



“The Arc of Jihad”: The Ecosystem of Militancy in East, Central and Southern Africa

Brenda Mugeci Githing’u, Tore Refslund Hamming

CONTACT DETAILS

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact:

ICSR
King's College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
United Kingdom

T. +44 20 7848 2098

E. mail@icsr.info

Twitter: [@icsr_centre](https://twitter.com/icsr_centre)

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Timeline

	Date	Event
2005	Dec 2005	Establishment of the Ansar Muslim Youth Centre in Tanzania
2006	2006	Creation of al-Shabaab as the military wing of the Islamic Courts Union
2008	Sep 2008	Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan pledges allegiance from al-Shabaab to al-Qaida, but the pledge is not officially accepted
	Dec 2008	Creation of the Muslim Youth Center in Kenya
2012	2012	Adf starts to rebrand itself as Madina at-Tawhid wa-I-Muwahideen
	Jan 2012	Al-Shabaab announces a merger with the Muslim Youth Center in Kenya, which led the latter to change its name to al-Hijra
	Feb 2012	Ahmed Godane pledges allegiance to al-Qaida. Ayman al-Zawahiri accepts the pledge
	Aug 2012	Aboud Rogo killed by Kenyan security forces
2013	Late 2013	Godane orders the establish of Jaysh Ayman, an elite operative unit in Kenya
2014	Feb 2014	Al-Qaida and the Islamic State split
	May 2014	Al-Shabaab amir Godane reaffirms his pledge of allegiance to al-Qaida
	Sep 2014	Death of Godane
2015	Jan 2015	Creation of al-Muhajiroun
	Apr 2015	Arrest of ADF leader Jamil Mukulu and election of Musa Muhsin Baluku as the group's new leader
	May 2015	Al-Muhajiroun threatens attacks in Tanzania
	22 Oct 2015	Abd al-Qadir Mumin, an influential al-Shabaab cleric, pledges allegiance with a group of fighters to the Islamic State
2016	Apr 2016	Announcement of Jabhat East Africa, a group linked to Abd al-Qadir Mumin, with allegiance to the Islamic State
	May 2016	The Islamic State is linked to a mass casualty terrorist plot in Kenya using anthrax
	May 2016	Jabha East Africa claims its first attack in Tanzania 15 attackers attacked the Masjid Rahmani in Mwanza
	Jul 2016	South African police arrests Brandon-Lee and Tony-Lee Thulsie as well as Arashad Smith for plotting attacks against Jewish and American institutions in South Africa on behalf of the Islamic State
	Sep 2016	The Islamic State claims its first attack in Kenya when three women attack a police station in Mombasa
	Oct 2016	The Islamic State claims its second attack in Kenya when Abdimahat Ibrahim Hassan stabbed a police officer outside the US embassy in Nairobi
2017	Mid 2017	Tanzanian authorities launch a major counter-terrorism campaign in Amboni
	Oct 2017	The insurgency begins in Mozambique when 30 fighters launch the first attack in Mocimboa da Praia
	Dec 2017	The Islamic State officially acknowledges the pledge of allegiance from Mumin

	Date	Event
2018	Feb 2018	South African police arrests Fatima Patel with her husband Sayfydeen Aslam Del Vecchio and a Malawian national, Ahmad ‘Bazooka’ Mussa for their alleged involvement in the kidnapping and murder of British botanists, Rod and Rachel Saunders. It has been reported that the trio erected an Islamic State flag at the reserve in KwaZulu-Natal province where the couple disappeared
	Feb 2018	FARDC forces find a book on a dead ADF fighter produced by the Islamic State’s <i>maktab al-buhuth wa-l-dirasat</i>
	Apr–May 2018	Picture showing a group of fighters in Mozambique pledging allegiance to the Islamic State begins circulating on online fora. Accompanying the picture was the text “Jihad will spread throughout the world... Mujahideen of Mozambique”.
	22 Aug 2018	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi mentions fighters in Central Africa as part of the Islamic State’s global caravan
2019	18 Apr 2019	The Islamic State claims its first attack in DRC. The attack took place in the village of Bofata in Beni when Islamic State fighters attacked a barrack of the Congolese army
	25 Apr 2019	The first Islamic State publication on ISCAP
	29 Apr 2019	Al-Baghdadi inspects a report titled Central Africa Province in an Islamic State video
	4 Jun 2019	The Islamic State claims its first attack in Mozambique. The attack took place in the village of Metobi, where Islamic State fighters attacked Mozambican forces.
	14 Jul 2019	Amaq video from aftermath of attack
	24 Jul 2019	First official Islamic State video showing footage from the DRC and Mozambique
	7 Nov 2019	Official Islamic State picture with pledge of allegiance from the DRC and Mozambique in <i>al-Naba</i> 207
2020	2 Jul 2020	The Islamic State threatens South Africa’s economy in <i>al-Naba</i> 241
	2 Aug 2020	A photoseries from Eid shows Musa Baluku for the first time in Islamic State propaganda
	Aug 2020	The Islamic State attacks and captures Mocimboa da Praia
	27 Aug 2020	<i>Al-Naba</i> 249 features a long article on the capture of Mocimboa da Praia
	Sep 2020	ADF leader Musa Baluku says in a video that the ADF ceased to exist and there is now only the Islamic State
	14 Oct 2020	ISCAP claims its first cross-border attack in Tanzania
	20 Oct 2020	The Islamic State attacks the Kangbaya prison in DRC
2021	10 Mar 2021	The US State Department designates both the group in DRC and in Mozambique as Islamic State affiliates
	24 Mar 2021	The Islamic State attacks and captures Palma before leaving the city again
	8 Aug 2021	Rwandan-Mozambican forces re-take Mocimboa da Praia
	9 Aug 2021	For the first time, a statement from the Islamic State mentions dawah activities in the DRC
	21 Sep 2021	A Jordanian national arrested in Beni, North Kivu. He was allegedly managing the Islamic State’s drone program in DR Congo
	7 Oct 2021	First attack claimed by the Islamic State’s Central Africa Province in Uganda

Militancy and Islamic State in sub-Saharan Africa

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) announced the launch of the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in April 2019 to promote the presence of ISIS associated elements within Central, East, and Southern Africa.

US State Department, 10 March 2021

According to the Global Terrorism Database, terrorism has steadily been on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa since 2004.¹ The years that followed saw the establishment of two notable al-Qaeda affiliates: the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), the forerunner of al-Shabaab, in Somalia in 2006 and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in 2007, based primarily between the borders of southern Algeria and northern Mali. Within a short period of time, the ICU and its predecessors² had posed enough of a threat to draw the United States, Ethiopia and the region at large into a military intervention in Somalia.

By 2018, sub-Saharan Africa surpassed North Africa and the Middle East in terms of the number of casualties as a result of terrorist attacks perpetrated by militant Islamists.³ This shift coincided with the collapse of Islamic State's physical caliphate in Iraq and Syria, which led the group to begin making overtures for regional wilayats in Africa. In doing so, Islamic State (IS) had to contend with devoted al-Qaeda affiliates, which led to deadly clashes, but also was able to capitalise on emerging factions, aspiring IS insurgents and extremist networks.

Between 2015 and 2019, IS acquired four affiliates in sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel: in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso the Islamic State in Greater Sahara; in Nigeria the Islamic State West African Province; in Somalia the Islamic State in Somalia (ISS); and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique the Islamic State Central African Province (ISCAP). As a result, since 2015 the number of incidents involving battles with security forces, explosions and remote violence against civilians has been on a steady increase, with 2020 marking the deadliest year across the Sahel, West, Central and East Africa.⁴

Somalia has historically been the focal point of Islamic extremism in East Africa. From the early al-Qaeda network in the 1990s to al-Shabaab in the present, East Africa and particularly Somalia have been central to the global jihadist movement, especially to

1 National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism: Global Terrorism Database, "Results: Sub-Saharan Africa", 9 July 2020, https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?start_yearonly=2000&end_yearonly=2018&start_year=&start_month=&start_day=&end_year=&end_month=&end_day=®ion=11&asmSelect0=&asmSelect1=&dtp2=all&success=yes&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=

2 Including a radical Islamic insurgency known as al-Itihaad al-Islamiyah, founded in 1984.

3 Institute for Economics and Peace, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, "Global Terrorism Index: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism" 9 July 2020, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf>.

4 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Full Dashboard Results: Eastern Africa, Middle Africa, Western Africa", 21 May 2020, <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/>.

al-Qaeda. Against the backdrop of IS incursions across the continent, Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2018 stated:

“Let us establish in East Africa a solid foundation for Islam and jihad, to support its Ummah everywhere, and to punish those who violate its sanctuaries and assault its sanctities ... My brothers the mujahideen in East Africa! You must understand the great responsibility that lies upon your shoulders. You are not fighting a local war, but you are facing a campaign of the modern Crusader and its ally Israel, which endeavours to take control over the Horn of Africa and the head of the Nile, and to suffocate Islamic jihad in East Africa and the rest of the world.”⁵

Nonetheless, the recent declaration of the establishment of formal IS affiliates in Central and East Africa comes as a surprise since neither the DRC nor Mozambique have strong links to the traditional Islamic world and because it breaks with the historical dominance of al-Qaeda in the region.

Aiming to reach a better understanding of IS’s incursion into sub-Saharan Africa and the international nature of the region’s militant networks, this report studies the militant Islamist ecosystem in East, Central and Southern Africa. Unpacking the historical and ideological trajectory of militant networks across borders in the region, it details the centrality of Somalia as the region’s hub for militancy, from where it has spread from country to country.

While the aim of this study is not to negate local factors contributing to the rise of Islamist insurgencies, it is prompted by the sudden rise of IS in the DRC and Mozambique leading to questions about the extent to which these insurgencies have been propelled by transnational factors.

Section one of the report introduces the methodology and framework to conceptualise our understanding of extremist networks within the context of affiliations and our research methodology. Section two analyses transnational factors that gave rise to emerging factions and extremist networks in East Africa. Section three critically addresses ongoing debates around what constitutes IS affiliates, as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Alhu-Sunna wa Jamma (ASwJ) controversially came to be recognised as groups by IS. Sections four and five look at the insurgencies in the DRC and Mozambique respectively, explaining their historical trajectories, international connections, affiliations with IS and how they are evolving militarily and in terms of their propaganda and operational capabilities. Finally, section six explores the evolution of extremist networks sympathetic to IS in South Africa and their involvement as one of the transnational factors contributing to the insurgency in Mozambique.

5 Ayman al-Zawahiri, “The Islamic Spring Episode 10 Part Two. East Africa: The Southern Battlefront of Islam”, as-Sahab Media, 2 August 2018.

1. Methodology

Due to the study’s enquiry mainly lending itself to internal organisational dynamics, this report relies on a literature-based study using primary and secondary source material such as magazines, internal correspondence and videos. This will be further supported by various international and local media publications. The purpose of selecting these sources is twofold: first, to offer a detailed historical and situational context as to the nature of the organisations in question; second, to explore how they came to engage with each other over a period of time. Ultimately, the study will be able to provide a historical account of the evolution of individual engagements over time, detailing key points at which they became affiliated with IS and the subsequent outcomes of such decisions on their organisations.

Furthermore, the study aims to undertake a social network analysis inspired by the works of Koschade,⁶ Krebs,⁷ Jones, Smith and Weeding,⁸ and Reynolds and Hafez.⁹ The study creates a picture of the network of Islamists including (senior) militants, radical clerics, ideologues, sympathisers and recruiters in East, Central and Southern Africa. In doing so, the report intends to document the profile, activities and links of these individuals as well as the nature and/or context of the relationship between themselves and other members. Therefore, the key measures of this report’s analysis will be relations among network actors and their respective roles in influencing the ideological and/or strategic nature of their respective organisations.¹⁰

The Evolution of Global Terror Franchising: From al-Qaeda to Islamic State

The prime case for the study of global terrorist affiliations prior to the emergence of Islamic State was al-Qaeda, which was widely regarded as a hierarchical organisation with a senior leadership highly involved in many key aspects of the organisation, including that of its subsidiaries. Studies detailing the history between al-Qaeda and its African affiliates demonstrates the extent to which al-Qaeda’s senior leadership shaped the ideological identities, operational capabilities and leadership structure of the group’s affiliates.¹¹

6 Stuart Koschade, “A Social Network Analysis Of Jemaah Islamiyah: The Applications To Counterterrorism And Intelligence”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* vol. 29 no. 6 (2006): 559–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.954039>.

7 E. Valdis Krebs, “Mapping Networks of Terrorist Cells”, *Connections* vol. 24 no. 3 (2002): 43–52, https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/ACLURM002810.pdf.

8 D. Martin Jones, Michael L. R. Smith and Mark Weeding, “Looking For The Pattern: Al Qaeda In Southeast Asia – The Genealogy Of A Terror Network”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* vol. 26 no.6 (2010): 443–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100390248284>.

9 Sean C. Reynolds and Mohammed M. Hafez, “Social Network Analysis Of German Foreign Fighters In Syria And Iraq”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 31 no. 4 (2017): 661–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1272456>.

10 Ibid.; Edith Wu, Rebecca Cartleton and Garth Davies, “Discovering bin-Laden’s Replacement in al-Qaeda, using Social Network Analysis: A Methodological Investigation”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol. 8 no. 1 (2014): 57–73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297100>.

11 Eric Ouellet, Jérôme Lacroix-Leclair and Pierre Pahlavi, “The Institutionalisation of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 26 no. 4 (2014): 650–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2012.745853>; Matt Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab* (Washington D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014), 4–6; E. Daniel Agbibo, “Terrorism Without Borders: Somalia’s Al-Shabaab and the Global Jihad Network”, *Journal of Terrorism Research* vol. 5 no. 1 (2014): 27–34, <https://core.ac.uk/display/20479794>.

In so doing, al-Qaeda developed criteria and processes for affiliation that typically necessitated subsidiary groups to: 1) be hierarchically structured with a senior leadership of veterans with personal links to or a history with its core leadership; 2) have the established leader of the group make a formal pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden and thereafter receive a response from al-Zawahiri or bin Laden acknowledging the pledge to establish a formal affiliation; 3) appropriate the al-Qaeda brand to instigate attacks against Western and European targets, otherwise known as the “far enemy”.

Al-Qaeda increasingly relied on its affiliates’ abilities to instigate attacks against Western targets to sustain its global presence and notoriety, especially as it began suffering major losses after 9/11 with the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The group shifted towards a “loosely organised movement with a central leadership” that oversaw largely autonomous global affiliates.¹² Similarly, IS in the wake of its territorial caliphate opted for the same organisational approach, matched by a rising interest in jihadist brand affiliation and notoriety from disenfranchised factions and insurgencies. Today, African IS affiliates play a key role in sustaining the group’s narrative of resilience despite major setbacks in the Middle East.

Unlike al-Qaeda, which appeared to have a stringent vetting process, initially IS seemed eager to endorse any aspiring affiliates. As a result, the saturation required some level of regional compartmentalisation to contain the plethora of IS actors, especially in such overlapping regions as West Africa and the Sahel. However, in recent years IS has also taken its time in recognising the pledges of emerging factions, rendering them essentially ‘aspiring affiliates’. Therefore debates over what constitutes an IS affiliate remains a pertinent topic that will be addressed in this study, especially within the context of its East, Central and Southern African affiliates. Even though the recognition of pledges remains a fundamental criterion for a group’s affiliation to either al-Qaeda or IS, it is worth noting that IS is a distinct organisation with its own processes for adopting affiliates.

¹² Daniel Holbrook, *The Al-Qaeda Doctrine: The Framing and Evolution of the Leadership’s Public Discourse* (New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014), 22–4; Katherine Zimmerman, *The al-Qaeda Network: A New Framework for Defining the Enemy* (Washington D.C: American Enterprise Institute, 2013), 5–7.

2. Al-Shabaab Affiliates in Kenya and Tanzania

The jihadist expansion along East and Southern Africa tells a story not only of how al-Shabaab sought to use key individuals to spread its influence throughout the region but also of how local grievances and doctrinal debates found full expression in pre-existing ideological and organisational structures that originated outside their immediate environments. Inasmuch as local factors, such as poor or absent governance, suppression of political expression and socio-economic inequalities, contribute to grievances and debates within religious communities and institutions on ways to reform the status quo, the extent to which this has metastasised in East Africa is indicative of broader factors at play involving regional and international forces.

Al-Shabaab first demonstrated its intention to expand its terror campaign beyond Somalia with the twin suicide bombings of the FIFA World Cup screening in Kampala, Uganda, in 2010. The attack was instigated by the Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan Battalion,¹³ a military wing of al-Shabaab named in honour of the leader of al-Qaeda's East African network, Saleh Nabhan, a Kenyan national who first pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda on behalf of al-Shabaab in 2008. This would be the first deployment of a battalion on a foreign mission, an operation that killed 74 and injured 85.¹⁴

Al-Shabaab thereafter sought to find a way to sustain its presence and expansion in neighbouring countries with elite units, affiliates and networks in Kenya and Tanzania. What is unique, complex and yet crucial to understand about these different structures is that they are very fluid and overlap in various aspects, which makes it difficult to distinguish the nature of their links in relation to each other and al-Shabaab. This requires an in-depth exploration of the lives of particular individuals to map the movement of ideological inspiration through East Africa and the significance of particular incidents leading up to the emergence of ISCAP in the DRC and Mozambique.

Kenya

Al-Shabaab has two main affiliates in Kenya: al-Hijra and Jaysh Ayman. Both play distinct roles in support of al-Shabaab. Al-Hijra operates a sophisticated radicalisation and recruitment network while Jaysh Ayman instigates terror attacks on behalf of or in collaboration with al-Shabaab militants from Somalia. Al-Hijra and Jaysh Ayman played a crucial role in expanding the ideology and operations of al-Shabaab beyond Somalia, ensuring attacks could occur in Kenya even as its ideology continued to be propagated even further south in Tanzania.

¹³ Thomas Joscelyn, “Shabaab Says Nairobi Attack Carried Out in Accordance with Zawahiri’s Guidelines”, 16 January 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/01/shabaab-says-nairobi-attack-conducted-in-accordance-with-zawahiris-guidelines.php>.

¹⁴ Josh Kron and Mohamed Ibrahim, “Islamist Claim Attack in Uganda”, 12 July 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/13/world/africa/13uganda.html>.

