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Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines:

Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency

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CHAPTER 6: Boko Haram's Fluctuating Affiliations: Future Prospects for Realignment with al-Qa`ida

By Jacob Zenn

Introduction

The group commonly known as “Boko Haram”⁶¹³ has gained international notoriety in recent years. First, it claimed to have ‘enslaved’ more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria, in May 2014, which led to an international outcry and the founding of a global social media movement calling for the girls’ release, #BringBackOurGirls. The movement finally pressured the Nigerian government to negotiate for the release of more than 100 of the girls in 2016 and 2017.

While Boko Haram was holding these girls captive, it also merged with the Islamic State in March 2015. The Islamic State’s acceptance of Boko Haram leader Abu Bakr Shekau’s pledge to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi led to the renaming of Boko Haram from its former official title, *Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da`wa wa-l-Jihad*,⁶¹⁴ to Islamic State in West Africa Province (*al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiya*), or ISWAP, as well as the Islamic State’s upgrading of the new ISWAP’s media operations.⁶¹⁵

Despite that the Islamic State has also “commanded the world’s attention” in recent years, including for its merger with Boko Haram, out of the media glare al-Qa`ida has, according to terrorism scholar Bruce Hoffman, “been quietly rebuilding and fortifying its various branches.”⁶¹⁶ Indeed, prior to 2015, the nature and extent of Boko Haram’s relationship with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was also kept secret and was not well understood.⁶¹⁷ Boko Haram’s relationship to AQIM, for example, was described as “marginal” and “not serious” by Thurston, “speculative” by Pérouse de Montclos, and “good propaganda” by Higazi.⁶¹⁸ Yet, primary source materials from AQIM and Boko Haram that AQIM’s al-Andalus media agency released from its archives on the Telegram messaging service in April 2017 show evidence to the contrary.⁶¹⁹ These materials shed new light on the nature of AQIM’s relationship with Boko Haram in the years prior to Boko Haram’s merger with the Islamic State. (The materials have since been made available for the general public on the blog jihadology.net.)

This article examines the reasons why al-Qa`ida’s relationship with Boko Haram collapsed and the prospects for al-Qa`ida or one of its affiliates to reenter Nigeria and rebuild its ties with Boko Haram through an evaluation of primary sources, including five archived letters from among primary source materials that AQIM released in April 2017. The letters are from southern commander Abu Zeid to AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel on August 24, 2009; Droukdel to Shekau on September 21, 2009;

613 Boko can refer to “book” or, more broadly, “Western education,” in northern Nigeria’s *lingua franca* of Hausa. Haram is an Arabic term also used in Hausa meaning “blasphemous.”

614 This name in Arabic literally means the “[Sunni Muslim] Group for Preaching and Jihad.”

615 “Al-Furqan Media Presents a New Audio Message from the Islamic State’s Shaykh Abu Muhammad Al ‘Adnani Al-Shami: ‘So They Kill and Are Killed,’” *Jihadology*, March 12, 2015; “Al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqa Foundation Presents a New Audio Message From Jama’at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da’wah wa-l-Jihad’s (Boko Haram) Abu Bakr Shekau: ‘Bay’ah Jama’at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da’wah wa-l-Jihad to the Caliph of the Muslims Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,’” *Jihadology*, March 7, 2015.

616 Bruce Hoffman, “Al-Qaeda’s Resurrection,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 6, 2018.

617 Shaykh Abu Al-Hasan Rashid, “Documents of Advice and Sharia Instruction to the Fighters in Nigeria,” *Jihadology*, released in April 2017 but dated to before bin Ladin’s death in May 2011.

618 Rashid.

619 Ibid.; Adam Higazi, “Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria,” in Michel Cahen, Marie Emmanuelle Pommerolle, and Kadya Tall eds., *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015); Alexander Thurston, “The disease is unbelief: Boko Haram’s religious and political worldview,” *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper No. 22*, January 2016; Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “Introduction,” *Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria* (Ibadan: French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA)—Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014); “Quick Items: Boko Haram and al Shabab,” *Sahelblog*, October 22, 2010.

Droukdel to Abu Zeid on July 5, 2010; Shekau to Abu Zeid on October 7, 2010; and Khalid al-Barnawi and eight members of his shura to a kidnapping specialist in Abu Zeid's brigade, Abdullah al-Shinqiti, a correspondence that al-Barnawi requested be forwarded to Mokhtar Belmokhtar in early 2011. The original version of at least two of the five letters were found in Usama bin Ladin's compound during the U.S. Special Forces raid that killed him in Pakistan in 2011, which means that AQIM forwarded them to bin Ladin.⁶²⁰ This further establishes their credibility, which has not been questioned by researchers of the region.⁶²¹

Among other revelations, the letters that AQIM released in April 2017 add to preexisting evidence that AQIM funding, weapons, and training contributed toward Boko Haram's first attack on Bauchi prison in 2010 and first suicide bombings in 2011.⁶²² They also show that while AQIM offered Boko Haram support in publishing its propaganda and Droukdel declared publicly his support to Boko Haram in 2010, much of the nature of the material relationship—funding, weapons, and training—was covert. Rather than the groups overhyping what was not a significant relationship, they actually kept what was a significant relationship largely under wraps. Indeed, the extent of the relationship, or even that a relationship existed, had been unknown to much of the research community until the release of these letters.

In the case of the above letters, the fact that they were initially intended for *internal consumption* between jihadis makes them more credible than primary sources that are originally intended as propaganda for an outside audience, including biographies of fighters and histories in AQIM magazines. Terrorist groups, such as AQIM and Boko Haram, often release propaganda materials and make attack claims that in and of themselves do not establish the accuracy of what they say. Similarly, government officials may claim AQIM or Boko Haram conducted an attack, but that in and of itself does not mean they actually carried it out.

Therefore, in the case of Nigeria, when a major attack takes place, it is important to corroborate any claims from either Boko Haram or the government about the attack's provenance with other evidence, such as whether Boko Haram fighters were in the vicinity of the attack site or regularly operate there; (an attack in Kwara State is less likely to be Boko Haram than one in Bauchi State, for example); reports about the attackers from eyewitnesses; evidence that officials working at the scene of the attack say they obtained or especially show to the public; the capabilities of Boko Haram compared to other groups or individuals to carry out the attack (a double-suicide bombing more certain to be Boko Haram while an arson perhaps not); the attack target (a media house more likely to be Boko Haram after the group threatens the media in a statement, for example); or the evidence Boko Haram provides in its claim (photos or a video of the attack, for example). This is the methodology used in this report to assess Boko Haram's responsibility for attacks attributed to it.

One of the advantages of the aforementioned is that they letters provide a window into the motivations and justifications of fighters, such as a Nigerian commander of AQIM's Tariq ibn Ziyad brigade, Khalid al-Barnawi, who broke away from Shekau to form a new group, *Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan* (Ansaru),⁶²³ after consulting with AQIM in 2011.⁶²⁴ Other AQIM-trained Boko Haram members, such as Mamman Nur, were ideologically and operationally aligned with Khalid al-Barnawi and Ansaru but still formally part of Boko Haram under Shekau's leadership, probably for fear that Shekau

620 "November 2017 Release of Abbottabad Compound Material," cia.gov.

621 See, for example, Thurston's treatment of the documents in Alexander Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," Princeton University Press, January 2018, p. 175.

622 Alexander Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," Princeton University Press, January 2018, p. 179.

623 This is an Arabic name meaning "Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands."

624 "A Message from Nigeria," Al-Risalah, January 2017.

would kill Nur and his loyalists if they defected.⁶²⁵ Despite Nur's remaining formally with Boko Haram and Khalid al-Barnawi's formal split from Shekau in 2011, two years later, in 2013, both of them had shifted course and reintegrated with or operated alongside Shekau.⁶²⁶ Therefore, as of 2013, Boko Haram was more unified than it had been in years, which helped the group to begin to conquer territory that year.⁶²⁷

While the above-mentioned letters, among other evidence, assist scholars to explain Boko Haram's early trajectory from 2009 to 2011, a new trend that emerged by 2013 was that AQIM became estranged from the jihadi scene in Nigeria after the French-led military intervention in Mali in February dispersed AQIM fighters northward to Libya and Tunisia and led to the deaths of its key couriers to Boko Haram.⁶²⁸ Formerly al-Qa`ida-trained Mamman Nur then supported Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi in March 2015, but in August 2016, Nur worked to depose Shekau from ISWAP and repeated many of the accusations of "transgressions" that Khalid al-Barnawi had leveled at Shekau in 2011 when al-Barnawi formed Ansaru. (Al-Barnawi returned to Ansaru by 2016 and did not join ISWAP.)⁶²⁹ Nur and Abu Musab al-Barnawi (no relation to Khalid al-Barnawi) then took control of ISWAP in August 2016, and Shekau was forced to revert to leading Boko Haram despite announcing his continued loyalty to al-Baghdadi.⁶³⁰

Now, in 2018, five years since the French-led military intervention in Mali, AQIM has resurged in Mali and the borderlands of neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso and Niger, through a coalition of AQIM-allied jihadi groups called *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM),⁶³¹ which formed in March 2017. JNIM has been endorsed by Abdelmalek Droukdel and al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. It includes in its coalition Katiba Macina, which is led by Hamadou Kouffa, is mostly ethnically Fulani, and operates in Central Mali; Ansar al-Din, which is led by Ag Ghaly, is mostly Tuareg, and operates in northern Mali; AQIM's Sahara Branch, which is led by North Africans (mostly Arabs but also some Berbers); and al-Murabitun, which is led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar (although it is unclear if he is alive or not) and other Arab North Africans. In addition, the Burkina Faso-based Fulani jihadi group, Ansaroul Islam, was formed as a branch of Katiba Macina, although it has not become formally part of JNIM and is suspected of having divided loyalties between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State. JNIM is also reportedly working on winning back Abu Adnan Walid al-Sahrawi, who in 2015 declared loyalty to the Islamic State and in 2018 claimed the attack that killed four U.S. Special Forces soldiers in Tongo Tongo, Niger, in October 2017.⁶³² JNIM has been highly active since its formation, with up to some 70 claimed attacks in Mali in 2017 and about as many attacks unclaimed.⁶³³

Against this landscape of regional jihadi activity, this article analyzes new primary sources, including, among others, the materials released by AQIM in April 2017, to evaluate the prospects for a future AQIM/JNIM alliance with the three active Nigerian jihadi groups—ISWAP, Boko Haram, and Ansa-

625 Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate: How Al-Qaeda Helped Islamic State Acquire Territory," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2018.

