who later fled to the territories of the Nigerian state because they became fatigued with warfare or preferred the laws in the land of the infidels above the laws in the Islamic State can be declared as infidels. These people, according to Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, are the renegade who should be expelled out of the ranks of ISWAP and fought against as infidels.

In a similar lecture titled “Living in the land of unbelief,” Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi rebukes the people who migrated from the Islamic State to the land of unbelief with the claim that they repented from fighting jihad and they have now been deradicalized.¹⁸³ Unlike Shekau, al-Barnawi admonishes the people living beyond the territories controlled by ISWAP to migrate to the Islamic State. He delivers a lengthy lecture on the virtues of residing in the Islamic State, and he encourages those who are yet to migrate to do so not for the purpose of allying themselves with the winning forces but solely for the purpose of the conviction that living in the Islamic State where the sharia is the source of law is

181 “Shekau Responds to His Critics,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 472.

182 “The Desertion of the Renegade: Rejection of the Filth and the Purification of the Ranks,” al-Naba, Issue 94, August 2017, p. 14, available at Jihadology.

183 Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, “Living in the land of unbelief,” October 16, 2016.

preferable than living in the land of unbelief. Some of the more moderate Muslims might accept—however reluctantly—the propaganda of al-Barnawi and his attempt to win over the sympathy of the local communities, but it remains to be seen if his alternative will eventually be preferred over the alternative offered by the Nigerian state. Whatever the case, it is clear from the foregoing that the internal civil war in Boko Haram is mainly influenced by the interpretation of *takfir* and the ethics of jihad. There are no indications yet that the theological house of Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi will ever come into agreement with each other. Until then, the civil war will continue to claim casualties both within and outside the ranks of the group. Those who kill know why they kill, but majority of those about to be killed will hardly understand why they are being targeted.

Conclusion

The internal civil war in ISWAP and Boko Haram has claimed casualties both within and outside the group. Notwithstanding the schisms, Nur, Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, and Shekau preserved their allegiance to the Islamic State. Despite Shekau's demotion as the Governor of ISWAP, a video released by Boko Haram in March 2017 titled "Exposing the Secrets of the Hypocrites" showed images of al-Qa`ida-sympathetic scholars and critics of the Islamic State, such as the Jordanian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the Britain-based Hani Siba`i, and the Canada-based Tariq `Abd al-Halim, who were portrayed as apostate scholars.¹⁸⁴ The portrayal of al-Qa`ida-sympathetic scholars as apostates is an indication that Shekau also supported the Islamic State in its ideological rivalry with al-Qa`ida. Shekau has, however, discontinued his reference to the Islamic State, and he now seems comfortable forging ahead as a 'jihadi loner' without acting as an affiliate to any of the global jihad movements, be it al-Qa`ida or the Islamic State.

On the other hand, AQIM has re-advertised itself as an alternative to members disaffected by Shekau, frustrated with Shekau's level of extremism, and not too comfortable with the union between Nur, al-Barnawi, and the Islamic State. This disaffected faction, which comprises of the remnants of the quiescent Ansaru, often voices its criticisms of the Islamic State and support for al-Qa`ida's model of jihad. The only feasible choice for this disaffected faction will most likely be an accommodation with the recently established Jama`at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), consisting of Ansar Dine, Al Murabitun, Macina Liberation Front, and AQIM's Sahara branch. The internal civil war in the ranks of jihadi movements in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region has led to the evolution of three distinct factions: the Shekau-led faction in Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad; the al-Barnawi-led faction in the Islamic State in West African Province; and the remnants of the quiescent Ansaru. In conclusion, whether the different factions will survive the current wave of schism or not is yet to be seen, but for the foreseeable future the internal civil war is nowhere near over.

184 "New video message from Jama'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da'wah wa-l-Jihad's Abu Bakr Shekau: "The Secret of the Hypocrites," available at Jihadology.