The extent to which these affiliates were successful was dependent on their support of each other. In most cases, key figures associated with al-Hijra publicly praised major attacks instigated by Jaysh Ayman, while also garnering a constituency in northern Tanzania from which to draw recruits for al-Shabaab.

Al-Hijra

Al-Hijra is a radicalisation and recruitment network based in Kenya and Tanzania. One of its founding members and leaders was Ahmad Iman Ali, a cleric at the Riyadhha mosque in Pumwani. Ali was a longstanding member and youth leader of the mosque who financially contributed both to it and to the building of other mosques in Majengo.¹⁵ By 2007, Ali had accumulated sufficient social capital to oust the existing leadership, which paved the way for Aboud Rogo and Samir Khan to deliver sermons promoting jihad at the Riyadhha mosque. Rogo was highly influential in several other mosques, including the Sirajul Munir madrasa in Mtwapa and the Masjid Musa and Masjid Sakina in Mombasa.¹⁶ The change in leadership was perceived by the local community as a failure by government authorities to intervene in a shift towards violent extremism. It was also viewed as a generational clash that drove the older leadership to establish their own moderate mosques in Majengo.

In 2008, Ali established what was known as the Muslim Youth Centre (MYC), which became a major platform for jihadist propaganda for the radicalisation and recruitment of Kenyans to join al-Shabaab in Somalia.¹⁷ Abubakar Sheriff Ahmad, also known as Makaburi, formed part of Ali's inner circle and became a leading facilitator of the recruitment of Kenyans to al-Shabaab.¹⁸ Ali himself left Kenya to join al-Shabaab in 2009.¹⁹

Two years later, in October 2011, the Kenyan government launched Operation Linda Nchi ('Protect the Country') in southern Somalia against incursions of al-Shabaab into the country. The operation led to the start of retaliatory attacks on Kenyan soil.²⁰ Just three months later, al-Shabaab announced an official merger with MYC, which began to phase in its new name: al-Hijra.²¹ As a result, Kenyan security services launched a crackdown on al-Hijra figureheads, which led to a series of assassinations between 2012 and 2014: Rogo in August 2012, his successor Ibrahim Ismail in October 2013 and Makaburi in 2014.²²

Extrajudicial assassinations of al-Hijra figureheads by security services ignited outrage and validated the grievances of the group's followers, even though they forced the network underground and online, where the propagation of jihadist propaganda and recruitment continued. Al-Hijra produced a variety of publications, such as *al-Misbah*, with its

15 J. Stig Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines of the African Jihad* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2019), 128.

16 Ibid.

17 Christopher Anzalone, "Kenya's Muslim Youth Center and Al-Shabaab's East African Recruitment", *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* vol. 5 no. 10 (2012): 9–12, <https://ctc.usma.edu/kenyas-muslim-youth-center-and-al-shababs-east-african-recruitment/>.

18 Fredrick Nzes, *Al-Hijra: Al-Shabaab's Affiliate in Kenya*, (New York: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2014) 24–25.

19 David Clarke, "Kenyan Muslim Networks Fund Al-Shabaab: UN Report", 28 July 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-kenya-shabaab-un-20110728-idAFJ0E76R0C320110728>.

20 Luckystar Miyandazi, *Kenya's Military Intervention in Somalia: An Intricate Process* (Durban: The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 2012), 1–6.

21 Nzes, *Al-Hijra*, 24–25.

22 BBC, "Al-Shabaab Supporter Aboud Rogo Mohammed Killed in Kenya", 27 August 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-19390888>; Joseph Akwiri, "Prominent Islamist Shot Dead on Kenyan Coast: Police", 1 April 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-islamist-idUSBREA301MN20140401>.

international outlook on jihad featuring reprints of Anwar al-Awlaki's speeches, *Gaidi Mtaani*, *al-Ghurabaa* (for women) and an al-Hijra bulletin. Al-Hijra's support spread beyond its main base of operations in Majengo to the southern coastal regions of Kenya.²³

Al-Hijra started making inroads into Tanzania when its Twitter account claimed to be operating from Tanga and Korogwe.²⁴ Al-Hijra publications also began featuring commentary on Tanzanian political affairs and mentions of al-Muhajiroun ('Emigrants of East Africa'), which emerged as another Kenyan al-Shabaab affiliate dedicated to growing its ideological footprint along the East African corridor.

Al-Muhajiroun emerged in January 2015 in the publication of a Swahili magazine, *Amka*,²⁵ in which Abu Salim al-Kenyi pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. In November of that year, an al-Muhajiroun leader in Tanzania, Abu Khalid Abu Izz al-Din, revealed in an interview that he was a former resident of Majengo and a student of Aboud Rogo, who had inspired the expansion of jihad throughout East Africa. Al-Din claimed al-Muhajiroun was operating in the Mahenge mountains in central Tanzania and, in referencing the group's first statement, said:²⁶

“...we must look to our beloved knights in Al-Shabaab. They have made us proud. I think it was in Amka that brother Abu Salim al-Kenyi referred to al-Shabaab as ‘pioneers’. I think he was right – al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda are the initiators of jihad in East Africa.”

This followed a statement in May 2015 when al-Muhajiroun threatened to instigate attacks in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, as well as against Western targets, and warned Tanzanian Muslims against democracy.²⁷ Al-Muhajiroun therefore appeared to be an extension of al-Hijra, another ideological network to spread al-Shabaab propaganda to the Tanzanian Muslim community. Al-Hijra's propaganda had already created an audience familiar with and receptive to its ideology. Thus, al-Shabaab expanded its area of influence to a second country on the East African coastline: Tanzania.

Jaysh Ayman

Since attacks in Kenya in recent years have involved local recruits, a common misconception is that the recruitment, training and arming of Kenyan militants is a recent phenomenon. However, the involvement and seniority of Nabhan in al-Shabaab and the al-Qaeda East African network in the 1990s, was an early indication of the influential role Kenyans would play in al-Shabaab in the future.

²³ Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 132.

²⁴ Ibid.; Muslim Youth Center, “New Statement from the Muslim Youth Center: MYC on Abu Mansur al-Amriki”, 12 January 2013, <https://jihadology.net/2013/01/12/new-statement-from-the-muslim-youth-center-myc-on-abu-man%e1%b9%a3ur-al-amriki/>; Muslim Youth Center, “New Statement from the Muslim Youth Center: Defend Our Shaykh's Honor: Humiliation of Shaykh Aboud Rogo's Family”, 14 November 2012, <https://jihadology.net/2012/11/14/new-statement-from-the-muslim-youth-center-defend-our-shaykhs-honor-humiliation-of-shaykh-aboud-rogos-family/>; Muslim Youth Center, “New Statement from the Muslim Youth Center: Amir Shaykh Ahmad Iman Ali to Release Message Soon”, 4 September 2012, <https://jihadology.net/2012/09/04/new-statement-from-the-muslim-youth-center-amir-shaykh-a%e1%b8%a5mad-iman-ali-to-release-message-soon/>.

²⁵ Caroline Hellyer, “ISIL Courts al-Shabaab as al-Qaeda Ties Fade Away”, 23 March 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/3/23/isil-courts-al-shabab-as-al-qaeda-ties-fade-away>.

²⁶ SITE Intelligence Group, “Al-Muhajiroun in East Africa Leader Discusses Jihad in Tanzania, Somalia; Pledge of Shabaab Fighters to IS”, 4 November 2015.

²⁷ SITE Intelligence Group, “Al-Muhajiroun in East Africa Threatens UN, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda”, 4 May 2015.

The overthrow of the ICU by the end of 2006 provided a catalyst for militants throughout the region, including Kenyans, to join the call of its newly established militant wing. Most found themselves in al-Shabaab's Majimmo sector located in southern Somalia designated to the mujahideen of East Africa under the command of Titus Nabisiwa 'Mwalim Khalid' (also known as Mwalim Kenya),²⁸ the members of which were reportedly close to al-Hijra.²⁹ It was actually Nabwisa's unit that began instigating small-scale grenade attacks in Garissa, Nairobi and Mombasa soon after the start of Operation Linda Nchi in October 2011.³⁰

Thereafter, Godane established an elite Kenyan unit, known as Jaysh Ayman, located in the Boni forest of Lamu's expansive woodland area.³¹ The unit was created to instigate cross-border attacks with the Nabhan Battalion between northeastern Kenya and southern Somalia. Its emir and commander was Luqman Issa Osman, the brother of Osman Issa Osman, a key al-Qaeda operative involved in the attack on the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in 2002. Other known commanders included Osman's successor, Maalim Ayman, Abdifatah Abubakar Abdi, Ramadan Kioko, Omar Owiti, Said Hemed Abdullah and two foreign fighters from the USA and Germany known as Malik Ali Jones and Andreas Martin Mueller respectively.³²

Jaysh Ayman has been linked with several high profile attacks: the Westgate Mall attack in 2013, which another one of its senior commanders Abdilatif Abubakar Ali was believed to have played a role in plotting and executing;³³ the Garissa University attack in 2015, which involved several of its members;³⁴ and the Battle of Kulbiyow in 2017, during which Erik Achayo Ogada and Anwar Yogan Mwok drove a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device into a military base shared by the Kenyan and Somali defence forces killing dozens of soldiers.³⁵

Jaysh Ayman is also responsible for attacks in Lamu, including last year's Manda Bay attack on Camp Simba,³⁶ which killed one member of the US military and two contractors, and injured two others from the US Department of Defense. As a result of its notable successes, Jaysh Ayman has been the pride of al-Shabaab's expansion efforts and has featured in its propaganda videos, including one in which Ali Mahmoud Rage speaks to recent training-camp graduates. In its propaganda series "No Protection Except by Belief or Covenant of Security", al-Shabaab boasts that:³⁷

"...now, with the mujahideen making inroads into the occupied Muslim lands in Kenya and beyond, it's time to redraw the East African map."

28 Intergovernmental Authority on Development, *Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat* (Djibouti: IGAD, 2016), 22.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 O. E. Duncan Gumba and Mohamed Daghar, "The DusitD2 Attack Shows That the Terror is Far from Over and Is Increasingly a Local Problem", 29 January 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/home-grown-terror-a-worsening-threat-for-kenya>.

32 Nyambega Giessa, "Inside Jaysh Ayman, al-Shabaab's Terror Wing in Kenya", 27 November 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/inside-jaysh-ayman-al-shabaab-s-terror-wing-in-kenya-3211526>.

33 Sunguta West, "Jaysh al-Ayman: A 'Local' Threat in Kenya", 23 April 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/jaysh-al-ayman-a-local-threat-in-kenya/>.

34 Ibid.

35 Cyrus Ombati, "Kenyan Suicide Bomber Behind Killing of KDF Soldiers in Kulbiyow, Somalia", 13 February 2017, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/kenya/article/2001229287/kenyan-suicide-bomber-behind-killing-of-kdf-soldiers-in-kulbiyow-somalia>.

36 Homeland Security Today, "State Department Designates Two Senior Al-Shabaab Leaders as Terrorists", 18 November 2020, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/state-department-designates-two-senior-al-shabaab-leaders-as-terrorists/>.

37 Ibid.

Indeed, al-Shabaab had already begun to make inroads beyond Kenya into Tanzania. At this point, it is important to note what distinguishes al-Hijra from Jaysh Ayman is that it was never a militant unit but an ideological network of clerics that propagated al-Shabaab propaganda and facilitated the recruitment of Kenyans to jihad. Jaysh Ayman marked a move towards active militant cells with the goal of instigating terror attacks in Kenya. These distinctions became crucial in Tanzania, where the nexus between active militancy and extremist recruitment networks overlapped more intricately.

Tanzania

As in Kenya, al-Shabaab had two affiliates in Tanzania: the Ansar Muslim Youth Centre and al-Muhajiroun. The former is involved in radicalisation and recruitment of Tanzanian youth to join al-Shabaab while the latter claimed to be involved in a series of attacks in northern Tanzania alongside the Congregation of the Ansar al-Sunna and other unknown actors. The agitation in Tanzania towards active militancy by both clandestine extremist networks and affiliate groups made it unique as groups sought to establish themselves in their own right. This was demonstrated with the emergence of an aspiring Islamic State affiliate, Jabha East Africa in April 2016 based in Tanga, northeast of Tanzania bordering Kenya.

Ansar Muslim Youth Centre

Important developments within Islamist organisations in Tanzania were propelled by international factors. Students with Saudi-funded scholarships returned to Tanzania in the 1980s to propagate Salafism. In doing so, they spearheaded a youth movement that challenged existing government-associated Islamic institutions, such as the Baraza Kuu La Waislamu Tanzania (Bakwata) and well-known traditional Islamic practices, such as Sufism.³⁸ In a similar fashion to what took place in Pumwani, Kenya, these ideological debates took centre stage within the Ansar Muslim Youth Union, a community-based organisation established in the 1970s that changed its name to the Ansar Muslim Youth Centre (AMYC) in 1988 to propagate Salafism.

The Saudi Haramain Foundation branch in Tanzania was believed to have facilitated the funding of Tanzanian students for religious studies abroad with the assistance of Sheikh Abbas Mustafa.³⁹ For example, the leader and founder of the AMYC, Salim Abdulharim Barahiyan, completed his religious studies in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s;⁴⁰ his brother, Fuad Abdulrahim Barahiyan, studied in Pakistan and went on to become a key sponsor of the AMYC. Another member who studied in Pakistan was Sheikh Kamis Abubakar, who led the Masjid

38 Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*; A. LeSage, *The Rising Terrorist Threat in Tanzania: Domestic Islamist Militancy and Regional Threats* (Washington D.C: Institute for National Strategic Studies: National Defense University, 2014).

39 According to the United Nations, the “Haramain Foundation provided financial, material or technological support” to al-Qaeda and associated networks including AIAI: United Nations, Al-Haramain Foundation (Union of the Comoros), 27 June 2018, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aa_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/al-haramain-foundation-%28union-of-the-comoros%29.

40 Jannis Saalfeld, *Before and Beyond Al-Shabaab: National Islamic Councils, Contentious Politics and the Rise of Jihadism in East Africa* (Duisberg: Institute for Development and Peace, 2019), 27.

Muhammad in Korogwe,⁴¹ a mosque that was established by the Haramain Foundation.⁴²

Based in Tanga, the AMYC became a major recruitment network for al-Shabaab primarily from Korogwe, garnering recruits and establishing indoctrination camps in other regions of the country including Kilimanjaro and Pwani. Abubakar was believed to have been facilitating the exchange of his students from Korogwe with the Masjid Sakina, Masjid Musa and Masjid Kanamai in Kenya by organising karate competitions to select his best recruits.⁴³

Nur Abubakar Maulana, who operated the Masjid Shabaab, also undertook recruitment efforts with a key AMYC sponsor, Abdulhakim Omar ‘Chillu’, before eventually making the journey to Somalia himself with Omar Suleiman. This was also made possible through prior links with Aboud Rogo, who was also revealed to have had telephone correspondence with Salim Barahiyani and another senior AMYC member known as Abubakar Shariff.⁴⁴ Another AMYC member involved in these operations was Juma Abdullah Kheri, who was later arrested (but subsequently released) for aiding jihadist networks in both Tanzania and Kenya.⁴⁵

This was just part of a wider effort involving the recruitment and migration of Tanzanians to Somalia through Kenya where they would join al-Shabaab and become the second largest contingent of foreign fighters after Kenyans.⁴⁶ Boats were the main mode of transporting recruits out of Tanzania, a process that involved AMYC members such as Kassim Mafuta and Somali recruiters. The boats would either dock at Mombasa in Kenya or Kismayo in Somalia, where new recruits would be transported to al-Shabaab training camps.

Former recruits described the camps as host to a variety of East African nationalities including Somalis, Kenyans, Ugandans and Tanzanians. While some remained past their training period to join al-Shabaab, others returned to Tanzania.⁴⁷ In 2012, the Haramain Foundation was disbanded after it was implicated in a UN report for its involvement in the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. However, because the Haramain Foundation had already established the necessary networks to absorb its disenfranchised members, many easily came into the fold of the AMYC or fled to Kenya or Somalia.

Ansar al-Sunna and al-Muhajiroun

Concurrently, a more radical faction emerged further south in Pwani known as the (Congregation of the) Ansar al-Sunna. The group held distinct undertones of takfirism in its insistence that the Tanzanian Muslim community undertake what it considered to be the right path in faith and in practice. This was demonstrated by incidents in which

41 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, “Letter to the Chairman of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea: (Nairobi: Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, 2012), 182.

42 LeSage, *The Rising Terrorist Threat in Tanzania*, 11.

43 Ibid.; Defence Web, “Al-Shabaab in Somalia Still a Threat to Peace in Spite of Decline”, 14 August 2012, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/national-security/al-shabaab-in-somalia-still-a-threat-to-peace-in-spite-of-decline-un/>; Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, “Letter to the Chairman of the Security Council Committee”, 182.

44 Ibid.

45 LeSage, *The Rising Terrorist Threat in Tanzania*, 6.

46 Intergovernmental Authority on Development, *Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat*, 21.

47 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, “Letter to the Chairman of the Security Council Committee”, 181.

its members, in a similar fashion to Boko Haram in Nigeria, preached that Western education was forbidden in a village in Ikwiriri.⁴⁸ This indicated an emerging Islamic revivalist sect in the area that came to establish its own mosques such as the Msikiti wa Mabanzi (Mabanzi mosque), Msikiti wa Mbao wa Kibwibwi (Kibwibwi timber mosque) and Msikiti wa Jaribu Mpakani (Jaribu border mosque), which were described as centres of radicalisation and training in armed combat.⁴⁹

As with any clandestine network, identifying the relation between key actors or perpetrators of attacks and the centre or periphery of the organisation is difficult. Tanzania already hosted two overlapping extremist networks with links to al-Shabaab. From around 2012 to 2017, Tanzania experienced a series of attacks against religious institutions including mosques and churches, Muslim clerics and pastors, community elders and police in Arusha, Zanzibar, Pwani in Ikwiriri, and Rufiji and Kibiti in particular.

Although Abdul Aziz Mohamed of the Ijuma mosque in Arusha and Jafari Lema in charge of the Quba mosque were implicated in some attacks against clerics in Arusha in 2013,⁵⁰ the pair were found to have no direct links to Ansar al-Sunna or AMYC. However, considering the extremist nature of the attacks targeting religious leaders and state institutions such as police stations, they could be considered to be a part of these networks' periphery.