626 Ibid.; "Taking the hostage road," *Africa Confidential*, March 16, 2013; Adam Nossiter, "New Threat in Nigeria as Militants Split Off," *New York Times*, April 26, 2013.

627 Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

628 Remi Caravol, "Belmokhtar, the Sahelistan Godfather," *Jeune Afrique*, January 15-31, 2015; "Judge's Absence Stalls Trial of Mali-based Boko Haram Suspect," *Premium Times*, May 8, 2013; "Algerian court sentences Belmokhtar aide to eight years in prison," *Ennahar el-Jadid Online*, December 30, 2014; "Mali: un Béninois à la tête d'une unité combattante, une katiba, dans le Nord," *Radio France Internationale*, December 28, 2012.

629 Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

630 Man Chari and Abubakr Shekau, "Message from the Soldiers," August 7, 2016.

631 This is an Arabic name meaning "Group of Supporters of Islam and the Muslims."

632 For more details on Ansaroul Islam, see "Islamic State affiliate claims deadly attack on U.S. troops in Niger," *Reuters*, January 13, 2018.

633 Caleb Weiss, "JNIM: Over 100 Al Qaeda-linked attacks in West Africa so far in 2017," *FDD's Long War Journal*, May 25, 2017.

ru. The article carries out this evaluation by tracing phases of the evolution of al-Qa`ida's and AQIM's relationship with Boko Haram, from the group's founding in 2002 through Boko Haram's splits with Ansaru and ISWAP in 2011 and 2016, which occurred primarily because of external organizational influences on Boko Haram from al-Qa`ida (in the case of the formation of Ansaru) and the Islamic State (in the case of the formation of ISWAP). The article then explores what the past reveals about the possible future loyalties of ISWAP, Boko Haram, and Ansaru and what the consequences of a merger or other forms of cooperation between AQIM/JNIM and any of these three groups would be for security in Nigeria.

Phases of AQIM-Boko Haram Relations

Start-Up Phase

Although the literature on Boko Haram has previously regarded it as an originally “peaceful” group, new research has shown that it was founded with violent jihadi objectives and its early leaders coordinated with al-Qa`ida and AQIM's predecessor, the Salafi Group for Preaching Combat (GSPC), which formally became AQIM in 2007.⁶³⁴ The group, which was then commonly known as the Nigerian Taliban, was founded in 2002 when it set up a camp called Afghanistan⁶³⁵ near Nigeria's border with Niger. According to one set of scholarly sources and news articles from 2004, a key funding stream for the group came from a Saudi-funded charity, al-Muntada al-Islami, which had funded several dozen mosques in northern Nigeria and whose clerics sent some followers to the Afghanistan camp.⁶³⁶ The charity's Sudanese director in Nigeria admitted he provided funding to a cleric in Boko Haram in 2003, but said he was only repaying a loan.⁶³⁷ Although Nigeria suspended the charity and the United Kingdom later considered an investigation of its alleged funding of Boko Haram, charges were never formally filed.

In an article in January 2017, the head of Ansaru offered an additional explanation for Boko Haram's founding in 2002. He wrote that initial funding to found Boko Haram came from “members of al-Qa`ida residing in the Arabian Peninsula” after 9/11.⁶³⁸ If true, this would likely refer to bin Ladin's Yemeni envoy to northwest Africa, who was invited to Nigeria in 2002 by a member of the GSPC. However, according to the Ansaru leader, much of this funding was stolen by the recipient of the funds in Boko Haram.⁶³⁹

The members of Boko Haram at the Afghanistan camp were commonly described in reports by eye-witnesses and officials as “undergraduates, ex-military personnel, and other professionals” who “quit their jobs, retreated to the desert, soaked up the Qur'an and then swore to oust the corrupt Nigerian system and western education that they saw as antithetical to true sharia and regarded as infideli-

634 Jean Herskovits, “In Nigeria, Boko Haram Is Not the Problem,” *New York Times*, January 2, 2012; Hilary Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram: Wives, Women Witness* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2018).

635 The training camp is also alleged to have been called “Kandahar,” not “Afghanistan.” Other Nigerian Taliban members have referred to their stay there simply as *tafiya*, or ‘journey,’ in Hausa language. The camp was also called the “al-Muntada camp” in 2002 by Sufi groups familiar with—and concerned about—the camp, in reference to the Saudi charity that they and other ex-camp members alleged funded the camp.

636 Andrea Brigaglia, “A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da'wa in West Africa: The Career and the Murder of Shaykh JaDfar Mahmoud Adam (Daura, ca. 1961/1962-Kano 2007),” *Islamic Africa* 3:1 (2012); Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 37; James M. Dorsey, “Creating Frankenstein: Saudi Arabia's Ultra-conservative Footprint in Africa,” Annotated remarks at Terrorism in Africa seminar, Singapore, January 18, 2017.

637 “Head of Islamic Charity Denies Funding Islamist Rebellion,” AFP, February 25, 2004.

638 Al-Risalah 4, January 2017, available at Jihadology.

639 Ibid.

ty.”⁶⁴⁰ Their leader, Muhammed Ali, had studied under scholars of bin Ladin’s in Sudan and received a promise of funding from bin Ladin to start a jihadi movement in Nigeria in the mid-1990s.⁶⁴¹ He also fought in Afghanistan before returning to Nigeria to found Boko Haram in 2002.⁶⁴² Muhammed Ali, therefore, was both the camp leader and a member of the al-Qa`ida network and a key funder for the group he founded.

Several observers, such as civil society activist Shehu Sani and scholar Muhammed Kabir Isa, note that Boko Haram trained young men in militancy and amassed weapons at the Afghanistan camp.⁶⁴³ The scholar Andrea Brigaglia argues that Boko Haram had the tacit support of leading Nigerian salafi clerics who were funded by al-Muntada al-Islami, such as the most prominent cleric in the salafi network called *Ahlas-Sunna*, Shaykh Jafaar Mahmoud Adam.⁶⁴⁴ Shaykh Jafaar and the deputies around him were rhetorically supportive of bin Ladin and al-Qa`ida’s jihads in Iraq and Afghanistan until as late as 2006.⁶⁴⁵ According to Brigaglia, they would have supported the training at the Afghanistan camp for Nigerians to fight in jihads with al-Qa`ida in Iraq or Afghanistan but showed no signs of supporting jihad in Nigeria, which could have led to a government backlash that would harm Muslims and undermine the ascendant salafi mission in the country.⁶⁴⁶ Thus, according to Brigaglia, Shaykh Jafaar supported or at least tolerated the Afghanistan camp so long as its militant objectives were not aimed at Nigeria.

Court trial transcripts from the Eastern District of New York that became public in March 2017 also support the argument that the Afghanistan camp was a training camp supported by al-Qa`ida, as Brigaglia suspected.⁶⁴⁷ According to the transcripts, al-Qa`ida’s Pakistan-based leadership sent a Saudi-born national of Niger, Ibrahim Harun, to meet with Boko Haram and the GSPC in Nigeria.⁶⁴⁸ Harun coordinated with one of Muhammed Ali’s deputies, who was a Saudi-born Nigerian, and another Boko Haram member, Muhammed Ashafa, to send Boko Haram members to Niger for trainings with the GSPC. Harun also sent Ashafa to train with al-Qa`ida so that he could develop the skills to support Harun to scout and bomb the U.S. embassy or other U.S. and Israeli interests in Nigeria.⁶⁴⁹ However, after Ashafa was arrested in Pakistan, plans to send other Boko Haram members to Pakistan for this training were halted. After a period of moving back and forth between Nigeria and Niger and communicating with al-Qa`ida leaders in Pakistan about what to do next, Harun fled to Libya, where he was arrested in 2005. In 2011, he was put on a migrant boat by the Libyan government and then arrested in Italy and extradited to the United States for his role in killing two U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, which was evidenced by his fingerprints found on a Qur’an left at the scene of the battle.⁶⁵⁰ He was finally convicted in the Eastern District of New York in March 2017, which is when his court

640 Kamal Tayo Oropo, “How Talibans Recruit, Operate Nationwide,” *Guardian*, January 18, 2004; “Taliban Riots in Yobe,” *Guardian*, January 28, 2004.

641 “Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency,” International Crisis Group Africa Report # 216, April 3, 2014.

642 Ibid.

643 Andrea Brigaglia, “The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram,” *Diritto e Questioni Pubbliche* 15:2 (2015).

644 Ibid.

645 “Security Agents Arrest Suspected Leader of ‘Taliban’ Group in Borno,” AFP, July 7, 2006.

646 Ibid.

647 “United States of America against Ibrahim Suleiman Adnan Adam Harun,” Case 1:12-cr-00134-BMC-MDG, August 4, 2016; “Al Qaeda Operative Convicted Of Multiple Terrorism Offenses Targeting Americans Overseas,” Department of Justice U.S. Attorney’s Office Eastern District of New York, March 16, 2017.

648 Ibid.

649 Ibid.

650 “Boko Haram Member Has Al Qaeda Links, Says SSS Official,” NigerianVoice, April 5, 2012; Ikechukwu Nnochiri, “Danger Alert: Al Qaeda boss in West Africa lives in Kano,” Odili.net, April 8, 2012; “Country Reports on Terrorism,” United States Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2007.

transcripts became public.

Although there is a gap in the literature on why the Nigerian security forces ordered the raid on the Afghanistan camp in late 2003, it was likely the result of a combination of factors. Brigaglia hypothesizes that Shaykh Jafaar became aware that the Afghanistan camp was being used for training for a jihad in Nigeria and consented to a government crackdown on the camp.⁶⁵¹ Brigaglia did not have access to Ibrahim Harun's case at the time of making this hypothesis, but that case shows that Shaykh Jafaar would have been correct if he believed members of the Afghanistan camp were training with al-Qa`ida for jihad in Nigeria.⁶⁵²

Another explanation for the raid is that the local government in Yobe State, where the Afghanistan camp was located, believed it could benefit from federal funding for solving the "security crisis" by raiding the camp.⁶⁵³ This may be why Shaykh Jafaar and the local government were both aligned in deciding to destroy the camp, albeit for separate reasons. Other researchers have argued that the reason for the raid was a fishing dispute between Afghanistan camp members and local villagers.⁶⁵⁴ It is possible that although a fishing dispute did take place, it was only a pretext for the government to destroy the camp and there were macro-level reasons behind the government's actions. The several days of violence between Boko Haram and the security forces during the destruction of the camp suggest the fishing rights dispute may have been a tipping point but that the camp members had already prepared for the eventuality of a clash. Indeed, Muhammed Ali's successor as leader after 2003, Muhammed Yusuf, who was a mentee of Shaykh Jafaar and a liaison between *Ahl as-Sunna*, the camp leaders, such as Muhammed Ali, and the local government, later claimed his students were at the camp and that he had urged Muhammed Ali's followers to delay a jihad until they had more popular support.⁶⁵⁵

The result of the raid was that Muhammed Ali and his deputy and dozens of other members of the Afghanistan camp were killed, al-Muntada al-Islami was disbanded in Nigeria, and its representative in Nigeria was deported back to Sudan (although the charity maintained a presence in northeastern Nigeria).⁶⁵⁶ Boko Haram was finished—or so Nigeria thought.

Preaching and Training Phase

After the destruction of the Afghanistan camp, some of its members shifted to GSPC camps in the Sahel. This was made possible because of prior GSPC support to the Afghanistan camp. Among the most prominent Boko Haram members to shift to GSPC camps was Adam Kamar, who was the son of a Maiduguri businessman and later became a U.S.-designated terrorist in 2012 and intermediary with contacts to Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁶⁵⁷ The Nigerian authorities attempted to convict Kamar when he was put on trial in 2007 (the year that the GSPC became AQIM), but groups such as the Supreme

651 Brigaglia, "The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology."

652 Brigaglia, "A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da'wa in West Africa."

653 This federal funding, also called the "security vote," in Nigeria refers to funding given from the federal government to states to resolve crises. This funding can, however, be an incentive for state governments to allow crises to fester so that the state's officials can pocket money once a crisis emerges. The clashes at the "Afghanistan" camp may have benefitted the Yobe State government in this way.

654 Caroline Varin, "Boko Haram and the War on Terror," *Praeger*, August 15, 2016.

655 Anonymous, "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42:2 (2012), p. 118. For a further discussion of Boko Haram in the two years prior to 2009, see Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement" and the contribution of Abdulbasit Kassim in this report.

656 "Nigeria: Investigating Wahhabi Insurrection and Saudi Funds," IRIN News, January 25, 2004; "Nigeria: Security Services Investigate Suspected Islamic Terror Camp Training," *Lagos Insider*, July 26, 2004, pp. 39-40.

657 Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," p. 183; "Five Nigerians on Terror Charges," BBC, November 27, 2009.

Council for Sharia in Nigeria lobbied for Kamar and others suspected of training with AQIM to be released to the custody of northern Nigerian imams in a “de-radicalization program.”⁶⁵⁸ Kamar and a future accomplice in the suicide bombing of the U.N. building in Abuja in 2011, which killed 23 people, Babagana Ismail Kwaljima, who also had been accused of training with AQIM, were therefore both released from custody. The Boko Haram members who joined AQIM in the Sahel, such as Kamar and Kwaljima, reportedly transferred their *bay`a* from Muhammed Ali to Muhammed Yusuf.⁶⁵⁹

Muhammed Yusuf, meanwhile, had spent around one year in exile in Saudi Arabia after the destruction of the Afghanistan camp. Shaykh Jafaar and leading Borno politicians, however, negotiated his return to Nigeria, where he initially preached in the Indimi Mosque in Maiduguri, where Shaykh Jafaar also preached on visits to the city. Shaykh Jafaar’s followers, however, soon expelled Yusuf from the mosque due to contradictions between Shaykh Jafaar’s teachings and Yusuf’s, especially the latter’s teachings that “boko” was “haram,” meaning “Western educational is sinful,” and that service in the “un-Islamic” Nigerian government was also “haram.”⁶⁶⁰ At that point, according to an “insider” on the group, Yusuf used money he received from Saudi funders he had met in Saudi Arabia to develop his own Ibn Taymiyya mosque in Maiduguri and to support micro-finance programs for his followers.⁶⁶¹ While Yusuf may not have ordered Shaykh Jafaar’s assassination in 2007, the suspicions that some of his followers may have been involved are also not completely unfounded.⁶⁶² In Shaykh Jafaar’s final sermon, he warned that he would disclose the “undercover support” that Yusuf was receiving. According to Brigaglia, Shaykh Jafaar may have been planning to announce that he believed the funders of Yusuf had been infiltrated by the CIA or Saudi intelligence services and that Yusuf was therefore an agent intending to harm and divide the Muslims in Nigeria, although Brigaglia ultimately attributed the assassination to networks associated in some way to al-Muntada al-Islami.⁶⁶³

Not long after Shaykh Jafaar’s assassination, Yusuf and his followers entrenched themselves in their main headquarters in northeastern Nigeria, while Yusuf began to call for a jihad against Nigeria. This led to another crackdown on Boko Haram in July 2009 that was similar to, but larger-in-scale than, the clashes in late 2003. Muhammed Yusuf, was killed in these clashes along with around 800 of his followers. However, unlike in 2003, by 2009 Boko Haram was prepared to fight the jihad it had not been prepared for when Muhammed Ali died.⁶⁶⁴ The relationships that Boko Haram members had developed with GSPC/AQIM from 2003 to 2009 enabled Yusuf’s deputy and successor, Abubakar Shekau, to receive needed support from AQIM for waging a jihad, which is detailed in the documents that AQIM released in April 2017 and discussed in the introduction and next sub-section of this article.

Jihad Phase

As is evidenced in the archived letters that AQIM released in April 2017, Shekau sent three militants

658 *Daily Trust*, November 21, 2007 (online commenter); This Day, December 10, 2007 (online commenter); “Nigeria: Security Services Investigate Suspected Islamic Terror Camp Training;” “Faltering al-Qaeda Turns to Boko Haram,” *Magharebia*, January 27, 2012; “Terrorist Designations of Boko Haram Commander Abubakar Shekau, Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kamar,” U.S. Department of State, June 21, 2012; “Boko Haram: Jonathan Moves to End Secret Deal Between SSS and Northern Traditional Leaders,” *Nigerian Voice*, September 11, 2011; “Taking the Hostage Road!”

659 Author’s interview, Fulan Nasrallah, Abuja, Nigeria, March 2017.

660 Anonymous, “The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram.”

661 Author’s anonymous interview in Abuja, Nigeria, March 2017.

662 Boko Haram subsequently disclaimed the assassination in messages sent between the group and the Islamic State’s Africa Media Agency in 2015. Africa Media, “Communiqués to Africa Media,” November 18, 2014-February 9, 2015.

663 Brigaglia, “A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da’wa in West Africa.”

664 These clashes in 2009 were ostensibly the result Yusuf’s followers being attacked by the security forces for refusing to wear motorcycle helmets, which they believed were an affront to God. However, in the weeks and months before the clashes, Yusuf had announced to his followers that they would soon launch a jihad, and according to this perspective, the military crackdown was to preempt Yusuf’s jihad.

in August 2009, including longtime Nigerian GSPC/AQIM operative, Khalid al-Barnawi, who was a commander in the AQIM Tariq bin Ziyad brigade, to meet with AQIM's overall commander in the Sahel, Abu Zeid, "to consult on waging jihad in Nigeria."⁶⁶⁵ Abu Zeid would later report to AQIM's overall leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel, that "they have lived with us previously and we know them well" and relay to Droukdel that Shekau wanted "communications via internet and phone;" that Shekau had a "big problem with weapons and money;" and that Khalid al-Barnawi requested trainings in intervals of "200 brothers."⁶⁶⁶ Abu Zeid also reported to Droukdel after the meeting that he agreed on the setting up of communications with Shekau, which "happens all the time;" on the establishment of an intermediary based in Niger, which "should be easy to manage;" and providing to Boko Haram "practical training" as opposed to "theoretical training," the latter of which is "less beneficial."⁶⁶⁷ Abu Zeid asked the three militants whether they wanted to "join an organization." They replied that Shekau, who was recovering from wounds from the July 2009 clashes, wanted to speak directly on that matter. AQIM would later relay a letter from Shekau asking to speak to "bin Ladin's representative" about joining al-Qa`ida, which was found in bin Ladin's compound in 2011.⁶⁶⁸