However, when police clashed with what they initially thought to be bandits at the Mikocheni falls in Amboni, Tanga, in February 2015, Abu Qays bin Abdallah, a leader in the Tanzanian branch of al-Muhajiroun, claimed responsibility for the incident, as well as others in the area.⁵¹ Abdallah also mentioned admiration for the jihadist movement in Somalia without making any direct mention of al-Shabaab. Al-Muhajiroun soon released another video, in which it called for people to join the fight for the Prophet, and a publication called *al-Ghurabaa*, produced in Dar es Salaam and featuring the biographies of martyrs.⁵²

Sensing imminent jihadist activity, Tanzanian security forces began a crackdown on extremist networks. The police uncovered secluded schools, houses and mosques being used as indoctrination camps where children were subject to al-Shabaab propaganda and military-style drills in Tanga and Kilimanjaro region. This corresponded with a series of disappearances in Ikwiriri involving children, some of whom absconded from school under the pretence of religious studies before returning to their communities radicalised against their parents, teachers and community elders.⁵³

48 Saalfeld, *Before and Beyond Al-Shabaab*, 27.

49 K. John Jingu, "The Flurry of Crimes in Kibiti and Rufiji and the Quest for Effective Early Warning and Response Mechanism", *The African Review* vol. 45 no. 1 (2018): 93–109, <https://journals.udsm.ac.tz/index.php/ar/article/view/2233/2086>.

50 Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 160; Akasha Daawah, "Dr Abdallah Kheri ... Kwanini Ndoa Zetu Hazidumu", 8 December 2017 [Kheri preaching at the Masjid Musa in Majengo in 2017 on Muslim marriages and family], https://youtu.be/OSU_mnwZchE.

51 Tres Thomas, "Analysis: Tanzania's Arrest of Militants Highlights an Ongoing Jihadist Threat", 20 April 2015, <https://somalianewsroom.com/2015/04/20/analysis-tanzanias-arrest-of-militants-highlight-an-ongoing-jihadist-threat/>.

52 Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 155.

53 Jingu, "The Flurry of Crimes in Kibiti and Rufiji", 96.

Kibiti also became a hotbed of extremist activity after a string of targeted assassinations of politicians, police and community leaders in 2014.⁵⁴ The area emerged as a key location from which al-Shabaab had drawn its recruits. According to a Tanzanian security official, operatives in Kibiti coordinated with others in Dar es Salaam and Tanga to fund their low-scale terror operations through bank robberies.⁵⁵ Extremist networks in Tanzania demonstrated real intent to be involved in more than just radicalisation and recruitment, trying to organise themselves towards an insurgency that would instigate attacks throughout the country.

However, sustained counterterrorism operations prevented any further development of their structure or capabilities beyond low-scale attacks, networked radicalisation and recruitment for al-Shabaab. As networks, these groups were by definition fragmented, lacking any clear command structure or control and distanced from their parent organisation. Therefore, they remained susceptible to splintering and hijacking by Islamic State, which had already captured an emerging faction of al-Shabaab in 2015. The next section will unpack how IS managed to make inroads in a region where al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab held the strongest and oldest ties.

Islamic State in East Africa

Division and factionalism within al-Shabaab are as old as the organisation itself, and it remains remarkable that it managed to establish itself as the formidable threat that it is at all. One possible explanation is the leadership style of Ahmed Abdi Godane, who was known to lead with such a high degree of ruthlessness that it not only contributed to al-Shabaab becoming the deadliest terrorist organisation on the continent for several consecutive years, but also caused major rifts at senior levels of the organisation.

One of the earliest incident revealing Godane's character was when he was believed to have organised the killing of bin Laden's preferred candidate for the leadership of al-Shabaab, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, in the same month the al-Qaeda leader was killed. In 2013, Godane ordered a major purge of foreign fighters, including Omar Hammami, which was openly challenged by senior leaders of the organisation, including a long-standing personal mentor, al-Afghani, who was also killed by a pro-Godane faction that year.

Islamic State thus emerged at an opportune time to court aggrieved members of al-Shabaab in the midst of a bitter factional dispute. By August 2013, images of pro-IS supporters of al-Shabaab emerged on IS's al-Sham media channel.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Hiraal Institute & Global Strategy Network, *The Islamic State in East Africa* (Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, 2018), 40.

⁵⁶ J. Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Musings of an Iraqi Brasenostriil on Jihad: Bay'ah to Baghdadi: Foreign Support for Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham", 22 August 2013, <https://jihadology.net/2013/08/22/musings-of-an-iraqi-brasenostriil-on-jihad-bayah-to-baghdadi-foreign-support-for-sheikh-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-and-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-ash-sham/>.



Al-Shabaab fighter holds sign stating “And if I were in ash-Sham, I could only be a soldier in Islamic State”

As IS began an aggressive campaign of courting al-Qaeda affiliates, Godane chose to reaffirm al-Shabaab’s loyalty to al-Qaeda publicly in a speech in May 2014,⁵⁷ while discreetly purging al-Shabaab of IS supporters. Defectors and disgruntled members often sought refuge from Godane’s wrath in Yemen, where militants had long gone for medical treatment and to trade weapons and expertise with AQAP.

Following the death of Godane in September 2014, IS started to reach out to disgruntled al-Shabaab members more openly. In a statement entitled “A Message to our Brothers in Somalia”, an IS supporter, Hamil al-Bushra, lauded the militants in Somalia for fighting government forces and implementing sharia law, while encouraging them to pledge allegiance to IS.

Al-Bushra also asked the new leader of al-Shabaab, Ahmed Umar, and his shura council why they had not offered their allegiance to al-Baghdadi, ending his message telling Umar how easy it is to pledge allegiance, even instructing him in the procedure.⁵⁸ At the time, IS was on a run of successes, symbolised both by the declaration of the Caliphate and the capture of Mosul, which made a shift in allegiance an attractive proposition.

In March 2015, Abu Salman, an influential al-Shabaab cleric, followed in the footsteps of al-Bushra when he issued a fatwa legitimising pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi.⁵⁹ Six months later, Hassan Husein Adan, a Nairobi-based sheikh who exercised strong influence on al-Shabaab members, authored a letter offering his support to al-Baghdadi and discrediting al-Qaeda’s rejection of his caliphate.⁶⁰ These messages were followed in September and October that year by

⁵⁷ Joscelyn, Thomas and Roggio, “Shabaab Leader Calls for Mediation in Syria, Says Zawahiri is Our Sheikh and Emir”, 17 May 2014, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/05/shabaab_leader_calls.php.

⁵⁸ Hamil al-Bushra, “risalah ila ahliina fi al-somal [A Message to Our Brothers in Somalia]”, Al-Jabha Al-‘Ilamiyyah Li-Nusrat Al-Dawla Al-Islamiyyah, February 2015.

⁵⁹ Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of Al-Qaeda’s Most Powerful Ally* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 258.

⁶⁰ Adan’s critique mainly concerns al-Qaeda’s rejection of the caliphate, which is elaborated in al-Zawahiri’s “Islamic Spring series”, which is based on historical events and not legal disqualifications. For more on Adan, see Ibid.

a string of articles and videos issued by IS's official media department and sympathetic media outlets claiming that al-Qaeda had become a deviant group abandoning the proper creed.

In Somalia, Sheikh Abd al-Qadir Mumin emerged as an influential cleric supported by the faction of disgruntled al-Shabaab members. He submitted a proposal to switch allegiance to IS. It was only after Godane was killed that the proposal was openly debated by such figures as Hussein Abdi Gedi, Taymullah al-Somali and al-Shabaab's most prominent Kenyan clerics, Abu Salman and Hassan Husein Adan.

By July 2015, the proposal was deliberated by senior members in Jilib, where it was alleged deputy emir Mahad Karate was prepared to issue a pledge to IS. However, this never materialised and instead resulted in a memo distributed throughout the organisation that al-Shabaab remained loyal to al-Qaeda.⁶¹ Al-Shabaab spokesperson Ali Dhere also made it clear that the group was the only “legitimate Islamic authority” in the country. Following this memo, Ahmed Umar continued Godane's ruthless purge of dissidents.

On 22 October 2015, Mumin and a group of fighters pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi by issuing a short audio statement. This was followed shortly afterwards by two further pledges of allegiance. The first was on 8 November when a group of 27 fighters gave bay'a to al-Baghdadi in a video. A month later, on 7 December, a smaller group of fighters led by Bashir Abu Numan similarly offered their allegiance in a video that was posted online only after their assassination by al-Shabaab's intelligence unit.

Jabha East Africa

Jabha East Africa (JEA) was a small Islamist group believed to be linked to Mumin that emerged after its attack on a convoy of troops belonging to the African Union Mission in Somalia in April 2016. The incident marked the first attack in Somalia claimed by IS.⁶² That same month, JEA pledged allegiance to IS in a statement that criticised al-Shabaab and urged its adherents to abandon its affiliates like al-Hijra and al-Muhajiroun to join the group as a representative of IS in East Africa.⁶³

Considering JEA comprised a range of East African nationalities from Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania, it is plausible that members of al-Shabaab's network of affiliates, such as al-Muhajiroun, al-Hijra and part of al-Shabaab's Nabhan Battalion, joined JEA.⁶⁴ In May 2016, a video emerged of masked men brandishing firearms and an IS flag in Tanzania (speculated to be the Amboni caves in Tanga) encouraging defections from al-Shabaab. This video marked the first presence of support for IS outside the traditional strongholds in Somalia and Kenya.

⁶¹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 259.

⁶² Sunguta West, “Jabha East Africa: Islamic State Alters the Dynamic of Somalia's Conflict”, 29 April 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/jabha-east-africa-islamic-state-alters-the-dynamic-of-somalias-conflict/>.

⁶³ Jabha East Africa, “New Statement from Jabha East Africa: Our Pledge of Allegiance to the Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi”, 7 April 2016, <https://jihadology.net/2016/04/07/new-statement-from-jabha-east-africa-our-pledge-of-allegiance-to-the-shaykh-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi/>.

⁶⁴ Jason Warner, “Sub-Saharan Africa's Three New Islamic State Affiliates”, *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* vol. 10 no. 1 (2017): 21–8; Steven Platt, “Al-Qaeda vs the Islamic State in Somalia”, 9 November 2017, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/al-qaeda-vs-islamic-state-somalia-steven-platt>.
<https://ctc.usma.edu/sub-saharan-africas-three-new-islamic-state-affiliates/>.



IS supporters in Tanzania, May 2016

JEA was allegedly established by a Kenyan medical intern named Mohamed Abdi Ali (Abu Fida'a) who was arrested for plotting an anthrax attack in Kenya in May 2016. His wife, Nuseiba Mohammed Haji, and a third accomplice named Fatuma Mohammed Hanshi were later arrested in Uganda.⁶⁵ Kenyan police claimed the attack was plotted by a network facilitated by Abdi Ali that involved individuals from Kenya, Libya and Syria.⁶⁶ Abdi Ali was also known to manage a recruitment network helping fighters from Kenya to migrate to Libya, Syria and Somalia to join IS.⁶⁷ The plot came after a period during which many people around the world migrated to join IS in Iraq and Syria, a journey that was relatively simple to make from Kenya with a flight to Turkey and a bus into Syria. For example, Garissa University attacker Abdirahim Abdullahi identified Mohammed Atom, an associate of Abdi Ali, as an example of someone who was recruited to join IS in Syria.⁶⁸

Furthermore, Abubakar Abdi, a key commander within al-Shabaab's Jaysh Ayman unit reportedly defected to IS in January 2021, taking with him about twenty of his fighters.⁶⁹

Although JEA was mainly active in southern Somalia, it marked the first presence of an IS group in Kenya and Tanzania. IS claimed an incident in September 2016 in which three women entered the Mombasa Central Police Station and tossed a petrol bomb at police officers while one attempted to stab an officer in the altercation. After the women were shot and killed, police uncovered an unexploded suicide vest on one of the women; they had posted their pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi, then leader of IS, on Telegram prior to the incident.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ BBC, "Kenya police 'foil anthrax attack' by 'IS-linked group'", 4 May 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36198561>.

⁶⁶ Hiraal Institute & Global Strategy Network, *The Islamic State in East Africa*, 36–8.

⁶⁷ European Institute of Peace, "The Islamic State in East Africa", September 2018.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See tweet from Tore Hamming (@ToreRHamming), 17 February 2021, <https://twitter.com/ToreRHamming/status/1361965005781012482?s=20>.

⁷⁰ Joseph Akwiri, "Kenyan police find note suggesting Islamic State link to Mombasa attack", 15 September 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-attacks-idUSKCN11L136>.

The following month, IS claimed an incident in which an attacker stabbed a General Service Unit officer and was subsequently killed outside the US embassy in Nairobi.⁷¹ In Tanzania, JEA claimed an attack in May 2016 in which 15 attackers armed with incendiary devices, firearms and machetes attacked the Masjid Rahmani in Mwanza, killing three people.⁷² These three incidents are the only known attacks instigated by JEA outside Somalia. However, despite attack claims by IS, JEA failed to receive an acknowledgement of its pledge from IS. Pledges by Mumin since October 2015 also went unrecognised.⁷³

Following a major counterterrorism operation in Amboni in mid-2017, JEA split, with some members fleeing towards ADF territory in eastern DRC while others headed to Mozambique, unable to withstand continued pressure by Tanzanian security services.⁷⁴ Sensing an emerging shift towards IS as its affiliated networks in the region disintegrated under the pressure of counterterrorism operations, al-Shabaab published an ambitious plea by Tanzanian fighter Daktari Khalid in July that year:⁷⁵

“My dear brothers in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Angola and in other parts of the worlds, come and take part in this ‘Ibaada so that we can establish the rule of Allah on earth.”

Two months later marked the start of the insurgency in Mozambique, with the occupation of Mocímboa da Praia for two days by insurgents locally referred to as al-Shabaab.⁷⁶ It was after another two months that IS finally accepted Mumin’s pledge as its affiliate in Somalia.

71 Reuters, “Islamic State claims responsibility for attack outside U.S. embassy in Nairobi”, 29 October 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-usa-islamicstate-idUSKCN12T0QS>.

72 Capital TV, “Three People Killed Following Mosque Attack in Mwanza”, 19 May 2016, <https://youtu.be/dn-DHuKRExg>.

73 Warner, “Sub-Saharan Africa’s Three New Islamic State Affiliates”, 21–8; Australian National Security, “Islamic State Somalia”, <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/Islamic-State-Somalia.aspx>.

74 Hiraal Institute & Global Strategy Network, *The Islamic State in East Africa*, 40.

75 SITE Intelligence Group, “Second Tanzanian Fighter Promotes Immigration and Jihad to East and Southeast African Muslims in Shabaab Video”, 18 July 2017.

76 Eric Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning”, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* vol. 4 no. 3 (2020): 396–412.

3. Affiliation to Islamic State in Central and Southern Africa

The evolving Islamic State networks in the region would over time connect the group to the local insurgencies in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique. The current view of the insurgencies in the two countries can be divided in two: those who consider ADF in DRC and ASwJ in Mozambique to be IS affiliates and those who oppose such categorisation, claiming that they are unable to identify any link between the groups. This disagreement appears partly to be driven by confusion about what it actually means to be an IS affiliate and partly by high expectations for how such affiliations translate into practice. This section intends to shed light on the process of the establishment of ISCAP and offers a discussion of how one ought to understand the affiliation. In July 2018, the Hiraal Institute wrote:

“Though Islamic State certainly does not regard the ADF as part of its Caliphate, and many would describe it more as a criminal enterprise or local rebel group than a terrorist one, some ADF members have expressed support for Islamic State and Islamic State could well see advantage in having a territorial foothold in sub-Saharan Africa.”⁷⁷

That was exactly what happened less than a year later when IS claimed its first official attack in DRC on 18 April 2019 and in effect introduced its new Central African Province (Wilayat Wasat Ifriqiyya). In August 2018, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi hinted in a speech that IS already had sympathetic fighters in Central Africa and, in late April 2019, he was seen reviewing a monthly report on activities in DRC. On 3 June that year, not even two months after the first claim of an attack in DRC, a similar claim of responsibility for an attack in Mozambique was published by IS’s Nashir News Agency. The claim also stated that Mozambique was part of the group’s new Central African Province.



ISCAP logo

⁷⁷ Hiraal Institute & Global Strategy Network, *The Islamic State in East Africa*, 40.

These claims of responsibility were followed by an official IS video, published on 24 July 2019, showing fighters in both DRC and Mozambique pledging allegiance to IS as part of the group’s global campaign to renew the pledge of allegiance to the caliph. On 7 November that year, this was followed by another picture in Islamic State’s weekly *al-Naba* magazine depicting fighters in ‘Central Africa’ pledging allegiance to the new caliph after the death of al-Baghdadi.⁷⁸



Fighters in ‘Central Africa’ pledging allegiance, from al-Naba 207

On 10 March 2021, the US State Department designated the groups in DRC and in Mozambique as IS affiliates.⁷⁹ However, despite the official media publications from IS’s central media department and the US designation, some observers remain unconvinced about the veracity of the link between ADF, ASwJ and IS. These critics’ concerns are based on several arguments that can be condensed to four overall points: (1) there is no proof of organisational connection; (2) not all IS-claimed attacks can be verified; (3) communication appears unreliable; and (4) there is an absence of technological and tactical transfer from IS to the groups in DRC and Mozambique.

First, on an organisational level, IS manages its affiliates through its Administration for Distant Provinces (*idarat al-wilayat al-ba’ida*),⁸⁰ which is divided into separate clusters headed by a main office.⁸¹ According to the UN, ISCAP covers Somalia, DRC and Mozambique with Somalia heading the *al-karrar* office, which functions as the organisational headquarters for the province and, as such, acts

⁷⁸ See IS’s *al-Naba* newsletter no. 207, issued on 7 November 2019.

⁷⁹ US Department of State, “State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique”, 10 March 2021, <https://www.state.gov/state-department-terrorist-designations-of-isis-affiliates-and-leaders-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-mozambique/>.