Droukdel responded to Shekau in September 2010 that he would provide Shekau with monetary support "to the extent we have it." This came in the form of 200,000 euros that Droukdel ordered Abu Zeid to give to Shekau in a separate letter to Abu Zeid in 2010. Droukdel also promised Shekau "weaponry support," which was "not a problem because of its abundance," and trainings of "waves of Nigerian brothers."⁶⁶⁹ Droukdel told Shekau, however, to "keep complete secrecy in communication both in content and in the manner of delivery" about the "ties between [AQIM and Shekau]."⁶⁷⁰

Droukdel also issued a public statement on August 20, 2009, through AQIM's al-Andalus media agency. It said the killing of Yusuf was "proof" that a "Crusader war is being waged in Nigeria by a Christian minority against the 80-million Muslim majority" and that the clashes were part of a "global Crusade against Islam."⁶⁷¹ He must have issued this message almost immediately after receiving the letter from Abu Zeid about the meeting with the three emissaries from Shekau in August 2009. In February 2010, Droukdel also followed with a statement calling on Nigerian Muslims to fight "the Crusaders" in the same way that al-Shabaab was fighting Ethiopian troops in Somalia and promised to provide the "Nigerian mujahideen" with "men, arms and ammunition" to "defend" Nigerian Muslims against the "Christian minority," which is similar to what he promised Shekau privately.⁶⁷² In addition, al-Shabaab and al-Qa`ida in Iraq (a predecessor to the Islamic State, and under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), offered condolences to the "Nigerian mujahideen" at the one-year anniversary of Yusuf's death in July 2010 through messages and videos posted on jihadi web forums.⁶⁷³

AQIM's operational support contributed to Boko Haram's first attack after the July 2009 clashes, which took place on September 7, 2010.⁶⁷⁴ In that attack 50 militants broke into Bauchi prison during

665 Abubakar Shekau, "Praise be to God the Lord of all worlds," Bin Laden's Bookshelf: Office of the Director of National Intelligence (released in August 2016 but dated to before bin Ladin's death in May 2011).

666 Rashid.

667 "Abdallah Abu Zayd 'Abd-al-Hamid to 'our Shaykh and Emir, Abu Mus'ab 'Abd-al-Wadud' Subject: A letter from the Emir of the Nigeria group," Bin Laden's Bookshelf: Office of the Director of National Intelligence (released in January 2017 but dated to August 2009).

668 Shekau, "Praise be to God the Lord of all worlds."

669 Rashid.

670 Ibid.

671 Shumukh al-Islam 47788; Al-Fallujah 80045.

672 "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Condolence, Support and Comfort for our Brothers and People in Nigeria 20/08/09;" "North Africa Qaeda Offers to Help Nigerian Muslims," Reuters, February 1, 2010; "Periodical Review July 2010 – No. 2," ICT's Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, August 2010; "'Knights of Martyrdom 8' Video Dedicated to Nigerian Muslims," al-Furqan Foundation, September 22, 2011.

673 "Al Kataib Media People of Tawheed in Nigeria 2.mp4," YouTube, March 12, 2012.

674 Abdulbasit Kassim, "The Initial Source of Boko Haram Funding Explained," Medium, May 16, 2017.

Eid al-Fitr prayers and freed 750 prisoners, including around 150 members who were arrested during the July 2009 clashes.⁶⁷⁵ One month after this operation, Shekau wrote a letter of thanks to Abu Zeid “for the training and financial generosity.”⁶⁷⁶ One of al-Qa`ida’s highest-level commanders, Abu Yahya al-Libya, later claimed in 2011 that AQIM extended the jihad to Nigeria and enabled Boko Haram to carry out large-scale attacks, such as the prison break in Bauchi and another large-scale urban attack in Damatru, Yobe State, in November 2011.⁶⁷⁷

Split and Merger Phase

Despite the successful launch of insurgency from September 2010 into 2011, Boko Haram began to split by 2011. As narrated by AQIM’s Abdullah Abu al-Hasan al-Shinqiti in the documents that AQIM released in April 2017, Shekau began to “take the possessions of Muslims under the rationale that they lived under the rule of unbelievers by choice” instead of joining Boko Haram.⁶⁷⁸ Khalid al-Barnawi and eight members of his *shura*, including Abu Muhammed who was one of the emissaries to have visited Abu Zeid with al-Barnawi in August 2009, wrote to AQIM that “Shekau spends his time proclaiming takfir,” which “led the Nigerian people to criticize the religion and jihad, causing general fitna (chaos).”⁶⁷⁹ According to al-Barnawi, Shekau was similar to Antar Zouabri of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), from which the GSPC split during the Algerian civil war in the 1990s because of Zouabri’s declaring *takfir* against the entire Algerian population that did not join his group.⁶⁸⁰ After Shekau stopped responding to AQIM’s entreaties for him to stop this behavior, AQIM consulted with al-Barnawi on splitting from Shekau, which led to al-Barnawi forming Ansaru in 2011.

After Ansaru split from Shekau, the political violence in Nigeria showed two distinct trends. Attacks increased in the main area of operations of Boko Haram under Shekau’s leadership in northeastern Nigeria from 12 in 2010 (starting from the September 7 Bauchi prison attack), to 69 in 2011, to 319 in 2012.⁶⁸¹ Most of these attacks were assassinations, bank robberies, bombings of mosques or churches, or shootings of government officials. In contrast, in northwestern Nigeria and the Middle Belt⁶⁸² there were attacks at a much lower rate, but with higher impact and sophistication.⁶⁸³ There were, for example, only a handful of attacks in the Middle Belt in 2010 but then nine in 2011 and 89 in 2012.⁶⁸⁴ What was distinct about the attacks in this region was that they demonstrated AQIM “fingerprints,” including the simultaneous bombings on Christmas Day in Jos in 2010, which killed 41 people, and the first

675 Sani Muhd Sani, “Attack On Bauchi Prison - Boko Haram Frees 721 Inmates,” *Leadership*, September 8, 2010.

676 Rashid.

677 The statement was posted on Al-Minbar forum #16019 in October 2011.

678 Ibid.

679 Ibid.

680 Ibid. It appears AQIM released these documents publicly to its followers for two reasons: first, one of the documents is the original version of one released by the U.S. Directorate of National Intelligence in January 2017, so AQIM may be seeking to contextualize a now public document; and, second, AQIM may be seeking to explain to its followership that it is not responsible—and even advised against—Shekau’s *takfirism* and the misguided paths that Shekau and his commanders have taken.

681 This is based on the author’s data and is available on request.

682 Nigeria’s “Middle Belt,” which for the purposes of this article includes Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, Gombe, Niger State, Kogi, and Abuja, is a region of central Nigeria populated by diverse ethnic groups. For the purposes of this article, it does not include Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, which are referred to as “northeastern Nigeria.” Attacks in Kano—though relatively few compared to the northeastern Nigerian states—for the purposes of this article were divided 50%-50% between the “Middle Belt” and “northeastern Nigeria” since some were clearly the Shekau faction and others were clearly not. As such, in general, the data should be considered estimates but reflective of broader trends.

683 Jide Ajani, “Horror in Sokoto - Al-Qaeda-Funded Group Killed Hostages,” *Vanguard*, March 11, 2012; Yusuf Alli, “Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram’s Leaders,” *Nation*, February 14, 2012; “Barnawi, Kambar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties,” *Agence France-Presse*, June 21, 2012; “How Nur, Shekau Run Boko Haram,” *Vanguard*, September 3, 2011; “Scott Stewart, “Untangling the Threads of Terrorism in Turkey,” *Stratfor*, March 22, 2016.

684 This is based on the author’s data and is available on request.

two suicide bombings in Nigeria's history at the Federal Police headquarters in June 2011, which killed three people, and the U.N. building in Abuja in August 2011, which killed 23, which were attributed to Mamman Nur and militants in direct contact with him.⁶⁸⁵ There were also 20 vehicle-borne suicide attacks and nine person-borne suicide attacks in 2012, with 18 and six, respectively, carried out in the Middle Belt. In contrast, there were only two vehicle-borne and two person-borne suicide attacks, respectively, in northeastern Nigeria 2012. In addition, 11 of the 18 vehicle-borne suicide attacks in the Middle Belt in 2011-2012 targeted churches, including seven in Kaduna and three on Easter.⁶⁸⁶ This was consistent with AQIM's desire for a "war against the Crusaders" in Nigeria.

The disproportionate number of AQIM "fingerprint" attacks in the Middle Belt, in particular suicide bombings, was an anomaly when contrasted with the vast majority of overall attacks in 2011-2012, which were in the area of operations of the Shekau faction in northeastern Nigeria. This is because suicide attacks were predominantly a tactic of the Nigerian militants who trained with AQIM and al-Shabaab from 2009 to 2011 and later either joined Ansaru or the faction of Boko Haram under Muhammed Yusuf's former third-in-command, Mamman Nur, who traveled Somalia to train with al-Shabaab after Muhammed Yusuf's death in July 2009.⁶⁸⁷ Indeed, in Khalid al-Barnawi's letter to AQIM in 2011, he indicated that Shekau threatened to kill Boko Haram members who traveled to Algeria or Somalia without his permission, such as Nur.⁶⁸⁸

Alexander Thurston has argued that Boko Haram was an exception to the global trend in the spread of suicide bombings, where skills in this area tended to be passed from group to group (Hezbollah to al-Qa`ida to AQI to AQIM, for example).⁶⁸⁹ Rather, Thurston has argued that Boko Haram was one of the only groups in the world to independently evolve the tactic of suicide bombings on its own.⁶⁹⁰ However, sources showing that Boko Haram members under the lead of Mamman Nur trained in suicide bombing operations with AQIM and al-Shabaab before carrying out the first suicide attack in Nigeria and the datasets of suicide attacks in Nigeria suggest that Boko Haram's rapid surge in suicide attacks in the Middle Belt in 2011-2012, on the contrary, was the result of the group's training abroad with AQIM and al-Shabaab.⁶⁹¹ It was these suicide bombings primarily by the Nur faction of Boko Haram in 2011-2012 that also garnered international attention and furthered al-Qa`ida narratives in a way that the Shekau faction's attacks did not.⁶⁹² Even though the Shekau faction's attacks were more frequent than those of the Nur faction, they were also more remote (in northeastern Nigeria compared to the politically volatile Middle Belt), smaller in scale and did not target symbolic locations.⁶⁹³

Ansaru attacks in 2011-2012 also reflected its members' training in kidnappings with AQIM. Ansaru's first operation in Nigeria, which was under the name al-Qa`ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel, was masterminded by Khalid al-Barnawi in May 2011 and coordinated by his deputy Abu Muhammed

685 Jide Ajani, "UN House Blast: Mastermind, Nur, Declared Wanted," *Vanguard*, September 1, 2011; UN House: Boko Haram Unveils Suicide Bomber," *This Day*, September 19, 2011; "Muslim group claims Nigeria blasts," *Al Jazeera*, December 28, 2010; Ben Charles Obi, "Kabiru Sokoto Phone Calls," *Insider Weekly* [Lagos], February 6, 2012.

686 This is based on the author's data and is available on request.

687 "Treasury Sanctions Senior Boko Haram Leaders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, December 1, 2015.

688 Rashid.

689 Alexander Thurston, "Boko Haram and ISIS: Be Careful with Evidence," *Sahelblog*, May 27, 2015.

690 *Ibid.*

691 The full datasets are available on request to the author. Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," p. 14; Michael C. Horowitz, "Non-State Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism," *International Organization* 64:1 (2010): pp. 33-64; Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

692 "U.S. debates 'terrorist' sanctions for Nigerian militants," *Reuters*, May 26, 2012.

693 "Christian Militants In Southern Kaduna Threaten Fulani Herdsmen, Give Seven Days Evacuation Notice," *Sahara Reporters*, June 5, 2012; "Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladi Sudan threatens Southern Kaduna Militant Group, Akhwat Akwop," *Desert Herald*, June 11, 2012.

whose base was in Kaduna State.⁶⁹⁴ In the operation, a group of militants kidnapped an Italian and a British engineer from their apartment in Kebbi State and took them to a hideout in neighboring Sokoto State, where they were killed in March 2012 in a rescue attempt. The hostages' location was revealed during a raid on Abu Muhammed's cell in Kaduna in March 2012, which killed Abu Muhammed.⁶⁹⁵

The second kidnapping, in January 2012, was of a German engineer in Kano, and on the same day Ansaru announced its "public formation" in leaflets dropped in the city.⁶⁹⁶ AQIM claimed the kidnapping through its al-Andalus media agency, although like the first kidnapping in Kebbi-Sokoto, it was coordinated from Abu Muhammed's base in Kaduna. AQIM also directly claimed the killing of the engineer in May 2012 after Nigerian security forces attempted to free him. Information about his location was also revealed during the raid that killed Abu Muhammed.⁶⁹⁷

Ansaru's third kidnapping, in Katsina State, was claimed by Ansaru in December 2012. The operation involved 30 militants who took captive a French engineer from a site in Katsina State. Ansaru continued al-Qa`ida's—and specifically, AQIM's—messaging when it said it would continue to kidnap French citizens until France ended its ban on the *niqab* and plans to intervene militarily in northern Mali.⁶⁹⁸ The hostage later escaped from an Ansaru hideout in Kaduna State in November 2013.

Ansaru's fourth and final claim of a kidnapping was in February 2013 when it captured seven foreign engineers on a construction site in Bauchi State. Before Ansaru killed them several weeks later in Sambisa Forest in Borno State, it warned that any attempt to rescue the hostages would lead to the same result as in the Kebbi-Sokoto and Kano kidnappings (claimed by al-Qa`ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel and AQIM but coordinated by Abu Muhammed). It said the kidnapping in Bauchi was in response to European "atrocities" in Afghanistan and Mali. In addition to these kidnappings, Ansaru also claimed an ambush on Nigerian troops preparing to deploy to Mali in January 2013 and a prison break in November 2012.⁶⁹⁹

Although Ansaru and the Nur faction of Boko Haram both resented Shekau, in 2013 members of both began reintegrating with Boko Haram under Shekau's leadership, including Khalid al-Barnawi and Ansaru's commander for suicide missions, Abu Fatima, and later Nur as well.⁷⁰⁰ The motivations for this reintegration were that AQIM was unable to continue supporting Ansaru after the French-led military intervention in Mali in 2013; Shekau was ordering the killing of Ansaru members; and Nigerian counterterrorism operations had eliminated key Ansaru cells.⁷⁰¹ As a result of the reintegration, Boko Haram rapidly improved in four tactical areas in 2013: kidnappings-for-ransom in Borno State and of 22 foreigners in five operations in northern Cameroon, which netted Boko Haram millions of

694 Midat Joseph and Ruth Yanta, "Kidnappers – Why We Killed Briton, Italian Hostages," *Leadership*, March 13, 2012; "Boko Haram Looks to Mali," *Africa Confidential*, November 30, 2012.

695 Ibid.

696 "Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges," *Vanguard*, February 1, 2012.

697 "Al-Andalus Media Presents a New Statement from al-Qa'idah in the Islamic Maghrib: 'On the Killing of the German Prisoner in Nigeria,'" available at Jihadology.

698 "Islamist group gives reasons for kidnap of French national in Katsina," *Vanguard*, December 24, 2012.

699 "Jaji, Abuja Terror Attacks: Army, Police Arrest 22 Officers," *Punch NG*, December 1, 2012; Declared of Jama`atu Ansarul Muslimina Fibiladis Sudan Garki II Abuja," YouTube, November 30, 2012. The Arabic and English statements are available at Jihadology. "Islamists Ansaru Claim Attack on Mali-bound Nigeria Troops," *Reuters*, January 20, 2013; "French Man Kidnap: Possibly an Inside Job – Katsina CP," *Vanguard*, December 21, 2012.

700 An example of the transfer of militants from Ansaru and Nur's faction of Boko Haram to Shekau's faction of Boko Haram is Abu Fatima, who claimed the Federal Police Headquarters suicide bombing in Boko Haram's name in 2011 but became Ansaru's commander for suicide operations by 2012. An audio of Mamman Nur and Abu Fatima, which was made and leaked publicly in August 2016, confirmed that Abu Fatima and Mamman Nur both came to a reconciliation with Shekau sometime before March 2015.

701 Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

dollars and became its biggest “war chest;”⁷⁰² suicide bombings, which rapidly increased in north-eastern Nigeria and became virtually extinct in the Middle Belt;⁷⁰³ raids on military barracks, which led to the conquest of territory in northeastern Nigeria;⁷⁰⁴ and media and narratives, which began to incorporate former Ansaru themes, such as praising 19th century Fulani jihadi, Usman dan Fodio, claiming to establish an Islamic state in *biladis Sudan* (Black Africa), which was part of Ansaru’s name, and offering anti-Boko Haram civilian vigilantes the opportunity to “repent” to be spared from being killed.⁷⁰⁵ By 2014, Boko Haram became stronger than ever and extended its area of operations in northern Cameroon and southeastern Niger and around Lake Chad in Chad. Boko Haram also controlled large swathes of territory in Borno State as the Nigeria military steadily withdrew from bases in the countryside due to pressure from the group as well as inadequate resourcing from the government.⁷⁰⁶

Loyalty Phase

Coinciding with Boko Haram’s occupation of territory, in June 2014 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared a caliphate from a mosque in Mosul, Iraq. His group, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), was then rebranded as the “Islamic State” with aspirations for a global caliphate. Strategically, Boko Haram became an important asset for the Islamic State to legitimate its claim that it had global reach,

702 Ahmed Salkida, “What Does Boko Haram Want?” Storify, November 1, 2014; Guibai Guitama, “Cameroun – Libération du père Georges Vandenberghe: Le négociateur désigné de Boko Haram réclame son argent,” L’Oeil du Sahel, January 6, 2014; Ola Audu, “Boko Haram Threatens JTF Spokesperson, Demands Prisoners Exchange for French Nationals,” *Premium Times*, March 18, 2013; “Nigeria’s Boko Haram ‘Got \$3m Ransom’ to Free Hostages,” BBC, April 26, 2013; “Gunmen Kidnap Senior Lecturer in Maiduguri,” *Vanguard*, February 24, 2013; David Molomo, “Dead or Alive? Customs Officer, Wife, Five Kids, Cousin Missing for 22 Days,” *Sun News*, April 29, 2013; Kareem Ogori, “Gunmen Kidnap Ex-Borno LG Boss, Demand N50m,” *Blueprint*, April 8, 2013; Njadvara Musa, “Gunmen Kidnap Ex-Council Chairman, Reject N10m Ransom,” *Guardian* [Lagos], April 13, 2013; Maina Maina, “Gunmen Kidnap DPO in Bama, Set Town on Fire in Borno,” *Daily Post*, April 25, 2013; Yahaya Ibrahim, “Borno Water Board GM Kidnapped,” *Daily Trust*, April 29, 2013; “Kidnapped Policeman Killed by Abductors in Borno,” *Vanguard*, May 1, 2013; Ola Audu, “How Boko Haram Turned to Kidnapping to Raise Funds in Borno,” *Premium Times*, May 20, 2013; Yusuf Alli, “Boko Haram Kidnaps 92-yr-old ex-Minister Ali Monguno,” *Nation*, May 4, 2013.