⁸⁰ Jawad al-Tamimi Aymenn, “Dissent in the Islamic State’s Yemen Affiliates: Documents, Translation & Analysis”, 29 February 2016, <https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/02/dissent-in-the-islamic-state-yemen-affiliates>.

⁸¹ UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities”, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [https://undocs.org/pdf/symbol=en/S/2021/68](https://undocs.org/pdf/symbol/en/S/2021/68); UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twelfth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2557 (2020) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan”, S/2021/486, 1 June 2021.

as the intermediary between IS's leadership in the Levant and the groups in DRC and Mozambique.⁸² This plausibly indicates that communication from DRC and Mozambique goes through the office in Somalia.

Historically, IS has emphasised three elements in particular when deciding on whether to accept a pledge of allegiance: jihadist unity and a designated leadership; territorial consolidation (*tamkin*);⁸³ and direct communication with IS.⁸⁴ This is in accordance with its declared process for the establishment of the caliphate, which also applies to groups outside the Levant wishing to be considered official affiliates. In practice, however, this has not always been the case.

Two factors are important to note in this discussion. First, IS is not as powerful an organisation as it was in the period between 2014 to 2016. At this point it was easier for the group to define requirements to potential affiliates, but with the partial turnaround in its successes, it is no longer in a similar position of power. Second, the group is opportunistic and history has shown that it is willing to relax requirements to facilitate geographical expansion. This is particularly the case in terms of jihadists' control of territory.

Critics of the relationship between ADF and ASwJ on one side and IS on the other appear to confuse what organisational linkage implies and they have too high expectations for how such linkage translates to practice. As remarked elsewhere, it would be a mistake “to judge the legitimacy of an Islamic State affiliate by whether it essentially looks like the Islamic State in Mosul or Raqqa circa 2014–2015.”⁸⁵ Despite the clear relations between the groups in terms of media production, critics point out that no proof of organisational relations exist. While it may not function perfectly, the IS media department's publication of videos, photos and accounts of attacks from DRC and Mozambique indicate some level of organisational interaction that is difficult to deny.

The second point is about expectations. The argument follows the line that the groups differ in terms of ideology, that there is a discrepancy between ISCAP media statements and events on the ground and that there appears to be no tangible transfer of know-how from IS to the groups in DRC and Mozambique. This is based on a mistaken perception of IS and how it functions on a global scale. As global organisations, both al-Qaeda and IS are characterised by ideological diversity from one affiliate to another. While groups may attempt to streamline their ideology across borders, this is a process that takes time and may never fully succeed as affiliates continue to pursue local agendas.⁸⁶ That IS is opportunistic in its attack claims is nothing new. Neither is the occasional misspelling of locations and mistaken information about casualty numbers. Often this information goes through several links before it arrives at the IS media department and translations to and

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Jacob Zenn, “The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries: Juxtaposing the Pledges from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group in the Philippines”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 13 no. 1 (February 2019).

⁸⁴ Daniel Milton and Muhammad al'Ubaydi, “Pledging Bay'a: A Benefit or Burden to the Islamic State?”, *CTC Sentinel* vol. 8 no. 3 (March 2015), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/pledging-baya-a-benefit-or-burden-to-the-islamic-state/>; Islamic State, “Remaining and Expanding”, *Dabiq* no. 5, October–November 2014, 22–33.

⁸⁵ Tara Candland et al., “The Islamic State in Congo”, *The George Washington University Program on Extremism* (March 2021): 9.

⁸⁶ Thomas Hegghammer, “The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups”, *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* vol. 18 (November 2009).

from Arabic aggravate the problem. But these occasional mistakes should not discount all the groups' activities. Lastly, the transfer of technological and tactical know-how takes time and is dependent on local needs.⁸⁷ While the advancement of improvised explosive devices in DRC may be the result of knowledge sharing from IS, it is not necessarily certain that the groups in DRC and Mozambique will adopt similar practices as the group in Syria because their existing equipment and tactics already function.

⁸⁷ Jacob Zenn, “The Islamic State’s Provinces on the Peripheries”.

4. DRC: The ADF and Islamic State

Although Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had already hinted at the presence of IS-affiliated fighters in Central Africa, it came as a shock to most observers when the group on 18 April 2019 claimed responsibility for its first attack in DRC. The attack took place in the village of Bofata in Beni when IS fighters attacked the barracks of the Congolese army, allegedly killing three soldiers.



First Islamic State claim of responsibility for an attack in DRC, 18 April 2019

A week later this claim was followed by an article in the group's weekly newspaper, *al-Naba*, showing a picture of a group of fighters in DRC. While the country is no stranger to violence, the surprising element was the establishment of an IS affiliate outside the traditional Islamic world. DRC is primarily Christian with Muslims making up somewhere between 2% and 10% of the population. Nonetheless, IS now claimed that the country was part of the caliphate.

This faction of IS fighters in the DRC grew out of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a regional insurgent group founded in 1995 in Uganda. However, in order to understand the transformative process from a nationalist Islamist-inspired rebellion to participation in the global jihadist movement, we need to begin looking at the group's trajectory and how over time it took steps closer to the jihadist movement that culminated in its affiliation with IS.

The ADF Insurgency

The history of the ADF rebellion can be traced back to as early as 1989. The group originally emerged from an internal power struggle within Uganda's Islamic community. Its members generally came from the Tablighi Jama'at or in some cases Salafism, but religiously it was a heterogeneous group. Its members opposed the government-controlled Ugandan Muslim Supreme Council, which eventually resulted in violent confrontations and the imprisonment of several members of the Tablighi, including Jamil Mukulu, at the

time the head of the Tablighi youth movement.⁸⁸ After their release, some members, Mukulu among them, left the Tablighi. To replace it they established the Salafi Foundation of Uganda centred around the Malakaz mosque in Kampala. Alongside religious activities, the group started providing military training to its members.⁸⁹ In 1995, this eventually became too much for the Ugandan government, which started to crack down on the newly established ADF. Eventually group members were forced to flee, with one faction seeking refuge in Kenya, before relocating to Sudan, while others migrated to eastern DRC. Once in DRC, they allied with the secular National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) under the leadership of Abdallah Yusuf Kabanda. Mukulu acted as his deputy until 2005, when he took over.⁹⁰ From eastern DRC the group continued to carry out attacks in Uganda, but in the early 2000s, the group faced increasing pressure from the Ugandan and Congolese armies. This led in 2007 to parts of the NALU leadership demobilising as a result of the ongoing peace process, but the ADF remained committed to the fight and, at the same time, the group started to focus more on implementing Islamic governance.

After several crackdowns from the Congolese government, the MONUSCO mission and the arrest of Jamil Mukulu in Tanzania in April 2015, the ADF initiated a process of restructuring and recruitment in 2015–2016. Mukulu was replaced by his deputy Musa Muhsin Baluku. Baluku's rise would have an immediate impact on the group's operations and communications. In terms of the former, the ADF started to launch more indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians, but at the same time the group began embracing social media platforms to communicate to a broader audience. This stood in striking contrast to its previous strategy of secrecy concerning both its leadership and rank-and-file.⁹¹ After fighting broke out again in 2017, the Congolese army initiated a new campaign against the ADF in January 2018 but it failed miserably.⁹²

The ADF started as an Islamic group, yet it was not part of the global jihadist movement until the tenure of Baluku. During Mukulu's reign, the group certainly had an Islamic identity and close links with local mosques in eastern Congo and Uganda.⁹³ Its Islamic identity was further strengthened around 2012 when the group started to rebrand itself as the Madina at-Tawhid wa-l-Muwahideen (MTM), first referring to its main camp and later to the entire group. It also adopted a new flag featuring the shahada, but at the time its objective remained to establish an Islamic government in its native Uganda.⁹⁴

88 International Crisis Group, “Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion”, Policy Brief, 19 December 2012, https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b093-eastern-congo-the-adf-nalu-s-lost-rebellion_0.pdf.

89 Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 130–1.

90 International Crisis Group, “Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion”.

91 Candland et al., “The Islamic State in Congo”, 13.

92 Congo Research Group, “Inside the ADF Rebellion: A Glimpse into the Life and Operations of a Secretive Jihadist Armed Group”, Center on International Cooperation New York University, November 2018.

93 International Crisis Group, “A New Approach for the UN to Stabilise the DR Congo”, Briefing no. 148, 4 December 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/b148-new-approach-un-stabilise-dr-congo>.

94 UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo”, S/2013/433, 19 July 2013, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/433.



Madina at-Tawhid wa-l-Muwahideen flag

It has been speculated that it was the arrest of Mukulu in April 2015 and the election of Baluku that eventually pushed the group further towards a jihadist ideology.⁹⁵ While this is certainly true, the ideological evolution was also related to the weakened role of the NALU component of the group after the demobilisation of the NALU leadership in 2007. For instance, it was only from then on that group members were obliged to convert to Islam.⁹⁶ This focus on the Mukulu-Baluku transition also overlooks that even during the reign of Mukulu, who received his education in Saudi Arabia, the rhetoric was extreme and focused on the targeting of infidels. Nonetheless, as will be explained below, the profile of Baluku is integral to understanding the trajectory of the ADF after he assumed power.

International Connections

The ADF's international relations started with Jamil Mukulu's travels to Afghanistan and Pakistan as early as the 1970s to receive military training. Over the years, he established contacts in several African countries as well as in Europe and the Middle East that would be of use to finance the activities of the ADF. This was especially true of Nairobi and the Tanzanian city Tanga, which were central hubs for the group's funding and training activities.⁹⁷

Despite its natural focus on first Uganda and later DRC, the modern ADF has not been as insular as it is occasionally portrayed. For years, the group received fighters from South Africa and several East African countries, including Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya, Mozambique and Somalia; it engaged with jihadist groups in other African countries as well.⁹⁸ If the reports are true, this engagement began already with Mukulu during a stay in Sudan in the 1990s where he is rumoured to have befriended Osama bin Laden. The ADF sent fighters to Sudan to train with bin Laden's al-Qaeda operatives with assistance from the

⁹⁵ Brian M. Perkins, "The Emerging Triad of Islamic State Central Africa Province", *Terrorism Monitor* vol. 18 no. 5 (11 March 2020), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-emerging-triad-of-islamic-state-central-africa-province/>.

⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, "Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion", 8.

⁹⁷ UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, "Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo", S/2011/738, 2 December 2011, 29, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1155632.pdf>

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Sudanese government.⁹⁹ This work was allegedly led by Benjamin Kisokeranio, the son of NALU-founder Bwambale Kisokeranio, who would later spearhead the ADF faction opposed to affiliation with IS.

The issue of the ADF’s relations with external Islamist or jihadist groups has been contested over time. However, it appears the group established relations with al-Shabaab in Somalia as early as 2011. Al-Shabaab has since functioned as a key partner in logistics and training for the ADF, even after its incorporation into IS. Early on, the ADF started sending fighters to Somalia for training,¹⁰⁰ with al-Shabaab also sending trainers to DRC,¹⁰¹ and the two groups engaged in shady smuggling exchanges related to illegal mining in North Kivu.¹⁰² This practice has been promoted by al-Shabaab emir Abu Ubaydah in several videos addressing East and Central Africa since 2016. After the arrest of Hassan Muluku, the son of Jamil Mukulu, in 2011 in Kenya, links between Hassan and the al-Shabaab Kenyan-affiliated MYC/al-Hijra were established. According to several reports, it was figures affiliated with al-Hijra who posted Hassan’s bail.¹⁰³

The ADF’s interest in engaging with militants outside DRC is evident from several videos. In a video posted on 14 October 2017, released under the banner of the MTM, an Arab fighter standing in the forest calls on militants from the region to migrate to DRC. In another example, also from 2017, a group of fighters speaking French and regional languages address militants from DRC, Burundi and Tanzania. They ask them to join the jihad and “wage war against infidels so that we establish a caliphate where the Quran and teachings of the Prophet are our only governing constitution.”¹⁰⁴ Over the years, the ADF has also enjoyed relations with a logistical network in the United Kingdom and more recently a South African-based criminal network, which have functioned as central sources of funding.¹⁰⁵

On an individual level, there is also evidence that the ADF is connected to the broader regions of East and Southern Africa. While the vast majority of members are from Uganda and DRC, the example of “Jundi”, recounted by Candland et al., is telling about the group’s geographical scope. Originally from Tanzania, between 2016 and 2017 Jundi was located in Durban, South Africa, where he was studying and teaching. After connecting online with an ADF media official, Jundi migrated to eastern DRC where he started to feature in ADF propaganda to recruit new members. Reportedly, Jundi has since been promoted to a senior official role in the group.¹⁰⁶

Three recent events are further illustrative of the ADF’s international connections and regional objectives. On 21 September 2021, the Congolese army arrested a Jordanian in Makisabo working with the local Islamic State group. According to news report, the Jordanian was in charge of the group’s drone program.¹⁰⁷ Approximately one week later,

99 Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 131; Sunguta West, “The Rise of ADF-NALU in Central Africa and Its Connections with al-Shabaab”, *Terrorism Monitor* vol. 13 no. 1 (9 January 2015), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-rise-of-adf-nalu-in-central-africa-and-its-connections-with-al-shabaab/>.

100 Ibid.

101 International Crisis Group, “Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU’s Lost Rebellion”, 9.

102 Brian M. Perkins, “The Cross Pollination of East Africa’s Armed Groups”, *Terrorism Monitor* vol. 17 no. 22 (18 November 2019), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-cross-pollination-of-east-africas-armed-groups/>.

103 International Crisis Group, “Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU’s Lost Rebellion”, 9.

104 Candland et al., “The Islamic State in Congo”, 26.

105 Ibid.; UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo”, 2013.

106 Candland et al., “The Islamic State in Congo”, 37–8.

107 HumAngle, “Jordanian ADF Trainer Arrested in Beni, DR Congo”, 22 September 2021, <https://humanglemedia.com/jordanian-adf-trainer-arrested-in-beni-dr-congo>.

the Rwandan police arrested 13 persons alleging they were plotting a terrorist attack in Kigali. Captured with explosives and other material to produce bombs, the cell was according to Rwandan police cooperating with the Islamic State in DR Congo.¹⁰⁸ The plans were assumedly in response to the Rwandan military campaign against the Islamic State in Mozambique. And finally, on 7 October ISCAP took responsibility for its first attack in Uganda after detonating explosives inside a police station in Kampala.

Joining Islamic State

In April 2019, IS claimed its first attack in DRC and in effect made public that the caliphate had an official affiliate in Central Africa. Earlier that year, the ADF experienced an internal fracture with the group splitting into two factions over the issue of affiliation to IS vis-à-vis a continued focus on implementing Islamic governance in Uganda. The majority faction headed by Musa Baluku pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi and now represented ISCAP. In the words of Baluku in a September 2020 video release, as documented by Candland et al.:

“There is no ADF anymore. Allah willing, ADF ceased to exist a long time ago. There is no ADF here. ADF was merely an alliance out of necessity for a certain time and when we finally got empowered, when we no longer had non-Muslims with us, we are no longer ADF as a group! Currently, we are a province, the Central Africa Province which is one province among the numerous provinces that make up the Islamic State that is under the Caliph and Leader of all Muslims...Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi.”¹⁰⁹

The trajectory of the pledge of allegiance from the ADF to IS is reported to have been initiated as early as 2016 when ADF members allegedly contacted IS officials in Libya and Syria to enquire about the potential for establishing a more formal link between the groups. Further cementing that some level of interaction between the ADF and IS was ongoing prior to the pledge, Kaka Bagyenda, director-general of Uganda’s Internal Security Organisation, explained in May 2018 that the two groups were cooperating.¹¹⁰ Such cooperation was also seen on a financial level: the Kenya-based IS-linked financier Waleed Ahmed Zein¹¹¹ sent money amounting to \$150,000 to the ADF in the first uncovered IS-related funding scheme.¹¹² It was possibly to these emerging links that al-Baghdadi referred to in an often overlooked claim from August 2018: that fighters in Central Africa had already joined IS’s caravan.

*“O Ahlus-Sunnah in Iraq, Sham, and all other lands,
O Ahlus-Sunnah, arm yourselves! Seek death and you will be
granted life, for indeed, those who’ve been killed in war retreating
are far greater in number than those who’ve been killed advancing.
Join the caravan of the Khilafah in Iraq, Sham, Yemen, Sinai,
Khurasan, Libya, West Africa, Central Africa, East Asia, Qawqaz,
and other wilayat, for the sons of Islam have become determined*

¹⁰⁸ AfricaNews, “Rwanda arrest 13 suspected of plotting ‘terrorist’ attacks”, 1 October 2021, <https://www.africanews.com/2021/10/01/rwanda-arrests-13-suspected-of-plotting-terrorist-attacks>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁰ European Institute of Peace, “The Islamic State in East Africa”, 38

¹¹¹ US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions East African Facilitator of Intricate ISIS Financial Network”, 7 September 2018, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm476>.

¹¹² See tweet from Jasmine Opperman (@Jasminechic00), 9 January 2021, <https://twitter.com/Jasminechic00/status/1347892604579553284>.

*not to lay down their weapons and not to allow the Crusaders and their puppets to enjoy a pleasant life until Allah decides between us and them, and fulfills a matter that has already been ordained.”*¹¹³

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, “Give Glad Tidings to the Patient”,
22 August 2018.

While Baluku might have already pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi at the time, the affiliation of the ADF to IS was still not official.

That ADF members had sympathies for, or at least interest in, IS is known and documented.¹¹⁴ For instance, in February 2018, FARDC forces found a book on a dead ADF fighter produced by IS’s maktab al-buhuth wa-l-dirasat (‘Office of Research and Studies’) and issued by the group’s Al Himmah publication house.¹¹⁵ The book, *tuw’iyat al-ra’iyyat bal-siyasat al-shari’a* (‘Educating the citizens about legal policy’), was written between December 2015 and January 2016 and is an introduction to the implementation of sharia. This shows that even prior to the official affiliation with IS, ADF fighters were interested in the group and presumably sympathetic to its ideology.