703 Boko Haram Militants Shows Off Weapons ‘Captured’ From An Army Barracks,” Sahara TV, April 29, 2013; “Message from a Mujahid,” al-Urhwa al-Wutqha, January 29, 2015.

704 These ambushes and raids on military barracks began on March 14, 2013—one month after the French-led intervention ousted AQIM, MUJAO, and Ansar al-Din from northern Mali—with the attack on a military barracks in Monguno along Borno State’s border with Niger (a natural entry point for militants from Mali to reenter Nigeria). In the weeks after the Monguno raid in March 2013, raids continued in Baga, Marte and Maiha. Other raids on towns and barracks from April to October 2013 resulted in the deaths of 127 people in Damatru, 142 in Benisheikh, 55 in Bama, 44 in Konduga, 41 in Gujba, and 35 in Demba. In March 2014, Boko Haram also attacked the barracks in Borno State’s capital, Maiduguri; freed hundreds of prisoners; and showed the operation in a Shekau-claimed propaganda video. The timing, claims, and geography of these raids on barracks and towns immediately after the French-led military intervention suggested that Nigerian militants who were in Mali, such as those training or fighting with AQIM, MUJAO, or Ansar al-Din, returned home to Nigeria and participated in the raids. “Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali’s Rebel Seize Gao,” *Agence France-Presse*, April 9, 2012; Baba Ahmed, “Leader of al-Qaida Unit in Mali Quits AQIM,” *Associated Press*, December 3, 2012; Lemine Ould M. Salem, “Portrait. On l’appelle ‘Barbe rousse,’” *Telquel*, January 17, 2013; Drew Hinshaw, “Timbuktu Training Site Shows Terrorists’ Reach,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013; Lars Inge Staveland, “New Islamist Group May Be Affiliated With Al-Qa’ida,” *Aftenposten*, February 22, 2013; “Le Mujao revendique le double attentat et promet qu’il y en aura d’autres,” *Radio France Internationale*, May 24, 2013.

705 An example of the transfer of narratives from Ansaru to Boko Haram is the legacy of Usman dan Fodio. Boko Haram, unlike Ansaru, had never incorporated Fodio’s legacy into its own statements until Shekau’s video claiming the kidnapping of more than 250 schoolgirls in Chibok in May 2014. Another Boko Haram video in 2014 began with a scene of Fodio waging battle and concluded with an image of al-Baghdadi declaring the caliphate in Mosul. The end of that video claimed an Islamic state was established in “biladis Sudan,” thus adopting part of Ansaru’s name into Boko Haram’s own declared geographic range. “Boko Haram Leader Shekau Releases Video On Abduction Of Chibok Girls,” YouTube, May 5, 2014; “Boko Haram Militants Display Control Of Captured Towns In Northeastern Nigeria,” YouTube, November 10, 2014. “Gunmen Attack Police SARS Headquarters, Free 30 Suspects,” *Daily Independent*, November 27, 2012; “Glad Tidings, O Soldiers of Allah,” *Ana al-Muslim Network*, December 1, 2012; Taiwo Adisa, “Shekau, Boko Haram Leader, Escapes Arrest in Kano – Wife Arrested – Security Operatives Probe 2 Top Politicians over Sect’s Funding,” *Nigerian Tribune*, March 5, 2012.

706 “Boko Haram kills 40 in Diffa, southeast Niger,” al-bawaba.com, June 19, 2015; “Boko Haram attacks prison in Niger, four killed,” Reuters, July 12, 2015; “Boko Haram suspected after suicide attacks in Chad, NE Nigeria,” AFP, July 11, 2015; “At Least 11 Dead in Twin Suicide Bombing In Cameroon,” AFP, July 13, 2015.

including into Africa, which had been home to several al-Qa`ida-aligned groups until then. Moreover, as al-Qa`ida became increasingly estranged from Boko Haram and reacted negatively to Boko Haram's Chibok kidnapping in April 2014, which the Islamic State admired and praised in its English-language magazine *Dabiq*, Boko Haram became a more viable acquisition for a merger with the Islamic State.⁷⁰⁷ Shekau, for his part, showed interest in the Islamic State, as evidenced by his chanting of Islamic State slogans for the first time since his first claim of the Chibok kidnapping in May 2014, such as *dawla al-Islamiya qamat, dawla al-Islamiya baqiya* (Islamic State is established, Islamic State remains), and frequently thereafter.⁷⁰⁸ On four occasions between May 2014 and October 2014, Shekau also announced that Boko Haram also established an "Islamic state" (*dawla islamiya* in Arabic and *daular musulunci* in Hausa) in northeastern Nigeria. Another Boko Haram video after the Chibok kidnapping featured a screengrab of al-Baghdadi's sermon from the mosque in Mosul where he had declared a caliphate and then showed Shekau in a mosque in Nigeria with hundreds of worshippers and Shekau gesturing and wearing clothes of an imam resembling al-Baghdadi.⁷⁰⁹

By late 2014, Boko Haram established a line of communication to North African former AQIM members who had defected to the Islamic State and ran a pro-Islamic State media agency in Tunisia called Africa Media (*Ifriqiya L'ilam*). Africa Media, in turn, set up an English-, French-, and Arabic-language Twitter account called al-Urwa al-Wutqha⁷¹⁰ for Boko Haram in January 2015.⁷¹¹ The Twitter account's "official spokesman" was Abu Musab al-Barnawi, who was Muhammed Yusuf's son and was allied with Mamman Nur and not Shekau, even though they were all nominally together in a unified Boko Haram.⁷¹² Shekau, despite being Boko Haram's overall leader, did not initially appear on the Twitter account because he had not yet agreed to pledge to the Islamic State by 2015 whereas Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Nur were ready to make the pledge.⁷¹³ Shekau agreed with them that al-Baghdadi was a true caliph, but he appeared reluctant to relinquish authority to the Islamic State.⁷¹⁴

What compelled Shekau to make the pledge, however, was his concern that if he did not make the pledge, then Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur would split from him, just as Khalid al-Barnawi had done with Ansaru in 2011 and Nur nearly did with his own faction of Boko Haram in 2011-2012.⁷¹⁵ Contrary to prior analyses that assume the pledge was a result of Boko Haram's "weakness," primary sources from Boko Haram and the Islamic State show that Shekau agreed to make the pledge to keep the group unified.⁷¹⁶ Ansaru likely did not agree to join the Islamic State, however, which is why on February 9, 2015, Ansaru issued a video after a two-year hiatus of no video productions that

707 In the October 2014 edition of its official magazine *Dabiq*, the Islamic State cited Boko Haram's kidnapping in Chibok as precedent for its own sexual slavery of hundreds of non-Muslim Yazidi girls.

708 Shekau's first claim of the Chibok kidnapping on May 5, 2014, is available at "Boko Haram Leader Shekau Releases Video On Abduction of Chibok Girls," Sahara TV, YouTube, May 5, 2014.

709 See, for example, "Boko Haram Militants Display Control of Captured Towns in Northeastern Nigeria," Sahara TV, YouTube, November 10, 2014. Shekau says "Islamic State" at 12:20 in "Boko Haram Militants Display Control of Captured Towns in Northeastern Nigeria" and also says "Islamic State" in three other videos in August, October, and November 2014.

710 Al-Urwa al-Wutqha means "Indissoluble Link" in Arabic.

711 "Jumbled Words and Authentication for the Important Period Prior to Shaykh Al-Shekawi's Allegiance Which Made the Umma Rejoice," Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad, March 27, 2015, formerly available on Twitter.

712 The Twitter account was a platform for showing Boko Haram videos with Islamic State choreography and production techniques and introducing Boko Haram and Borno State to the Islamic State's global followership. The account also featured live-tweets in French, Arabic, and English on Boko Haram attacks, particularly along the Nigeria-Cameroon border.

713 Shekau did not feature on the Twitter account until February 15, 2015, nearly one month after it opened. However, he was uncharacteristically calm and professional when he did appear, perhaps due to the demands of the controllers.

714 Mamman Nur, "An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau," August 4, 2016, available at Sahara Reporters' SoundCloud account.

715 Ibid.

716 Adam Higazi, "Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria," in M. Cahen, M.-E. Pommerolle, K. Tall eds., *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015); Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," p. 183; Adam Chandler, "The Islamic State of Boko Haram?" *Atlantic*, March 9, 2015; "Five Nigerians on Terror Charges."

for the first time condemned Shekau by name and mocked his repeated crotch-scratching gesture in a video in which Shekau proudly claimed the bombing in November 2014 at Kano's Grand Mosque, but that Ansaru had condemned as "tragic."⁷¹⁷ Africa Media, for its part, was highly in favor of Shekau making the pledge and may not have accepted a pledge if a lesser-known militant, such as Abu Musab al-Barnawi or Nur, were to be the new ISWAP leader. Neither Abu Musab al-Barnawi nor Nur had shown their faces publicly since 2009. (Abu Musab al-Barnawi was veiled in his videos on the Twitter account.)⁷¹⁸

Shekau finally appeared on the Twitter account in a video in late February 2015, after agreeing to make the pledge and then again in an audio clip on March 7, 2015, to make the pledge publicly.⁷¹⁹ The pledge was accepted by al-Baghdadi's spokesman and praised in 10 other Islamic State videos from Yemen, Algeria, Libya, Syria, and Iraq and in the Islamic State's English-language propaganda magazine *Dabiq*.⁷²⁰ Shekau, in turn, was named ISWAP's *wali*, or governor.⁷²¹ ISWAP fully merged into the Islamic State's social media system, and the Africa Media members, such as Abu Malik Shaybah al-Hamad, who had promoted Boko Haram's Twitter account, encouraged foreign fighters to "migrate" to Libya and Nigeria.⁷²²

However, by late 2015, the Islamic State was coming under increasing pressure in Iraq and Syria, as well as Libya, while AQIM cracked down on factions that had pledged loyalty to al-Baghdadi in Algeria and the Sahel. Algerian forces also killed leaders of the Islamic State-loyal factions that split from AQIM in Algeria. Meanwhile, in Nigeria the government launched a state of emergency military offensive with contributions from Chadian, Nigerien, and Cameroonian forces as well as South African military contractors, starting in late January 2015 and continuing through the presidential election victory of retired military commander, Muhammed Buhari, in March 2015.⁷²³ Within one year of Shekau's pledge, the Nigerian army retook a number of towns from ISWAP and eliminated much of its *tamkin* (authority) in northeastern Nigeria.

The longstanding differences between Mamman Nur and Shekau became more apparent as ISWAP came under pressure in 2016.⁷²⁴ Shekau, for example, believed that even Muslims in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps were "infidels" because they were receiving support from the "infidel" Nigerian government and humanitarian organizations. ISWAP, in contrast, employed the theological tool of deferment (*irja'*) and took a neutral stance on whether "ordinary Muslims" who did not join ISWAP or received services from an "infidel" government or humanitarian organizations were themselves "infidels." Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Nur would only kill Muslims who were *actively opposing* the jihad while, like the Nur faction of Boko Haram in 2012, they said they would focus on targeting Christian "proselytizers" or the Nigerian government.⁷²⁵ More practically, Abu Musab al-Barnawi

717 "Investigation of the Nigerian Army by Jam 'At Ansar Al-Muslimin Fi Bil D Al-Sudan," February 10, 2015, available at jihadology.net.

718 A translation of this letter will be available in Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (London: Hurst, forthcoming 2018).

719 "Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqa Foundation Presents a New Audio Message From Jama'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-I-Da'wah wa-I-Jihad's (Boko Haram) Abu Bakr Shekau."

720 In the October 2014 edition of its official magazine *Dabiq*, the Islamic State cited Boko Haram's kidnapping in Chibok as precedent for its own sexual slavery of hundreds of non-Muslim Yazidi girls.

721 "Al-Furqan Media Presents a New Audio Message from the Islamic State's Shaykh Abu Muhammad Al 'Adnani Al-Shami: 'So They Kill and Are Killed,'" March 12, 2015, available at jihadology.net.

722 Screenshots of these tweets are available on request to the author.

723 "Boko Haram Fighters Fleeing NAF Aerial Bombardment In Sambisa Forest," Sahara Reporters, May 3, 2015.

724 One of the turning points was an attack by dozens of fighters in Shekau's faction, including several female suicide bombers, on an IDP camp outside of Maiduguri on January 30, 2016, which killed nearly 100 people. "Shekau no longer leads Boko Haram, says Chad's President," *Premium Times*, August 12, 2015; "Cameroun – Espionnage: Deux présumés Boko Haram arrêtés à Minawou," *Mutations*, August 15, 2014.

725 Al-Naba newsletter 41, August 2016.

believed attacks on civilians and Shekau's other acts of "extremism" (*ghalaw*) would cause ISWAP to lose the support of the population.⁷²⁶

In April 2016, ISWAP rebounded from government pressure and began to increase its attacks on military barracks and towns, especially in southeastern neighboring Niger, in a sign Abu Musab al-Barnawi-loyal fighters were gaining momentum and pilfering supplies. The Islamic State actively promoted these attacks on social media.⁷²⁷ Several months later, in August 2016, the Islamic State used an interview with Abu Musab al-Barnawi in its Al-Naba newsletter to announce that al-Barnawi was the new *wali* of ISWAP, thus indicating that Shekau was dropped from the position.⁷²⁸ Shekau responded within hours to what his military emir later described as this "sudden" news. Shekau then declared in a video on YouTube that although he still believed al-Baghdadi was a caliph, he was now reviving Boko Haram, which had ceased to exist after the formation of ISWAP, and was reverting to being its leader again.⁷²⁹ Shekau, who was concerned that ISWAP members, such as Nur, were trying to track and kill him, remained in control of Boko Haram but he was also deeply suspicious of and opposed to the theology of ISWAP.⁷³⁰

These developments all took place in the context of al-Qa`ida and AQIM becoming increasingly disassociated from Nigeria. The last al-Qa`ida acknowledgement of Boko Haram appears to have been in July 2014, when the leader of AQIM's Tunisian "sub-affiliate," Abu Iyad al-Tunisi, sent a letter to al-Qa`ida leaders, including Shekau, arguing that Ayman al-Zawahiri should pledge loyalty to al-Baghdadi as a way of marginalizing Islamic State hardliners and ending jihadi infighting. (Al-Tunisi later retracted his opinion upon advice of other al-Qa`ida scholars and leaders).⁷³¹ Yet once al-Baghdadi declared the caliphate in June 2014 and Shekau claimed the Chibok kidnapping in May 2014, al-Qa`ida may have fully ended the relationship with Shekau. However, this does not mean al-Qa`ida will always be out of the picture in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

Future al-Qa`ida Alignment in Nigeria

While ISWAP was undergoing its split in August 2016, JNIM—AQIM's Mali-based sub-group—was consolidating its foothold in Mali and increasingly in Burkina Faso and Niger. The southernmost member of JNIM, Katiba Macina, in 2017 was also making inroads mostly among Fulani communities in Mali which have cross-border networks throughout the region. This means JNIM's strength is in its potential geographic reach beyond Mali. It has been because of Fulani kinship ties as well as criminal highway banditry and herder networks that Katiba Macina has been able to extend its reach into Fulani communities beyond Mali and was able to spawn a new group in Burkina Faso, Ansaroul

726 Ibid. Nur's accusations against Shekau also included that he was hoarding supplies while children were dying of starvation; killing militants who disagreed with him without explanation and fighters and civilians whose only crime was holding a government ID card; and killing militants who defected to Nur's bases, including highly skilled bomb-makers whose absence weakened ISWAP's capabilities. Mamman Nur, "An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau," August 4, 2016, available at Sahara Reporters' SoundCloud account.

727 "The Raid of Niger: Coverage of the Liberation of the Nigerien Military Training Camp in the Bosso Area – Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah," July 6, 2016, available at jihadology.net.

728 Al-Naba newsletter 41.

729 Man Chari and Abubakar Shekau, "Message from the Soldiers," August 7, 2016, available at jihadology.net.

730 Abubakar Shekau, "Response to Mamman Nur's Open Letter," December 18, 2016.

731 The letter was sent to several jihad leaders, including Abd-al-Wadud, the late Al-Qa`idah in Yemen leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi; the late Somali al-Shabaab leader Mukhtar Abu-al-Zubayr; Shaykh Abu-al-Fadl Iyad Ghali (aka Iyad Agh Ghali), the leader of the northern Mali-based Islamist militant group Ansar al-Din; and Abubakar Shekau. Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Tunisia leader says gains in Iraq should be cause for jihadist reconciliation," FDD's Long War Journal, June 14, 2014.

Islam, even though that group has not been fully incorporated into JNIM.⁷³²

Fulani kinship networks are robust and intertwined across West Africa, and the Fulani people have some of the strongest cultural and socioeconomic linkages between northern Nigeria and northern Mali. Therefore, many of the same dynamics that allowed JNIM to extend its reach into Burkina Faso and Niger could apply to Nigeria. There is a possibility of JNIM taking advantage of inter-communal conflicts involving Fulani herders in Nigeria to recruit or to support Fulani co-religionists in Nigeria while also reorienting them toward jihadi narratives (claiming attacks in the name of Islam, for example) and aims (imposing some form of sharia law). In 2018, there were newfound reports of some former Boko Haram members involved in leading vigilante groups to defend Muslim communities against Fulani herders while other former ISWAP and Boko Haram members have left both groups to engage in cattle-rustling with herders in the Middle Belt.⁷³³ If these members acted as part of, rather than independent of, either ISWAP or Boko Haram, it could strengthen either faction.

There remains a possibility for JNIM to be the vehicle to revive an al-Qa`ida presence in Nigeria through these Fulani herder or vigilante groups in Nigeria. Moreover, despite Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Shekau both being loyal to al-Baghdadi (but only the former officially part of the Islamic State) and Ansaru being in operational dormancy, AQIM has a long institutional memory in Nigeria, which dates to Boko Haram's founding in 2002 but extends to as early as 1994 when the first joint al-Qa`ida-GIA recruitment in Nigeria began in Nigeria.⁷³⁴ AQIM's institutional memory is mostly in the Middle Belt, where in 2011-2012 AQIM-trained Nigerians carried out the suicide bombing campaign previously described, and Ansaru carried out its series of four kidnappings of foreigners. This means AQIM/JNIM would be more suited to reenter Nigeria not through ISWAP and Boko Haram's main bases in northeastern Nigeria, but through operatives in the Middle Belt. In addition, JNIM's main bases in Mali are much closer to northwestern Nigeria than to Borno, which means it would be easier to infiltrate Fulani populations in the Middle Belt than Borno.