There is no doubt that the election of Musa Baluku as ADF’s emir in 2015 was a driving force in the group’s move towards jihadism and affiliation with IS. Born in Uganda in the mid-1970s, Baluku was a veteran of the ADF and a longtime deputy of Mukulu. Religiously educated at the Bugembe Islamic Institute and with a past as an imam at the Malakaz mosque in Kampala, he has relatively strong religious credentials, which resulted in his appointment as the highest ranking religious judge in the group and then political commissar, which saw him in charge of the group’s theological education. He is known for his preachings in the ADF camps in which he promotes jihad and laments *shirk* (polytheism) and *kufr* (unbelief).¹¹⁶ The increasing role of religion within the ADF was also evident from the group’s internal structure with specialised units, including a sharia council, which Baluku heads, that ensures that the group’s actions follows their religious interpretation and a school teaching the Koran in addition to other courses.¹¹⁷ During his time as emir of the ADF he managed to consolidate and centralise his power within the group; in the process of affiliating with IS, he garnered the support of the majority of ADF members.¹¹⁸ Therefore it is particularly noteworthy that Baluku on several occasions has featured in official IS media productions.

In an IS video from 24 July 2019, from its Central Africa wilayah, a group of ADF fighters pledge allegiance to IS. It is quite possibly Musa Baluku, identified as Sheikh Abdur Rahman and wearing a headscarf covering most of his face, who pronounces the pledge of allegiance. It is interesting to note that Baluku is *reaffirming* the pledge of allegiance from the ADF to IS. This could indicate that a pledge had already been given by Baluku or, as in the case of Somalia, that IS had decided to wait to announce it publicly as an official wilayah.¹¹⁹ This is further strengthened by the fact that in his 29 April 2019 video appearance, al-Baghdadi is seen reviewing a report titled ‘wilayat wasat ifriqiya’ (‘Central Africa Province’) and carrying the subtitle ‘monthly report about the course of work’.¹²⁰

¹¹³ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, “Give Glad Tidings to the Patient”, al-Furqan Media, 22 August 2018.

¹¹⁴ European Institute of Peace, “The Islamic State in East Africa”, 37.

¹¹⁵ Congo Research Group, “Inside the ADF Rebellion”, 16.

¹¹⁶ Congo Research Group, “ADF Leadership Biographies”, Center on International Cooperation New York University, <https://insidetheadf.org/leadership-adf-bios/>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Candland et al., “The Islamic State in Congo”, 35.

¹¹⁹ Candland et al. similarly argue that it is Baluku articulating the pledge of allegiance: see Candland et al, 23.

¹²⁰ Thanks to Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi for deciphering the subheading.



Report on the Central Africa Province reviewed by al-Baghdadi

Another interesting point about this video is the possible presence of an IS emissary. One person in the circle of fighters stands out because of his light skin, civilian clothing and the status gun he is carrying. Strengthening this suspicion, he is the only person whose face is cropped throughout the video. Considering that this is the first public pledge of allegiance from DRC to IS, it is possible that a representative from IS was present as a means of authorisation.¹²¹ In a photo series from 2 August 2020, Baluku features again, this time with his face uncovered. In the context of Eid al-Adha, Baluku appears to be giving a sermon to a group of fighters sitting in front of him. The following year, Baluku is seen leading prayer during Ramadan.



Left: Older known picture of Musa Baluku. Right: Baluku from 2 August 2020 ISCAP photo series. Below: Baluku seen leading prayer for eid al-fitr in 2021, ISCAP photo series



¹²¹ The authors would like to thank Ryan O'Farrell for sharing this observation.

Baluku's decision to join IS fragmented the ADF. While the vast majority of fighters and leadership figures, represented by Baluku, pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi, a smaller faction headed by veteran ADF-official Benjamin Kisokeranio disagreed with Baluku and instead remained loyal to Jamil Mukulu's vision of an Islamist insurgency focused on Uganda. The son of the founder of NALU, Kisokeranio was a senior figure in the ADF and allegedly in charge of intelligence, finances and supplies within the group.¹²² After breaking with Baluku, the breakaway faction headed by Kisokeranio and the family of Mukulu relocated to the Uvira-Bukavu-Bujumbura triangle, where it started to recruit new members. In reaction to the split, Baluku killed one of his wives, the daughter of Jamil Mukulu.¹²³ The UN expert group on DRC estimates that Kisokeranio's splinter group comprises approximately thirty individuals, implying that the vast majority of the ADF joined IS.¹²⁴

UN reports on IS have also emphasised several times the organisational link between the groups in DRC and Mozambique. Relying on intelligence information from member states, the reports describe ISCAP as IS's regional province covering Somalia, DRC and Mozambique.¹²⁵ According to a report dated 3 February 2021, Somalia has been designated as the command centre for ISCAP, meaning that it is acting as the link between the affiliates in East and Central Africa and IS's central organisation in the Levant, as organised in its Administration for Distant Provinces (idarat al-wilayat al-ba'ida).¹²⁶ This logistical and supervisory function has meant that trainers and operatives have been sent from Somalia to both DRC and Mozambique.¹²⁷ Allegedly, these trainers, as well as media officials, are based in Puntland but have on several occasions travelled to eastern Congo to an ISCAP command centre located in Beni to train DRC fighters and officials.¹²⁸

Nonetheless, the group's actual link to IS remains contested. Now IS itself has addressed this rather comical situation. In its *al-Naba* newspaper from early August 2021, it wrote:

“Like all their brothers, the mujahideen in Congo received their share of the deliberate campaign of distortion and falsehood. The governmental and international media in Congo continue to describe the soldiers of the Caliphate with strange local names (!), far away from the name and purpose of Islamic State. This is done to avoid admitting that what they are fighting in the Congo today is the same Islamic State that they previously claimed was eliminated in al-Baghoudi!”¹²⁹

¹²² Congo Research Group, “ADF Leadership Biographies”.

¹²³ Author's interview with a DRC expert, March 2021.

¹²⁴ UN, “Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo”, S/2021/560, 10 June 2021.

¹²⁵ Islamic State is rather inconsistent in how it brands the province. For instance, in an infographic from 1 October 2020 published in *al-Naba* 254, it tallies the province's attacks the prior year including DRC, Mozambique and Tanzania, but not Somalia.

¹²⁶ UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twenty-seventh report”.

¹²⁷ UN, “Twelfth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat”, S/2021/98, 29 January 2021.

¹²⁸ Author's interview with a Somali security consultant, February 2021.

¹²⁹ *al-Naba* 298, “But the Hour is Their Appointed Time”, 5 August 2021.

Tactics and Propaganda

Since its first claim of an attack in DRC, IS has to date claimed responsibility for 185 attacks (see figure 1)¹³⁰ in the eastern regions of North Kivu and Ituri. This corresponds well to the ADF's areas of activity, with the UN group of experts reporting that it is operating in three mobile groups: one operating in Ruwenzori, another around the Mbau-Kamango road in northern Beni and the third in southern Ituri near Irumu.¹³¹ The claims show a general increase in activity from March 2020 but with great variety in activity levels from one month to the next, indicating that the group continues the tradition of the ADF in adjusting to military campaigns.

The attack patterns resemble what has been seen in both Mozambique and Nigeria, although much less advanced than the latter. Attacks have been carried out in North Kivu, mainly in and around Beni, and southern Ituri and the primary target is the Congolese army followed by the region's Christian population. Insurgents usually attack military convoys, barracks or Christian villages before retreating to their safe havens in the jungle. For now, they generally appear unable to conquer and control territory as we have seen in Mozambique in mid-2020 with the capture of Mocímboa da Praia, which has since been regained by Mozambican government forces with the assistance of the Rwandan military.¹³²

The extent to which the group has adopted tactical or technical practices from IS remains contested. A 2020 UN report on DRC found that from 2019, the group started increasingly to use improvised explosive devices (IED) and that an improvement in the technical construction of the explosive ordnances had taken place. While impossible to confirm at this stage, this evolution could be the result of technical assistance from other IS affiliates.¹³³ The likelihood of such collaboration in terms of the IED production is further strengthened by the finding on 7 June 2019 of an IED in Beni with a paper attached with the text “Made in Dawlah”. While this is a matter of interpretation, it is potentially a reference to IS (usually referred to as “Dawlah” by its supporters) and a tactic that has been used by supporters in other regions.¹³⁴ Such an interpretation is supported by a recent UN report stating that there has potentially been coordination and transfer of know-how, resulting in an increasing coherence in *modus operandi*.¹³⁵ In its most recent report, the UN expert group on DRC concluded that it was “unable to establish direct support or command and control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) over ADF, despite ADF attempts to project alignment with ISIL,” yet it stated that “the involvement of ADF combatants from outside the Democratic Republic of the Congo contributed to modest advancements in improvised explosive device construction techniques.”¹³⁶

Another possible example is the 20 October 2020 prison break: ISCAP claimed responsibility for an attack on Beni's Kangbayi prison, which led to the release of approximately 1,320 fighters with

130 As of 10 October 2021.

131 UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, “Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo”, S/2020/1283, 23 December 2020.

132 Al Jazeera, “Rwanda, Mozambique Forces Recapture Port City from Rebels”, 8 August 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/8/rwanda-mozambique-forces-recapture-port-city-from-rebels>.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid., 25.

135 UN, “Twelfth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat”.

136 UN, “Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo”.

allegedly 235 of them affiliated with the group.¹³⁷ The prison break was announced as part of the group’s global “Answer the Call” campaign inaugurated by IS spokesman Abu Hamza al-Quraishi and follows the tradition of IS prison breaks.¹³⁸

In any case, the absence of extensive adoption of new tactics is a weak indicator of the relationship between IS and the group in DRC. New affiliates are not obliged to adopt specific tactics or targeting priorities as this entirely depends on the type of conflict with which the group is involved and its dynamics. This is particularly the case now with a weakened IS core.

In its communication strategy, the ADF has historically been a highly secretive organisation with a weak public communications footprint. Leaders have generally prioritised secrecy over propaganda and proscribed rank-and-file members who communicate publicly. That changed in 2016 after the election of Musa Baluku when the group started to embrace the value of having a public media profile to brand the ADF and as an effective recruitment tool. At first, the group appeared on Facebook with an MTM profile but its media presence has exploded in scale since affiliation with IS.

Prior to affiliation, the ADF published its propaganda under the MTM brand and through its own media institution Ashabul Kahf Media. These publications specifically targeted a local audience and were characterised by, in terms of video productions, their low quality.¹³⁹ It is noteworthy that Baluku’s admission – that the ADF had ceased to exist and was replaced by IS – came in a video published through the ADF’s local “Mujahideen TV” outlet.

From April 2019, photos, videos and communiqués started to be released through official IS channels as well. After claiming the first attack in DRC on 18 April 2019, the first IS publication on ISCAP was released on 25 April 2019: an article that included a picture of a group of fighters in the jungle was published in *al-Naba*.¹⁴⁰ Ever since, IS has issued a regular stream of media output showing the aftermath of attacks and captured war spoils (*ghanima*), including several pictures and videos featuring Musa Baluku, while *al-Naba* has featured detailed accounts of attacks. This indicates close contact between the group in DRC and IS media officials responsible for obtaining media material from provinces outside the Levant and for posting them in the name of IS. These new media productions were something new, not only because they were issued through official IS channels, but also since the quality of the productions appeared markedly improved compared to previous ADF productions.

¹³⁷ UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, “Twenty-seventh report”.

¹³⁸ Islamic State, *al-Naba* 257, 22 October 2020.

¹³⁹ Candland et al., “The Islamic State in Congo”, 25.

¹⁴⁰ Islamic State, *al-Naba* 179, 25 April 2019.



First Islamic State publication on ISCAP in al-Naba 179

Additionally, the group has continued to disseminate material through informal channels on encrypted platforms with a primary objective of targeting local and regional audiences. This is not unprecedented for IS provinces and well known behaviour from both the Sahel and Khorasan. These 'unofficial' releases are released by Ashabul Kahf Media but branded as IS's Central Africa province; they further support the narrative of the group's militant Islamist and internationalist outlook. A recent series of video releases is illustrative. On 24 August 2020, a video was circulated on unofficial channels showing three children and a man all carrying guns and dressed in a combination of religious attire and military fatigues, standing in front of a black flag inscribed with the shahada, which in recent years has been heavily associated with IS. The video, which was issued as a greeting to celebrate Eid al-Adha, exclusively had a religious character.



Left: Screenshot from video shared on 24 August 2020 on Telegram.
Right: Screenshot from video shared on 24 January 2021 on Telegram featuring a veteran ADF commander.

In another video from January 2021, a veteran ADF commander is featured, standing in the exact same spot in front of the flag used in the previous video and speaking in Kinande, explaining that he was the ideological mentor of ADF-member Hamuli Banza Suleman Zakaria, better known as Bonge la Chuma, and his close relations with Jamil Mukulu. Addressing the youth in Uganda, he talks about the infidels in the country and how the youth should respond by migrating to DRC to join the group. The following month, in mid-February 2021, another video issued through the ADF's media house circulated on Twitter. In the video, a man sits in front of the same banner used in the previous videos and speaks in Swahili.

He says that the Muslims and the Congolese are one people.¹⁴¹ In about two weeks, he warns, a secret will be revealed to the people because they have been blinded by politicians’ suppression. So far, no such secret has been made public.

Since December 2020, the group’s activity level and geographical scope has evolved considerably. Throughout 2021, it has grown increasingly active and since July, its operations in southern Ituri have become more frequent. There are also initial signs that the group is entering a new stage. After attacking Mabeba village in Ituri on two occasions in early August, the group issued a long statement through its Amaq Agency featuring a fighter allegedly engaged in giving *dawa* to the village’s Christian population. This is the first time the group has published propaganda of this type and this explicitly softer profile could indicate that the ADF is turning its focus towards territorial consolidation (*tamkin*).



Islamic State fighter giving dawa in Mabeba, Ituri

¹⁴¹ See tweet from Steve Wembi (@wembi_steve), 17 February 2021, https://twitter.com/wembi_steve/status/1362088147954335748.

5. Mozambique: Ahlu-Sunna wa-Jamma and Islamic State

In Mozambique, Ahlu-Sunna wa-Jamma (ASwJ), known locally as Shabaab,¹⁴² has become the latest Islamic State affiliate, with over fifty attack claims by IS for the province of Cabo Delgado. ISCAP's claims, which began just two months after the ADF became an IS affiliate in April 2019,¹⁴³ often feature detailed accounts and images of attack locations, indicating some correspondence between the two groups. In March 2020, ASwJ made an appearance in the district capital of Mocímboa da Praia (MdP), Quissanga, waving IS flags and banners,¹⁴⁴ marking the first public indication of its leanings towards IS. By June 2021,¹⁴⁵ 890 attacks had been instigated, resulting in 2,868 fatalities and more than half a million displaced people since the start of the insurgency in October 2017. Some of the more notable incidents that took place in the past year include the occupation of MdP in August 2020,¹⁴⁶ and the decapitation of more than 50 people in the village of Muatide in November 2020.¹⁴⁷ These developments, along with emerging indications of links with ISCAP, mark the beginning of a new phase for ASwJ as it brands itself more clearly in line with IS, carries out mass beheadings and acquires territory in MdP, clearly defined as its base, with the potential to draw IS adherents from across the Southern, Central and East African regions.

Historical Origins of the Insurgency

From 1896, Sufism of the Shadhuliyya and the Qadiriyya orders arrived and spread throughout Mozambique, becoming particularly influential in the northern parts of the country. The offshoot of the global Sufi network saw Muslim communities in Mozambique become more connected with their neighboring Swahili brethren, as well as the wider Muslim community, than ever before.¹⁴⁸ In the 1960s, at the start of the war for independence against the Portuguese colonial administration, Wahhabism emerged from a handful of graduates returning from religious studies in Gulf States who sought to challenge the existing Sufi order.

This included the son of a prominent Qadiriyya Sadat khalifa, Haji Ahmad Haji Yussufo, who completed his studies in Saudi Arabia and returned to Mozambique to join another recent Saudi graduate,

142 Not formally associated with the Somali-based anti-al-Shabaab paramilitary group Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jamma or al-Shabaab.

143 Robert Postings, "Islamic State Recognises New Central Africa Province, Deepening Ties with DR Congo Militants", 30 April 2019, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/04/30/islamic-state-new-central-africa-province/>.

144 Peter Fabricius, "Islamist Insurgents Capture Second Town in Northern Mozambique Within 48 Hours", 26 March 2020, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-03-26-islamist-insurgents-capture-second-town-in-northern-mozambique-within-48-hours/>.

145 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Cabo Ligado Weekly: 31 May-6 June", 8 June 2021, <https://www.cabolidado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-31-may-6-june-2021>.

146 BBC, "Mocimboa da Praia: Key Mozambique Port Seized by IS", 12 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53756692>.

147 Al Jazeera, "ISIL-Linked Attackers Behead 50 People in Northern Mozambique", 10 November 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/10/isil-linked-attackers-behead-50-people-in-northern-mozambique>.

148 J. K. Liazzat Bonate, "The Advent and Schisms of Sufi Orders in Mozambique, 1896–1964", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* vol. 26 no. 4 (2015): 483–501, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2015.1080976>.

Abdulbacar Musa Ismael Mangira, who emerged as an influential voice speaking up against the existing Islamic establishment.¹⁴⁹ As tensions between Sufis and Wahhabis simmered, post-independence Mozambique saw the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) rise to power, establishing a Marxist-socialist order that would secularise the state through the suppression of religious expression.