A potential accelerant to an AQIM/JNIM revival in Nigeria would be the death of al-Baghdadi. The key draw to the Islamic State for ISWAP and Shekau has been ideological: they believe al-Baghdadi is a true caliph. Pledges are made to an individual, not to a group, which is a vulnerability for the Islamic State. If al-Baghdadi were to be killed, would ISWAP find his successor to be as legitimate as al-Baghdadi himself? If not, then ISWAP might revert to being organizationally independent but still ideologically aligned with other jihadi groups at large, just as Shekau has been since he reverted to leading Boko Haram in August 2016. Beyond ideological attraction to al-Baghdadi, there may be little that the Islamic State could offer to continue to attract ISWAP, especially if it has fewer opportunities for making money without a hold on a large amount of territory in Syria and Iraq. The primary sources discussed in this article, such as correspondence between Boko Haram and the Islamic State, do not reveal high levels of transfers from the Islamic State to ISWAP of finances, weapons, or arms, as had been the case of AQIM support to Boko Haram after 2009. Therefore, if al-Baghdadi were eliminated, some ISWAP and Boko Haram members who had been loyal to al-Baghdadi might seek to leave either faction and re-connect with AQIM.

It is unlikely that AQIM would accept any realignment with Shekau after the experience of dealing with him from 2009 to 2011, but it is possible that AQIM would accept realignment with Abu Musab al-Barnawi for ideological reasons. In his *Al-Naba* magazine interview with the Islamic State in August 2016, Abu Musab al-Barnawi even recognized AQIM's contributions to Boko Haram, noting that his

732 Menastream, "#Egypt: Recently created AQ-linked channel 'Huras al-Sharia Misr al-Kinana' celebrates El-Wahat attack," Twitter, October 21, 2017. Heni Nsaibia and Caleb Weiss, "Ansarul Islam and the Growing Terrorist Insurgency in Burkina Faso," *CTC Sentinel* 11:3 (2018).

733 "The Nigerian Killing Field," Salkida.com, January 18, 2018.

734 Rashid.

slain father's followers found haven with AQIM in 2009.⁷³⁵ In addition, as the "official spokesperson" of Boko Haram and then ISWAP before becoming *wali* of ISWAP in August 2016, he avoided anti-al-Qa`ida polemics, which differed from other Islamic State-loyal or -leaning groups around the world. In addition, Abu Musab al-Barnawi's theological positions, including his critiques of Shekau, have been roughly similar to al-Qa`ida's regarding not harming "ordinary" Muslims, but only those who actively oppose the jihadis.⁷³⁶ This shows there is potential for AQIM/JNIM realignment with Abu Musab al-Barnawi since ideological differences would not be an insurmountable hurdle.

The question then arises: how would it benefit ISWAP and AQIM/JNIM to realign with each other? Both groups are self-sufficient in their ability to engage in warfare (unlike Boko Haram was in 2009), including tactics such as kidnappings-for-ransom, suicide bombings, and ambushes and raids on military barracks and conventional forces. However, both groups face challenges from professional armed forces, such as the Malian army and G5 comprising Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and France (against JNIM); and the Nigerian army and Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprising Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin (against ISWAP), respectively. In practical terms, a realignment could see AQIM/JNIM and ISWAP offer each other safe havens, or the resupply of arms. If ISWAP were to change loyalties, it would also add legitimacy to the al-Qa`ida brand and therefore strengthen JNIM's messaging and recruitment. ISWAP could win new recruits who see its loyalty to al-Qa`ida as a strength, including currently dormant Ansaru members who may seek to reactivate their militant activities under ISWAP. In addition, JNIM could deploy its Fulani members to recruit from among Nigeria's Fulani population and expand ISWAP's support base and geographic reach to areas beyond Yobe and Borno states, which neither ISWAP nor Boko Haram have attacked with regularity since 2012.

A renewed alliance between AQIM/JNIM and ISWAP would also give Ansaru opportunity for a revival. Even though Ansaru is no longer active, the group retains an online presence. The release of the article by Ansaru's leader in January 2017 in the al-Qa`ida publication al-Risalah, which was followed by AQIM's release in April 2017 of the primary source documents discussed in this article, shows al-Qa`ida still pays attention to Nigeria.⁷³⁷ In the article and primary source documents, al-Qa`ida has attempted to explain to its audiences the history of involvement in Nigeria and the reasons why it is no longer active operationally in the country. The close timing of the release of the article and the primary sources and their similar message may also not have been coincidental. Rather, al-Qa`ida may have been attempting to reaffirm to its followers that it is not al-Qa`ida's fault that Boko Haram went on the *takfiri* path of Abubakr Shekau and then joined the Islamic State.⁷³⁸

Nonetheless, al-Qa`ida would likely exercise strategic patience in two ways before reentering Nigeria. First, it would wait for al-Baghdadi to be killed and for ISWAP—and the Islamic State global network more broadly—to face a crisis about whether or not to be loyal to the next caliph. One possible scenario is that some ISWAP members would not stay loyal to al-Baghdadi's successor, which would provide an opportunity for defections because primary sources show that Mamman Nur, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, and Shekau all agreed that al-Baghdadi's caliphacy is what made the Islamic State legitimate.⁷³⁹ Second, al-Qa`ida may also wait for Shekau to be killed or to lose more support due to his ruthlessness. If Shekau were killed, his fighters would face a crisis because they are loyal to al-Baghdadi but not necessarily Abu Musab al-Barnawi. While their ideology may be too similar to Shekau's for a realignment with AQIM/JNIM, it is possible many of Shekau's fighters have only remained with him out of

735 Al-Naba newsletter #41.

736 Ibid.

737 "A Message from Nigeria," Al-Risalah, January 2017; Rashid.

738 Ibid.

739 Mamman Nur, "An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau."

fear that Shekau would kill them, as he has killed other commanders suspected of subordination.⁷⁴⁰ The best-case scenario for AQIM/JNIM would be if Shekau's fighters rejoin ISWAP after Shekau's death and then ISWAP as a whole entity reoriented toward AQIM/JNIM after al-Baghdadi's death.

The impact of an al-Qa`ida revival in Nigeria would likely be different than the impact that the Islamic State has had on ISWAP since March 2015. The Islamic State's impact on ISWAP has been mostly evident in its media and branding even though there were also theological matters on which the Islamic State offered advice, such as expressing disagreement with Shekau's enslaving of Muslims, who could only be killed (but not "enslaved"), and on whether ISWAP could target markets where there were Muslims.⁷⁴¹ However, the impact of AQIM on Boko Haram after 2009 was much more significant operationally because it immediately led to increased tactical sophistication. AQIM also benefited from being geographically closer to Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2009 than the Islamic State in Libya or Syria and Iraq has been. With AQIM/JNIM's entrenchment in Mali, it will remain more proximate to ISWAP than the Islamic State in the future. This will be a long-term advantage for the prospects of AQIM/JNIM reviving an alliance with any of the groups in Nigeria.

If AQIM's expansion into southern Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso are any indication, then an al-Qa`ida revival in Nigeria would likely lead to similar outcomes in Nigeria. In less than a six-month period from November 2015 to March 2016, AQIM employed primarily Fulani attackers to target an international hotel in Bamako, a hotel and a café in Ouagadougou, and a resort outside Abidjan, killing dozens.⁷⁴² Those attacks were statements to the leadership and civilians of each country, if not also the rival Islamic State and the broader international community, that AQIM was capable of expanding its targets. Similarly, in Nigeria AQIM/JNIM would likely carry out a 'statement' attack in Lagos or Abuja to alert Nigeria and the international community that it too has returned. This could also lead to a potential outbidding scenario where militants who are still loyal to ISWAP seek to attack international targets to match AQIM/JNIM in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This article traced Boko Haram's evolution and assessed whether al-Qa`ida, which was once active in Nigeria, will return to the country. This analysis is important because al-Qa`ida—specifically its subgroups in Mali—would have different targeting preferences if they operated in Nigeria compared to Boko Haram or ISWAP just as Ansaru had different targeting preferences compared to Boko Haram in previous years. Therefore, when embassies, corporations, NGOs, and militaries plan mid- to long-term contingencies in Nigeria, it is worth them considering whether, if they have offices in Abuja or Lagos, for example, al-Qa`ida will return to Nigeria and potentially impact their operations there just as al-Qa`ida has done in parts of southern Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire in recent years. If al-Qa`ida does not return to Nigeria and ISWAP and Boko Haram continue their current focus on holding territory in northeastern Nigeria, then organizations in Nigeria can remain vigilant but reduce their concern about attacks on their property or people in areas of the country outside of northeastern Nigeria.

This article found that al-Qa`ida's history with Boko Haram has largely been underappreciated or unexamined in much analysis and research on the group and its factions. One reason for this is that analysts have differed over how to evaluate the reliability of certain sources of data on this issue, in particular government statements, local media reports, public statements of support for each other by AQIM and Boko Haram, and datasets showing a sudden increase in Boko Haram attacks starting in 2010, including a suicide bombing campaign. While it is important to critically assess sources in this

740 Ibid.

741 Ibid.; Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan), "The Nigerian Questions," al-Turath Media Foundation, March 1, 2018.

742 Jacob Zenn and Dario Cristiani, "AQIM's Resurgence: Responding to Islamic State," *Terrorism Monitor*, March 3, 2016.

field, it is this author's judgment that these sources are now complemented by other newly available primary sources, such as letters between AQIM and Boko Haram, which provide a deeper level of understanding of al-Qa`ida's and AQIM's ties to Boko Haram and attest to more experienced AQIM leaders supporting lesser experienced Boko Haram members in financing, weapons, training, and advising (the latter of which Shekau was too intransigent and impetuous to accept).

While it is important not to underestimate the loyalty of ISWAP to the Islamic State and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, it is important to recognize al-Qa`ida retains an interest in Nigeria. This article argues that an al-Qa`ida return to Nigeria is likely in the mid- to long-term future and will also have consequences for Boko Haram and its factions and the security of Nigeria and the region more broadly.