However, FRELIMO soon reconsidered this position, fearing further support of the Mozambican National Resistance by the Muslim community and Muslim majority nations.¹⁵⁰ In doing so, the government sanctioned the establishment of the Islamic Council of Mozambique (CISLAMO) in 1981 in Maputo, an arrangement that was widely viewed as an exclusion of Muslim community leaders in the northern provinces. Nonetheless, the leadership of CISLAMO came to be formed by the handful of Wahhabi graduates from the Gulf States, including Mangira, who was elected as the council’s coordinator and later its first ever secretary.¹⁵¹

Due to the fact that the Mozambican government had come to reject the notion that Islam and its various sects represented a threat to the status quo, financial and religious exchanges were permitted. Through CISLAMO, philanthropists and Muslim missionary organisations financed the travel of young Mozambican Muslims to countries such as Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Saudi Arabia for religious studies.¹⁵² Meanwhile, a radical sect was reported to have emerged in Nangade between 1989 and 1990 with practices that were unfamiliar to the local Muslim community and are similar to the practices of the current insurgent group, ASwJ. These practices included not wearing kufis, sometimes wearing cloths around their shaved heads and short trousers praying three times a day and entering mosques with shoes and weapons.¹⁵³

Concurrently, tensions within CISLAMO between Muslims from the northern provinces, (characterised as young black Africans) and southern “Moorish” Muslims (characterised as those of Indian or Arabic descent) came to a boiling point. As recent graduates from abroad, northern black African Muslims expressed discontent with their subordinate positions within the council, despite receiving a similar level of education to that of the older leadership. This cohort of recent graduates eventually split from CISLAMO in 1998 to establish their own sect, known as the Ansar al-Sunna.¹⁵⁴

In 2007, a radical sect emerged in Balama under the leadership of Sualehe Rafayel who spent several years in Tanzania before returning to his home village of Nhacole to join a Wahhabi mosque. Rafayel emerged with an alternative and extremist approach to Islam that rejected several longstanding core practices of the existing establishment and local communities, which led to tensions with local mosques and CISLAMO.¹⁵⁵ Rafayel went on to lead his sect from his own personal compound after tensions rose with local community members that

149 J.K. Liazzat Bonate, *Roots of Diversity in Mozambican Islam*, 129–149.

150 A. Dorina Bekoe, M. Stephanie Burchard and A. Sarah Daly, *Extremism in Mozambique: Interpreting Group Tactics and the Role of the Government’s Response in the Crisis in Cabo Delgado* (Virginia: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2020), 4.

151 Bonate, *Roots of Diversity in Mozambican Islam*, 129–149.

152 Bekoe et al., *Extremism in Mozambique*, 4.

153 Eric Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning”, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* vol. 14 no. 3 (2020): 396–412; Ngala Chrome, *Eastern Africa’s Regional Extremist Threat: Origins, Nature and Policy* (Nairobi: Center for Human Rights and Policy Studies, 2020), 19.

154 Ibid.

155 Morier-Genoud, “The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique”, 396–412.

made it difficult to facilitate teachings from a public mosque. In 2010, more reports of a radical sect emerged with the same description of the 1998 sect.¹⁵⁶ In May 2010, Rafayel was arrested by authorities and expelled a year later by the district administrator for refusing to comply with existing Islamic practices governed by CISLAMO. Rafayel and his adherents fled to Tanzania and returned at some point to establish themselves in an unknown part of Cabo Delgado.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, another radical sect emerged in Chuire district in 2010 under the leadership of Abdul Carimo. This sect is believed to have formed the genesis of the more prominent sect in MdP that emerged in 2014. Like Rafayel, Carimo led his sect from his personal compound before establishing his own mosque in Namuita after falling out with local Muslim community leaders; another affiliated mosque was established in Nhamissir. By 2016, the sect had established another mosque in Nanduadua in MdP; meanwhile, members of the sect clashed with Muslim community members in Chiure, which led to the death of one person.

The incident led to counter-protests against Carimo's sect that saw the mosque destroyed and items confiscated. Carimo was injured by a gunshot wound after he joined his sect in a protest outside a police station over the destruction of the mosque. After escaping hospital, Carimo was arrested and died in prison in 2018.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the MdP sect came to demonstrate similar characteristics and practices to prior sects, indicating a common ideological influence. Abdul Chucar, a Tanzanian ideologue, is believed to have held considerable influence over the MdP sect and to have been responsible for the exposure of its members to radical teachings of the Quran. Furthermore, some members of the sect are believed to have travelled to Kenya for religious education while others have been trained by the ADF in Eastern DRC.¹⁵⁹

Therefore, ASwJ follows a similar history to the emergence of jihadist groups and extremist networks across East and Central Africa, defined by international and regional exposure to fundamentalist teachings of Islam that was contrary to the existing practices of local communities. As a result, the leadership and members of ASwJ comprise both local and foreign nationals with established links to fundamentalist cells across the region that reach as far as Saudi Arabia, Libya, Algeria and Sudan.¹⁶⁰

It follows that the doctrinal debates (and exclusion) that facilitated the emergence of radical sects in northern Mozambique between 1981 to 2016 created the ideal environment for extremist networks further north to exploit and establish residence. This came as counterterrorism operations by Kenyan and Tanzanian authorities created an environment unsuitable for operations beyond indoctrination, recruitment and low-scale attacks. What makes ASwJ unique, however, is the way in which it emerged sporadically in various districts across Cabo Delgado under different individuals.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Chrome, *Eastern Africa's Regional Extremist Threat*, 19-20.

¹⁶⁰ Saide Habibe, Salvador Forquilha and João Pereira, *Islamic Radicalization in Northern Mozambique: The Case of Mocimboa da Praia* (Maputo: Institute for Social and Economic Studies, 2019), 11.

Although sects had similar characteristics and practices, the organisation could at best be described as a cluster of semi-coordinated cells or factions with no overarching leadership structure. Nonetheless, battleground successes of ASwJ over the past four years have in part been attributed to high levels of organisational and operational sophistication for an insurgency in its infancy, suggesting some level of impact caused by some of its members having trained outside Mozambique. These factors have come to demonstrate the significance of transnational factors defining the nature and capabilities of ASwJ.

Regional Linkages

The debate about the insurgency in Mozambique ranges between arguments that it is inherently local in nature and those arguing that it is foreign-orchestrated. While insurgents are mainly Mozambican from Cabo Delgado, mobilised by local political and socio-economic issues,¹⁶¹ it is clear that similar to the ADF, ASwJ is tightly connected to extremist networks in East, Central and Southern Africa in terms of funding,¹⁶² training and indoctrination.¹⁶³ Furthermore, according to interviews with former prisoners of the group, there are also a few well-trained Arabs among the insurgents and white people who speak only English.¹⁶⁴

Links are particularly strong to extremist networks along the coast in Tanzania, Kenya and Somalia. This is not least evident from the presence of foreign fighters,¹⁶⁵ who mainly come from these three countries.¹⁶⁶ In May 2020, the Mozambican attorney general confirmed this tendency, saying that of the 60 fighters currently kept in pre-trial detention, ten were foreign fighters from Tanzania (six), Kenya (two) and Somalia (two).¹⁶⁷ In another testament to the cross-border connection, in the March 2021 attack on Palma, a unit comprising between 100 and 120 fighters allegedly crossed from Tanzania to support the Palma offensive.¹⁶⁸

As we have already described, militants fled Tanzania to escape increasing counterterrorism pressure in Tanzania and allegedly joined ASwJ,¹⁶⁹ where they would eventually rise to senior roles in the group. Militants from Mozambique, however, also travelled to Tanzania to study and occasionally receive training.¹⁷⁰ The influence from further north came from Aboud Rogo, who allegedly had a strong influence

161 João Feijó, “Caracterização e Organização Social Dos Machababos a Partir Dos Discursos de Mulheres Raptadas”, Observatório do Meio Rural Working Paper, April 2021, <https://omrmz.org/omrweb/wp-content/uploads/OR-109-Caracterização-e-organização-social-dos-Machababos.pdf>.

162 According to SADC, the group receives funding from private donors and organisations in South Africa, Tanzania, DRC, Uganda and Burundi. See SADC, “Report of the double Troika plus Angola technical assessment mission to the Republic of Mozambique on the assessment of the security situation in Cabo Delgado and required regional support”, 21 April 2021.

163 “Mozambique: Islamists funded by illegal trade in timber and rubies – AIM report”, *Club of Mozambique*, 23 May 2018, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-islamists-funded-by-illegal-trade-in-timber-and-rubies-aim-report/>.

164 Feijó, “Caracterização e Organização Social Dos Machababos”, 3–4.

165 ACLED, “Cabo Ligado Weekly: May 18–24, 2020”.

166 “Mozambique, Tanzania join forces to tackle Cabo Delgado violence”, *Al-Jazeera*, 23 November 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/23/mozambique-tanzania-sign-deal-to-join-fight-against-armed-groups>; International Crisis Group, “Understanding the New U.S. Terrorism Designations in Africa,” 18 March 2021; Gregory Pirio, Robert Pittelli and Yussuf Adam, “The Emergence of Violent Extremism in Northern Mozambique”, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 25 March 2018.

167 “PGR pede equipamentos sofisticados e conhecimentos técnico-operativos”, 20 May 2020, Notícias Online, <https://www.jornalnoticias.co.mz/index.php/politica/97159-pgr-pede-equipamentos-sofisticados-e-conhecimentos-tecnico-operativos>.

168 Rhula Intelligence Solutions, “Mozambique Palma Attack – March 2021”, 16 April 2021.

169 International Crisis Group, “Al-Shabaab Five Years after Westgate: Still a Menace in East Africa”, Report no. 265, 21 September 2018; “Tracing the history of Mozambique’s mysterious and deadly insurgency”, *The Conversation*, 18 February 2019, <https://theconversation.com/tracing-the-history-of-mozambiques-mysterious-and-deadly-insurgency-111563>; Feijó, “Caracterização e Organização Social Dos Machababos”.

170 Feijó, “Caracterização e Organização Social Dos Machababos”.

on the leadership of ASwJ. The founders of the group were followers of Rogo and, although the cleric was killed in 2012, his teachings in Swahili continued to circulate in the region.¹⁷¹ In Cabo Delgado, Rogo's followers then adopted the cleric's teachings in their own mosques, which helped to expand his ideology. Such followers included a senior Tanzanian leader identified as “H.M.” (or “Great Hassan”), who distributed audiovisual material of radical clerics, including Rogo, to recruits.¹⁷² The links to Somalia are less clear but there are reports that militants from Mozambique travelled through Tanzania and Kenya to reach Somalia where they have received military training.¹⁷³ However, arguably more important is the migration the other way. Testimonies indicate that numerous Somalis have joined ASwJ. One of these is a former senior official in IS's Somalia Province, Mohamed Ahmed “Qahiye”. In 2018 Qahiye fled Somalia after internal conflict and, after a stint in Ethiopia, he travelled to Mozambique in early 2020 to join IS's newest affiliate. In a UN report, Qahiye is described as a veteran military commander and it is plausible that while in Cabo Delgado he assisted local militants developing their tactics, which became much more sophisticated in 2020.¹⁷⁴

ASwJ also has links to Uganda, which directly connects it to the other ISCAP constituent group in DRC, the ADF. In addition to their shared formal affiliation to ISCAP, the connection between the groups in DRC and Mozambique is related to the Usafi mosque in southern Kampala. The mosque was previously headed by Ibrahim Kimera, who was once connected to the ADF, but after Kimera's death, Abdur Rahman Faisal became its new leader. It was under Faisal's leadership that the mosque turned into a recruitment and training centre for the ADF.¹⁷⁵ Faisal himself later became a central figure in the Cabo Delgado insurgency until he was eventually arrested by Mozambican police.¹⁷⁶ There are also examples from several years ago of ASwJ members and leaders travelling from Mozambique to DRC to train.¹⁷⁷ In a recent report containing testimonies from women held captive by ASwJ, one woman reported that a Mozambican man among the insurgents had spent ten years outside Mozambique travelling to DRC and the Arabian Peninsula.

Finally, it is known that several South Africans joined the insurgency even prior to ASwJ joining IS. In 2018, Renaldo Smith and Mohammed Suliman, accompanied by 15 others, left South Africa to join the group in Mozambique. Shortly after his arrival, Suliman appeared in a picture pledging allegiance to IS.¹⁷⁸ If reports are true, it was not only fighters coming from South Africa, however: it is suspected that individuals based in South Africa also act as key financiers of the militant activities in Mozambique.

¹⁷¹ Pirio et al., “The Emergence of Violent Extremism in Northern Mozambique”.

¹⁷² Philip Obaji Jr., “Growing Insurgency in Mozambique Poses Danger to Southern Africa”, 21 March 2021; Habibe et al., *Islamic Radicalization in Northern Mozambique*.

¹⁷³ “Mozambique: Islamists funded by illegal trade in timber and rubies – AIM report”, *Club of Mozambique*, 23 May 2018, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-islamists-funded-by-illegal-trade-in-timber-and-rubies-aim-report/>.

¹⁷⁴ UN Panel of Experts on Somalia, “Letter dated 28 September 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia addressed to the President of the Security Council”, S/2020/949, 28 September 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_949.pdf.

¹⁷⁵ Baker Battle Lule, “Was Usafi mosque a terrorist hide-out, or security front?”, *The Observer*, 9 May 2018, <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/57642-was-usafi-mosque-a-terrorist-hide-out-or-security-front.html>; Conrad Ahabwe, “How Usafi Mosque was turned into ADF training camp”, *PML Daily*, 30 April 2018, <https://www.pmldaily.com/news/2018/04/how-usafi-mosque-was-turned-into-adf-training-camp.html>.

¹⁷⁶ “Uganda seeks terror suspects’ extradition from Mozambique”, *APA News*, 31 January 2019, <http://apanews.net/en/news/uganda-seeks-terror-suspects-extradition-from-mozambique>.

¹⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, “Understanding the New U.S. Terrorism Designations in Africa”, 18 March 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/understanding-new-us-terrorism-designations-africa>.

¹⁷⁸ “Chilling links between Mozambique ISIS and South Africa – report”, *Club of Mozambique*, 3 September 2020, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/chilling-links-between-mozambique-isis-and-south-africa-report-170283/>.

Becoming Part of ISCAP



First Islamic State claim of responsibility for an attack in Mozambique, 3 June 2019

The first known indication that ASwJ was on course to pledge allegiance to IS came in the spring of 2018, when a picture started to circulate online in Telegram groups showing a group of fighters in Mozambique pledging allegiance to IS.¹⁷⁹ In the picture, six militants, including two South Africans, pose with weapons in front of a black flag with the shahada. Accompanying the picture was text stating that a pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would soon follow. Yet it was not until 4 June that year that IS first claimed an attack in Mozambique. On 24 July, a group of fighters in Mozambique were shown pledging allegiance in a video issued by ISCAP.¹⁸⁰ Over the following months, IS claimed several more attacks and published photos of captured war spoils.



Six fighters in Mozambique pledge allegiance to Islamic State

¹⁷⁹ US Department of State, “State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique”, media note, 10 March 2021; see also tweet from Tore Refslund Hamming (@ToreRHamming), 1 June 2018, <https://twitter.com/ToreRHamming/status/1002457746728538113>.

¹⁸⁰ Hamming, “The Islamic State in Mozambique”, *Lawfare*, 24 January 2021.

As in the case of DRC, critics object over whether ASwJ did indeed pledge allegiance to IS. Generally relying on the same arguments that little proof of such affiliation exists, they argue that IS is opportunistically attempting to appropriate the success of the Mozambican insurgency. In the case of Mozambique, we know far less about the process and nature of affiliation largely due to the absence of information about the insurgency’s leading figures and the group’s general secrecy in terms of communication. Hence, there remains legitimate uncertainty as to whether the entire insurgency in Mozambique joined IS or if the pledge of allegiance resulted in factionalisation similar to the situation in DRC. It is interesting to note that the US State Department supports the idea that the entire insurgency shifted its allegiance.¹⁸¹

Indicative of the relationship between IS and ASwJ is the fact that since June 2019, IS’s media department has claimed 53 attacks in Mozambique and on more than 20 occasions published articles on or photos from the group in Mozambique in its official propaganda. Judging from its history of affiliations outside the Levant since 2014, IS is not known to claim affiliates without any substance behind such claims. However, the relatively low number of attack claims, considering the frequency of attacks, could be used as an argument to sow doubts about the affiliation or at least its strength. This will be discussed below.

With little publicly available information, the fact that both the UN and the US support the argument that ASwJ is an official affiliate of IS weighs heavily. In its recent reports, the UN refers to the insurgency as “Islamic State”, based on member states’ intelligence. In December 2020, Nathan Sales, the US coordinator for counterterrorism, referred to the insurgents as “ISIS actors”,¹⁸² and, in March 2021, the USA designated the insurgents as an official IS affiliate.¹⁸³ On the link between IS and ASwJ, acting coordinator for counterterrorism John Godfrey even stated that there exists clear evidence but that such evidence remains secret.¹⁸⁴

With no official communication from the ASwJ leadership on the affiliation to IS, the recent testimonies from women imprisoned by the group is one of the few insider accounts. On the identity of the group, one woman offered interesting insights:

“The group that was with us said they were from Islamic State, especially the Tanzanians. That’s what they said. They even wrote in a house there, in English, that Islamic State was a good thing. And the youth; one Tanzanian that was in Mocimboa [da Praia] for three years, he said that he had found Islamic State through a social media network. And he volunteered. And began to be prepared [trained] in other countries and, when he was ready, went to Mozambique.”¹⁸⁵

If trusted, this account shows that within ASwJ there is sympathy for and self-identification with IS. These accounts are important to qualify the strength of affiliation, although they reveal little about its scale.

181 This assessment is based on the fact that the US State Department claims that the IS-affiliated group in Mozambique is responsible for all attacks since October 2017: see US Department of State, “State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique”.

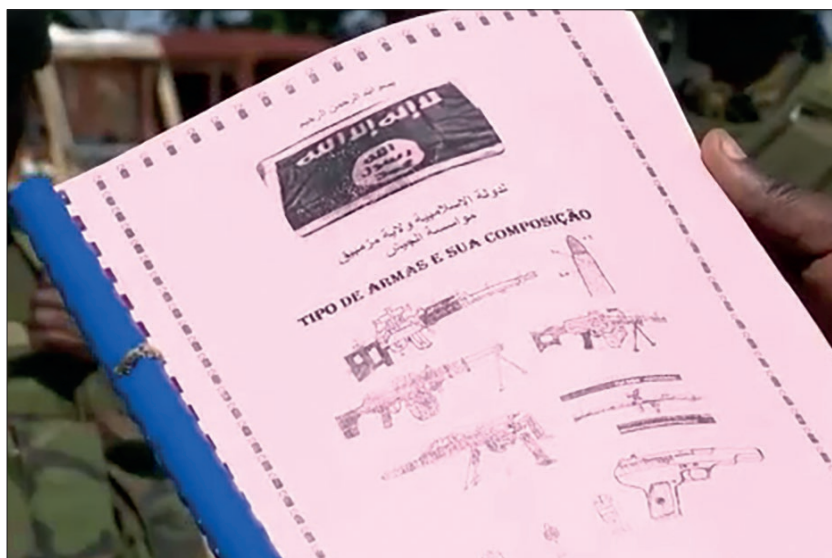
182 Anita Powell, “US Offers Resources to Help ‘Contain, Degrade and Defeat’ Mozambique Insurgency”, VOA News, 8 December 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-offers-resources-help-contain-degrade-and-defeat-mozambique-insurgency>.

183 US Department of State, “State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique”.

184 “Mozambique: U.S. Names ISIS-Mozambique and its ‘Leader’ as Global ‘Terrorists’”, All Africa, 19 March 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202103190467.html>.

185 Feijó, “Caracterização e Organização Social Dos Machababos”, 4. Thanks to Sam Ratner and Tórnas Queface for the translation.

The most recent indication of such self-identification is the discovery by Rwandan forces after the recapture of Mocímboa da Praia of five books on weaponry, explosives, tactics, communications and military engineering. Although the books are in Portuguese, their front covers contain the Islamic State flag and the Arabic title containing a self-identification as “wilayat mozambique”.



Book on weaponry left by ASwJ in Mocímboa da Praia containing the description “wilayat mozambique”

Leaders of the Insurgency

Contrary to the situation in DRC, we know much less about the leadership of the insurgency in Mozambique, in terms of the profiles of its leading figures and their specific roles, and the hierarchy. No official leadership statements exist and in no official propaganda issued by IS has any leader been identified.

In its designation of ASwJ as an IS affiliate, the US State Department revealed that the person allegedly heading the group is Abu Yasir Hassan, also known as Yaseer Hassan or Abu Qasim.¹⁸⁶ Born sometime between 1981 and 1983, Abu Yasir is known as a religious leader from Tanzania’s Pwani region who migrated to Mozambique several years ago.¹⁸⁷ According to available sources, he previously spent time in DRC, where he had links to militant groups. Abu Yasir thus exemplifies the regional character of the Mozambican insurgency and how intertwined it is with the Central and East African jihadist ecosystem. Despite the US designation of Abu Yasir, however, there remains doubt about his actual role and whether he is the overall emir of the group or one of its leading officials.¹⁸⁸

In August 2018, Mozambique’s police revealed the names of six leading figures of ASwJ: Abdul Faizal, Abdul Remane, Abdul Raim,

¹⁸⁶ US Department of State, “Designation of Abu Yasir Hassan as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist”, 11 March 2021, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/03/11/2021-04907/designation-of-abu-yasir-hassan-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist>.

¹⁸⁷ “Mozambique: U.S. Names ISIS-Mozambique and its ‘Leader’ as Global ‘Terrorists’”.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Nuno Remane, Ibn Omar and Salimo Kijepel.¹⁸⁹ In 2021, a report identified two others, Mustafá and Maulana Ali Cassimo, as well as naming Ibn Omar once again.¹⁹⁰ While little additional information exists about these six leaders, there is information about Bonomade Machude Omar, or Ibn Omar (also known as Nuro Saíde or Abu Surakha), from Cabo Delgado’s Palma district. Born in 1988 in Palma, he went on to study Islam in several countries outside Mozambique, but eventually returned to his native country to work at the Africa Muslim Agency in Cabo Delgado’s provincial capital, Pemba.¹⁹¹ After receiving training in DRC, Ibn Omar became a senior military official in the insurgency and has been described as the architect behind the insurgency’s campaign in Cabo Delgado. Last year, Mozambique’s Ministry of Defence announced his death, but this appears not to have been accurate.¹⁹² In fact, in a recent statement designating Ibn Omar as a “specially designated global terrorist”, the US State Department stated that he is the head of military and external affairs, “external” potentially referring to operations in Tanzania. According to the statement, he was allegedly the person in charge of the attack on the Amarula Hotel during the attack on Palma in March 2021.¹⁹³

Ibn Omar appeared in a rare video publication after an attack in MdP with a message for local residents.¹⁹⁴ Warning them to cooperate with the government, he tells residents that his group and its Islamic governance will take care of them and protect them as long as they do not assist the government. If they do, he says, the group will execute every one of them. Playing on the injustice of the Maputo government, which is held to take care only of the elite, he tells locals that his group will implement more justice when in power.



Senior ASwJ member Ibn Omar with a message after an attack in Mocímboa da Praia, 2019

189 Sunguta West, “Leaders of Mozambican Militant Group Revealed”, *Militant Leadership Monitor* vol. 9 no. 9 (4 October 2018), <https://jamestown.org/brief/leaders-of-mozambican-militant-group-revealed/>.

190 João Feijó, “From the ‘Faceless Enemy’ to the Hypothesis of Dialogue: Identities, Pretensions and Channels of Communication with the Machababs”, *Observatório do Meio Rural*, 10 August 2021.

191 “Bonomado Machude Omar ou Ibn Omar: The Mozambican face of terrorism in Cabo Delgado”, *Centro de Jornalismo Investigativo*, 22 September 2020, <https://cjimoz.org/news/en/bonomado-machude-omar-ou-ibn-omar-the-mozambican-face-of-terrorism-in-cabo-delgado/>.

192 See tweet from Nuno Rogeiro (@Nrogeiro), 7 July 2020, <https://twitter.com/nrogeiro/status/1280572910776844290>.

193 US Department of State, “Designations of ISIS-Mozambique, JNIM, and al-Shabaab Leaders”, 6 August 2021, <https://www.state.gov/designations-of-isis-mozambique-jnim-and-al-shabaab-leaders/>.

194 The authors thank Luis Nhachote for sharing the video.

Another of the six leaders, Nuro Adremane, allegedly spent time in Somalia receiving military training and travelling through Kenya with several companions from Mozambique.¹⁹⁵ Other reports have identified a senior figure named Musa, originally from Gambia, as Abdala Likonga, a native of MdP. Likonga allegedly travelled first to Kenya and later to DRC to seek religious education and receive military training. Upon his return to Mozambique, he became one of the group’s military commanders in charge of its first attacks in 2017.¹⁹⁶ Some reports even claim that he outranks Ibn Omar as the most senior military commander of ASwJ.¹⁹⁷

Tactics and Propaganda

Since the launch of its military campaign in October 2017, ASwJ’s insurgency has grown in strength and sophistication,¹⁹⁸ with the group being described as well organised and wealthy.¹⁹⁹ The group has perpetrated hundreds of attacks, killing thousands and displacing many more, with targets and tactics changing over time. Ever since IS’s first claim of an attack in Mozambique in June 2019, the group has publicly taken responsibility for 58 attacks (see figure 2).²⁰⁰ In the period from June 2019 to October 2020, attack claims ranged between one and five monthly attacks in Mozambique.

At first, in 2017–18, the insurgents’ tactics were defined by caution and simplicity. The militants relied on guerilla tactics targeting smaller villages mainly at night and assassinating local Muslim leaders. Late in 2018, they intensified their campaign and slowly expanded activities to daytime attacks on isolated villages. In 2019, the scope and lethality of insurgent attacks increased both in terms of numbers and geographical expansion, with Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia and Palma being the most affected districts. November 2019 marked the first time ASwJ made an incursion into Tanzania, killing six in the village of Ngongo on the Tanzanian side of the Rovuma river.²⁰¹ Fighters now employed more advanced weapons captured from police and army forces that enabled more complex tactics. Occasionally dressed in army uniforms to deceive and infiltrate local towns, they started to target the better secured and more populous coastal region and important infrastructure, while also expanding their targets from primarily male civilians to include police and army forces and explicitly targeting Christians.²⁰² This was around the time IS began to take responsibility for the attacks in Mozambique. The attack on 6 December 2019 near Malali in Cabo Delgado is an example of these changing tactics, with a larger group of insurgents targeting an army post with a variety of weapons, killing 16 soldiers and capturing weapons and vehicles. In the aftermath of the attack, IS issued a photo set showing fighters posing on a captured police truck with one of them holding a black flag with the shahada.²⁰³

195 Sunguta West, “Leaders of Mozambican Militant Group Revealed”.

196 Centro de Jornalismo Investigativo, “Lifting of the fog reveals ring-leaders behind Cabo Delgado terrorism”, 29 September 2020, <https://cjmjmoz.org/news/lifting-of-the-fog-reveals-ring-leaders-behind-cabo-delgado-terrorism/>.

197 “ISCAP Mozambique Elusive Leadership Includes Ibn Omar And Abdala Shaki Radicalized In DRC And Kenya”, *Strategic Intelligence*, 7 October 2020, <https://intelligencebriefs.com/iscap-mozambique-elusive-leadership-includes-ibn-omar-and-abdala-shaki-radicalized-in-drc-and-kenya/>.

198 Tim Lister, “Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique Grows in Sophistication and Reach”, *CTC Sentinel* vol. 13 no. 10 (October 2020); “Who are the fighters launching attacks in northern Mozambique?”, *Al-Jazeera*, 29 March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/29/who-are-the-fighters-launching-attacks-in-northern-mozambique>.

199 Feijó, “Caracterização e Organização Social Dos Machababos”.

200 As of 10 October 2021.

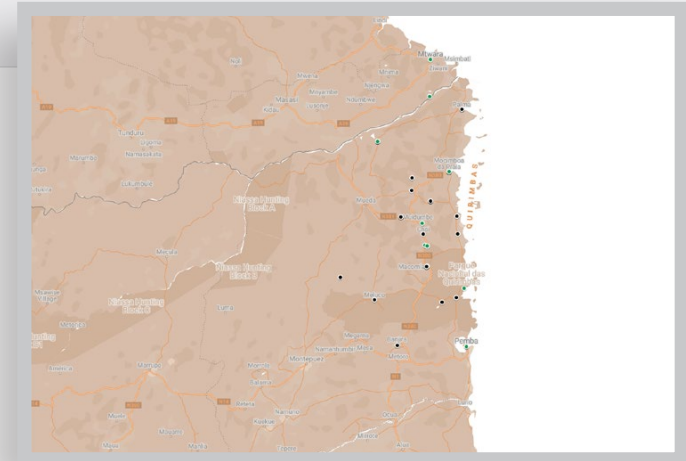
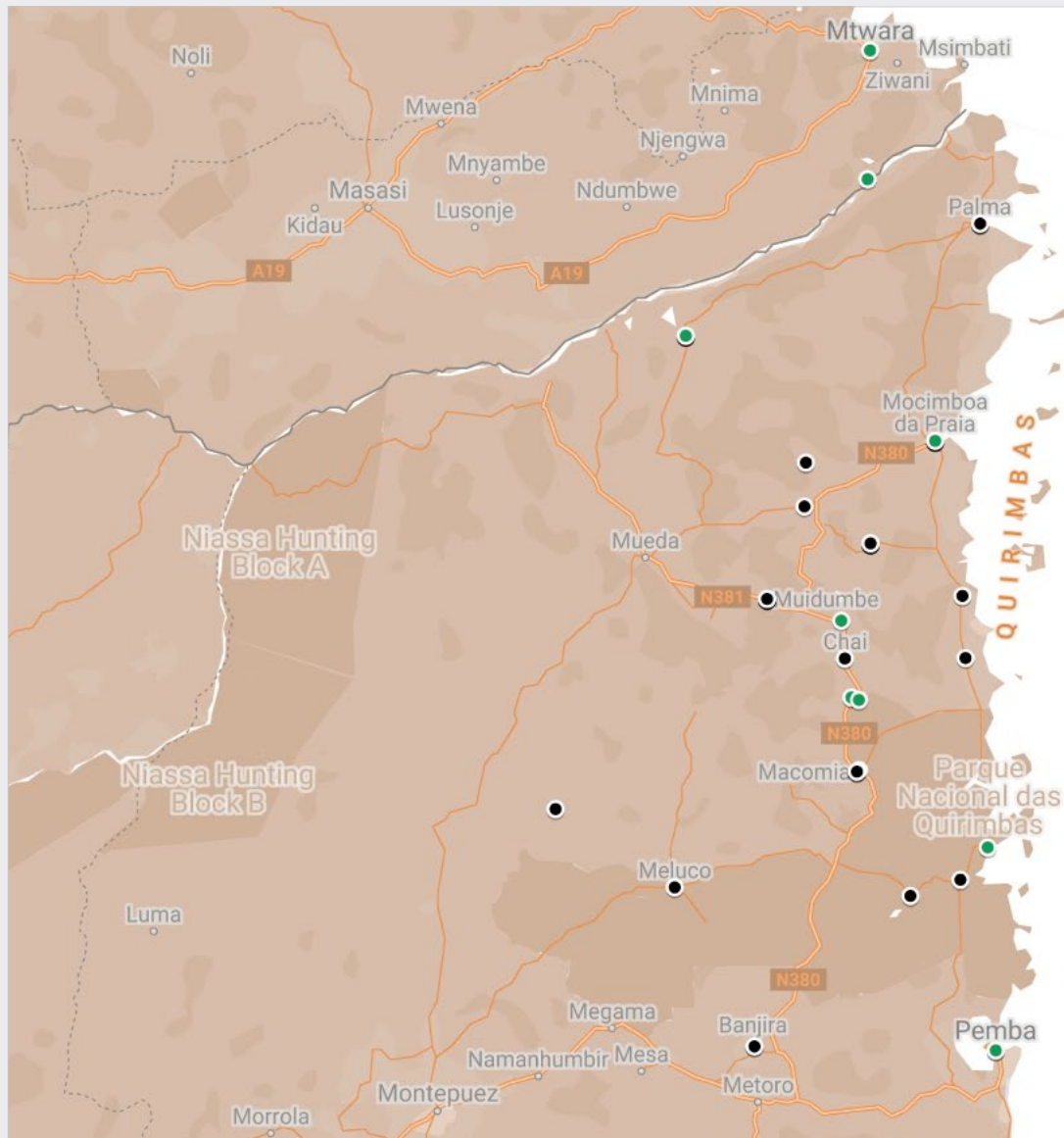
201 Agence France-Presse, “Six killed in Tanzania attack near border with Mozambique”, *News 24*, 13 November 2019, <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/six-killed-in-tanzania-attack-near-border-with-mozambique-20191113>.

202 Hamming, “The Islamic State in Mozambique.”

203 Tweet from Jasmine Opperman (@Jasminechic00), 8 December 2019, <https://twitter.com/jasminechic00/status/1203693168170016769?lang=da>.

Figure 2: Islamic State-claimed attacks in Mozambique

● Armed Assault ● Arson



In 2020–21, group tactics evolved further with an increasing focus on larger urban centres. In March 2020 insurgents managed to control MdP and Quissanga for a few days before retreating, but in August the group once again attacked MdP and this time it took full control of the city for a period. The enhanced brutality of the group also came to full expression in 2020 with first a massacre of more than 50 villagers in Xitaxi village in Muidumbe,²⁰⁴ and in November with another 50 civilians beheaded on a football field in Muatide village.²⁰⁵ Indicative of its transnational trajectory, in October 2020 IS claimed ASwJ’s second attack in neighbouring Tanzania around Mtwara. Considering the group appears to be influenced by a militant milieu in Tanzania and a leadership composed of Tanzanians, this should come as no surprise. Undoubtedly the 24 March 2021 attack on Palma city that lasted until 4 April is the clearest example of the group’s tactical evolution with fighters infiltrating the city prior to the assault, followed by attacks from several sides.²⁰⁶ This included a simultaneous attack in Mucojo and Quiterajo in Macomia that aimed to divert attention and resources from the assault on Palma.²⁰⁷ The following day, 25 March, some 100 to 120 insurgent reinforcements crossed the border from Tanzania to support the ongoing attack in Palma.²⁰⁸ The incident showcased the tactical capacity of ASwJ to coordinate a local and transnational attack.



Screenshot from a video released by Islamic State’s Amaq News on the Palma attack

Testimonies from victims previously held captive by ASwJ also describe the advanced organisation of the group in three types of camps: their permanent camps deep in the jungle, where the leadership is located; temporary camps located 30 to 40 kilometres

204 Jason Burke, “Islamist group kills 52 in ‘cruel and diabolical’ Mozambique massacre”, *The Guardian*, 22 April 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/22/islamist-group-kills-52-in-cruel-and-diabolical-mozambique-massacre>.

205 “Militant Islamists ‘behead more than 50’ in Mozambique”, *BBC*, 9 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54877202>.

206 Emilia Columbo and Austin C. Doctor, “Foreign Fighters and the Trajectory of Violence in Northern Mozambique”, *War on the Rocks*, 13 April 2021.

207 Rhula Intelligent Solutions, *Mozambique: Palma Attack–March 2021* (Maputo: Rhula Intelligent Solutions, 2021), 2–3.

208 Ibid.

outside areas where they are planning attacks; and advanced camps immediately outside areas of attacks to offer direct operational support.²⁰⁹

One of the reasons we know so little about the Mozambican insurgency is that it has adopted a secretive identity similar to the ADF’s strategy pre-2016.²¹⁰ Neither before or after affiliation with IS has the group or its leaders been open to communicating about the insurgency. In recent years, jihadists have freely communicated, including repeating mantras that propaganda and the media is half of jihad, but in the case of Mozambique it appears ASwJ has chosen a different approach. This prioritisation is most likely the result of a desire to safeguard the leadership and fighters while focusing on communicating with local audiences. At this point, only a few unofficial videos exist. After the affiliation with IS, the group’s Amaq news agency has published only a few low-quality videos showing the aftermath of attacks.

This approach is plausibly also why IS has not claimed more than 53 attacks since June 2019, despite ASwJ executing several hundred attacks in the same period. This is one argument to explain the absence of any attack claims between November 2020 and March 2021 and again between 29 March and 23 June 2021. Another, weaker explanation is that the lack of internet connection in large parts of northeastern Mozambique makes it difficult for the insurgents to communicate with IS’s media department. While this obviously is a challenge, it hardly explains why some attacks are claimed while others are not and why only a small number of videos and photo sets have been published.

The claim of responsibility on 23 June initiated a new wave of public communication with a total of eleven attack claims issued throughout July. The reason for the sudden change in communication is likely to be found in the start of foreign military intervention in Mozambique with a contingent of 1,000 Rwandan troops arriving in July followed by troops from several SADC member states. In particular, the arrival of Rwandan troops has turned the momentum of the conflict, at least in the short term, with the army supported by the Rwandans first capturing Awasse and, in early August, MdP. For now, however, it appears ASwJ has made a tactical retreat from both cities and in response spread out its activities across Cabo Delgado as a manoeuvre to stretch army forces as much as possible.

In late July, alongside the increase in attack claims, more unofficial material started to emerge. On 26 July a video was shared on Telegram showing a large group of fighters dressed in military fatigues and wearing red headbands. They were sitting behind a line-up of heavy weaponry. The following day, another video containing footage of fighters doing training exercises was shared. In a third video from 8 August, approximately 20 fighters are seen in a pick-up truck yelling “dawlatul islam” followed by the usual proclamations of “takbir” and “baqiya”. Prompted by the foreign intervention, the global IS supporter community also started a digital campaign targeting Rwandan forces using the hashtag #Christian_crimes_Rwanda, featuring statements in Arabic, English, French and Swahili.

²⁰⁹ Feijó, “Caracterização e Organização Social Dos Machababos”.

²¹⁰ Eric Morier-Genoud, “Tracing the history of Mozambique’s mysterious and deadly insurgency”, *The Conversation*, 18 February 2019.

قتلوا وأصابوا العشرات من الجيش الموزمبيقي

مجدداً.. جنود الخلافة يسيطرون على (موسيمبوا دا برايا) ومينائها الحيوي

مقتل العشرات وفرار البقية

وحول حصيلة الخسائر البشرية في صفوف الجيش الموزمبيقي، قال المصدر إن الهجوم أسفر منذ أول يوم له، عن سقوط نحو ١٢٠ قتيلًا وجرحاً في صفوفهم والسيطرة على كميات كبيرة من الأسلحة والذخائر والمعدات المختلفة، وأكد المصدر أن عدد القتلى الذين سقطوا في الهجوم هو الأكبر منذ انطلاق عملياتهم الجهادية في المنطقة، والله الحمد.

رواية الجيش الموزمبيقي

وفي أعقاب الهجوم، صرح مصدر عسكري موزمبيقي لوكالة أنباء صليبية إن "البناء سقط". وإن



جنود الخلافة داخل ميناء مدينة (موسيمبوا دا برايا) بعد إحكام السيطرة عليها

Above: al-Naba article on Mozambique and MdP attack, August 2020.

Below: al-Naba article on the foreign intervention in Cabo Delgado, August 2021

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الافتتاحية العدد ٢٩٨ الخميس ٢١ ذي الحجة ١٤٤٢ هـ

بل الساعة موعدهم!



أجلها، وهي توحيد سيجاته، ولا سبيل مقسدة أسوأ من الشرك، ينصر الإسلام إلى تحقيق ذلك إلا بقتال عن أشرك به وناصب المسلمين العدا، ولأجل هذه الغاية سخر المجاهدون حروبهم ضد جيوش الصليب في موزمبيق والكونغو، وعندها أحزاب الباطل ضد دولة الإسلام، فقد

وعند الله تعالى عباد المؤمنين القائمين على أمره بالغلبة والفوز في الدارين، وفي المقابل توفد الكافرين على اختلاف طوائفهم وتحالفاتهم بالهزيمة في الدنيا والعذاب في الآخرة، وهذا من عدله سبحانه

Despite the growth in public communication throughout July and August, ASwJ's output remains peculiar for an IS affiliate and the group leadership's general unwillingness to communicate may not please IS. The insurgency in Mozambique is a success story for the caliphate and its capture of larger urban centres is particularly useful from a propaganda perspective and clearly resonates among online IS supporters who frequently praise the military achievements. It is thus possible that the Mozambican case offers an interesting example of an affiliate employing its advantages to inform the nature of affiliation with IS to a new extreme.

6. Islamic State in South Africa

As Islamic State rose to notoriety following rapid territorial gains in Syria, the extremist landscape shifted, as a number of South Africans sought to join IS. Those known to have successfully made the journey to Syria include Patrick Modise and Rashid Moosagie, who relocated with their families, and Musa Abu Mujahid Oscar, Fayaaz Valli, Abu Hurayra al-Hindi (also known as al-Afriki) and Bilal and Ahmed Cajee.²¹¹

South Africa currently has four cases related to IS in which suspects Brandon-Lee and Tony-Lee Thulsie and Ronaldo (Arashad) Smith attempted to travel to Syria to join IS in 2015 before being stopped by South Africa’s Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, also known as the Hawks.²¹² The trio were subsequently released and placed under surveillance and were alleged to be found plotting attacks against Jewish and American institutions in South Africa on behalf of IS.

On the day of their arrest on the 9th of July 2016, the Hawks initially raided Smith’s home, who allegedly agreed to become a state witness for the case against the twins. State prosecutors were keen to use Smith to build a case against the twins and therefore placed Smith under witness protection and thoroughly interrogated him. However, Smith claimed his statements implicating the twins were made under duress, which included threats made against his wife and in-laws.²¹³

After Smith managed to escape witness protection just a few months after the arrests of the Thulsie twins in July 2016, his whereabouts remained unknown for at least four years. However, in September 2020, reports emerged that Smith had fled to Mozambique and was identified in a viral image of men holding an Islamic State banner in an unknown location, one of whom was identified as another South African national, Mohammed Suliman.²¹⁴ Meanwhile, the twins were charged separately with three counts of contravening the Protection of Constitutional Democracy against Terrorist and Related Activities Act (2004).

Ebrahim and Fatima Patel were arrested and charged on the same day in a separate incident for being in contravention of the Firearms Control Act and the Explosives Act after being found with bullets and stun grenades.²¹⁵ Two years later, Fatima Patel was re-arrested with her husband, Sayfydeen Aslam Del Vecchio, and a Malawian

211 Nashira Davids and Philani Nombembe, “PE man takes family to join Islamic State”, 19 April 2015, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2015-04-19-pe-man-takes-family-to-join-islamic-state/>; Simon Allison, “Exclusive: Is this the first South African fighting for the ISIS?”, 22 February 2015, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-02-22-exclusive-is-this-the-first-south-african-fighting-for-the-isis/>.

212 Christian Jokinen, “Islamic State’s South African Fighters in Mozambique: The Thulsie Twins Case”, 5 November 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/islamic-states-south-african-fighters-in-mozambique-the-thulsie-twins-case/>.

213 Barry Bateman, “Thulsie Twins: State Witness Claims His Statement Was Coerced”, 29 July 2016, <https://ewn.co.za/2016/07/29/State-witness-alleges-coerced-statement-in-Thulsie-twins-case>.

214 Club of Mozambique, “Chilling links between Mozambique ISIS and South Africa – report”, 3 September 2020, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/chilling-links-between-mozambique-isis-and-south-africa-report-170283/>.

215 Graeme Hosken, “Police conduct in terror case questioned”, 24 March 2017, <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2017-03-24-police-conduct-in-terror-case-questioned/>.

national, Ahmad “Bazooka” Mussa in February 2018 for their alleged involvement in the kidnapping and murder of British botanists Rod and Rachel Saunders.²¹⁶

The trio had been under the surveillance of the Hawks since Patel’s initial arrest. According to Detective Warrant Officer Anuresh Lutchman, the trio planned and coordinated the murder of the elderly couple through encrypted messaging services. Lutchman further testified to seeing an IS flag on the premises of Patel and Del Vecchio’s home in Durban.²¹⁷

It has also been alleged that the trio erected an IS flag at the reserve in KwaZulu-Natal province where the couple disappeared. Patel and Del Vecchio were arrested in their homestead where police also uncovered items belonging to the Saunders and valuables purchased using funds from the couple’s bank accounts. The trio face four counts of contravening the Protection of Constitutional Democracy Against Terror and Related Activities Act (2004).

In 2019, a senior state prosecutor presented to the Verulam Family Court the testimony of investigating officer Adriaan van Jaarsveld, who testified to sketches of key access and exit points of the court being found in Del Vecchio’s cell during a search on 14 May at the Westville Correctional Centre by prison wardens.²¹⁸ According to van Jaarsveld, the sketch detailed an attempted escape in which “the accused would not refrain from attacking the police, prosecutors and the judicial staff and would die as martyrs in the process, as per their ideology.”²¹⁹ As a result, Del Vecchio and Mussa were moved to a maximum security prison as the trio await trial.

Meanwhile, in May 2018, knife-wielding men murdered Shaheed Abbas Essop and seriously injured Moulana Ali Nchiyane and Mohammed Ali, a caretaker, at the Imam Hussain mosque in Verulam, Durban.²²⁰ The mosque library was also petrol-bombed, destroying the mosque’s Korans and other valuable assets.²²¹ The following day an incendiary device was discovered to have been planted overnight at the mosque while the Hawks continued to comb the scene.²²² The same type of device was left in various locations, including parking lots and shopping centres, between May 2018 and October 2018.²²³

Farhad Hooper was one of twelve men arrested for their alleged involvement in the mosque attack and the planting of incendiary devices. Hooper was apprehended at his home in Reservoir Hills in Durban which, according to a police affidavit, was allegedly being used as a training camp. IS DVDs and a kidnapped victim were found

216 Nabeelah Shaik and Mervyn Naidoo, “Isis links of botanists’ alleged killers ‘exaggerated’”, 6 May 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/sunday-tribune/news/isis-links-of-botanists-alleged-killers-exaggerated-14806002>; BBC, “Rodney Saunders: South Africa identifies body of missing horticulturist”, 26 April 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43901056>.

217 ANA Reporter, “Kidnappers of UK couple discussed plans to ‘kill the kuffar’”, 6 March 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/kidnappers-of-uk-couple-discussed-plans-to-kill-the-kuffar-13627042>; Zululand Observer, “Body identified as missing botanist in ISIS-linked case”, 25 April 2018, <https://zululandobserver.co.za/169890/body-identified-missing-botanist/>.

218 Orrin Singh, “Security tightened at KZN court as alleged Isis trio’s ‘escape plan’ revealed”, 19 August 2019, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-19-security-tightened-at-kzn-court-as-alleged-isis-trios-escape-plan-revealed/>.

219 Ibid.

220 Rebecca Davis, “Inside the community where terror struck”, 17 May 2018, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-05-17-inside-the-community-where-terror-struck/>.

221 Mxolisi Mngadi, “Smell of smoke still lingers inside Verulam mosque”, 22 June 2018, <https://www.news24.com/news24/SouthAfrica/News/smell-of-smoke-still-lingers-inside-verulam-mosque-20180622>.

222 Gia Nicolaides, “Device Found at Verulam Mosque Confirmed as Homemade Device Used to Start Fires”, 14 May 2018, <https://ewn.co.za/2018/05/14/device-found-at-verulam-mosque-confirmed-as-homemade-device-used-to-start-fires>.

223 Suthentira Govender, “Three Arrested for Durban Bombings”, 5 October 2018, <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-10-05-three-arrested-for-durban-bombings/>.

in his basement.²²⁴ However, in July 2020, the twelve accused were released.²²⁵ The magistrate dismissed the case stating the twelve were prejudiced by a lack of evidence and a series of unsubstantive adjournments by state prosecutors.

Only two weeks later, South African police uncovered a kidnapping syndicate in Kliprivier, south of Johannesburg, following a rescue operation of a 72-year-old businessman who had been held hostage for 18 days.²²⁶ Police arrested five suspects on the property, including two foreign nationals from Somalia and Ethiopia, who were part of the twelve suspects released from charges related to the Verulam mosque attack.

IS material, weapons and foreign military uniforms were found, leading to speculation that the case had wider links to international terrorism. This came after IS issued a warning against South Africa’s intervention in Mozambique and discovered that accomplices of the five suspects had fled to Mozambique.²²⁷ This case and its possible connections to Verulam is considered one of the biggest breakthroughs relating domestic affairs to international terrorism in South Africa.

In June, Hooper was one of five suspects arrested by police during a raid in Mayville, Durban, where ammunition, firearms and jewelry were seized. Considering Hooper’s prior involvement in a terror-related case, this incident continues to typify the nature of an emerging threat of IS in South Africa, defined by a hybridity of crime and extremism.

Considering the cases mentioned above, the insurgency in Mozambique has several implications for the nature of the threat of terrorism in South Africa. While it is worth noting that IS has no official presence in South Africa at present, suspects found in possession of IS material are a cause for concern, particularly as ASwJ has begun attracting recruits from South Africa.

Investigations are currently ongoing to determine the source of revenue for ASwJ. It has been established that the insurgency is being supported by transnational flows of funds from across East, Southern and Central Africa through mobile money transfer platforms.²²⁸ For South Africa, this demonstrates an ongoing trajectory towards more substantial domestic ties and support of international terrorism than never before.

Last year, security officials confirmed the presence since 2015 of several IS cells in South Africa.²²⁹ As the South African National Defense Force continue to participate in the ongoing SADC Mission in Mozambique against ASwJ, the likelihood of increased recruitment, material support and possibly attacks increases.

224 Peter Fabricius, “Kliprivier kidnapping cell was funding Islamic State terrorism, say sources”, 30 July 2020, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-30-kliprivier-kidnapping-cell-was-funding-islamic-state-terrorism-say-sources/>.

225 Kailene Pillay, “KZN terror suspects accused of Woolworths bombings and deadly mosque attack free after 2-year court battle”, 14 July 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/mercury/kzn-terror-suspects-accused-of-woolworths-bombings-and-deadly-mosque-attack-free-after-2-year-court-battle-50948917>.

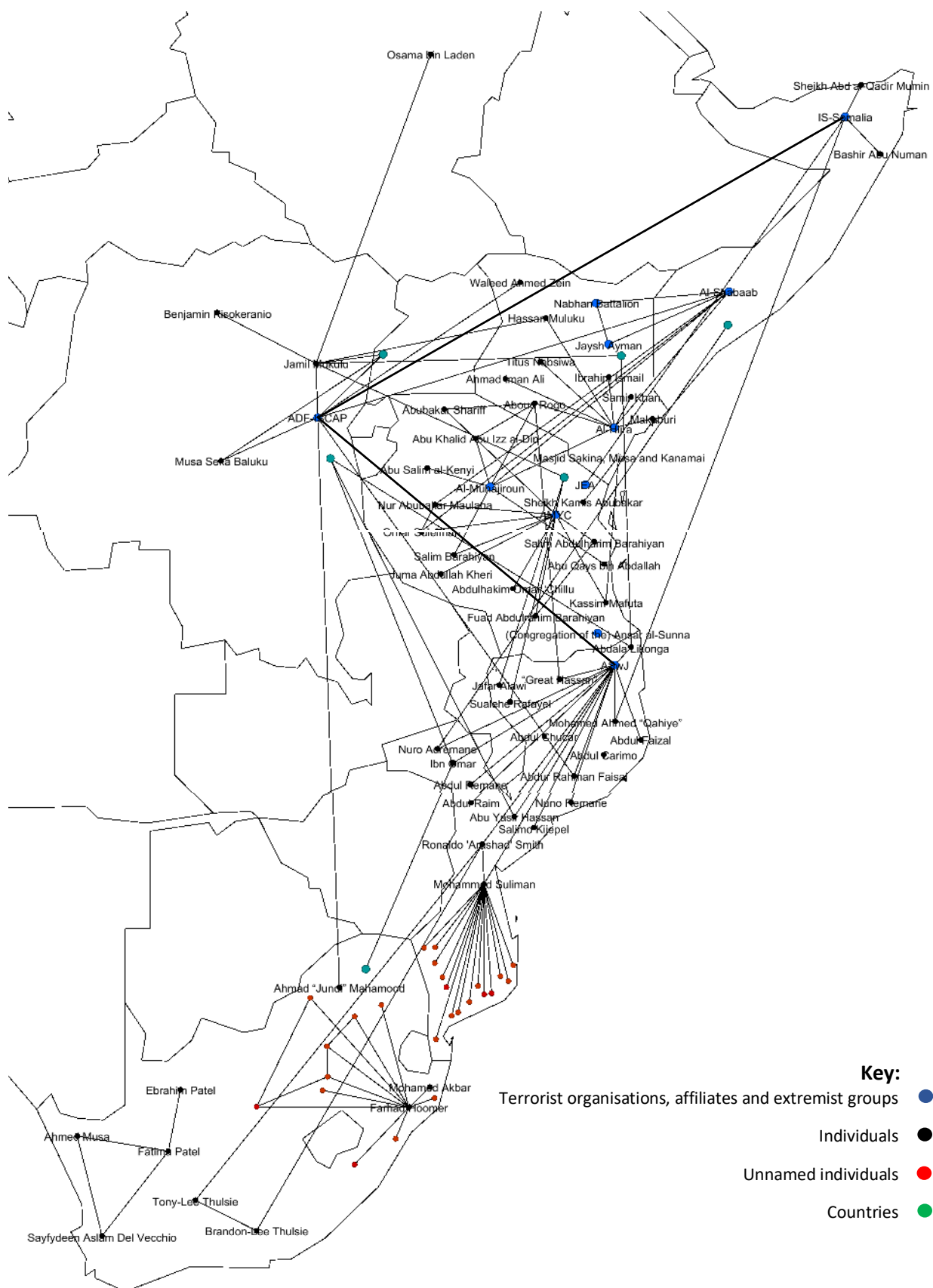
226 Canny Maphanga, “Alleged extremism syndicate members in court for businessman’s kidnapping”, 15 October 2020, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/alleged-extremism-syndicate-members-in-court-for-businessmans-kidnapping-20201015>.

227 J. Aymenn al-Tamimi, “Islamic State Editorial on Mozambique”, 3 July 2020, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2020/07/islamic-state-editorial-on-mozambique>; Fabricius, “Kliprivier kidnapping cell”.

228 Carlen du Plessis, “South Africans among funders of Mozambique insurgents – SADC report”, 28 April 2021, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/south-africans-among-funders-of-mozambique-insurgents-sadc-report-20210428>.

229 Ibid.

Extremist networks in East, Central and Southern Africa



Conclusion

The study revealed that the core leadership groups of the ADF, al-Hijra, MYC in Tanzania, al-Muhajiroun and ASwJ were exposed to fundamentalist teachings propagated either regionally by radical clerics and extremist networks or through their religious education abroad in such countries as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Upon return, their newfound ideology not only challenged the status quo but made the networks and organisations with which they were associated ideologically inclined towards affiliation with international jihadist organisations.

This pattern across Kenya, Tanzania, DRC and Mozambique highlights the impact of Salafism and Wahhabism on religious discourse within existing (government-endorsed religious) bodies and communities. Exposure to fundamentalist teachings thus prompted critical discourse on the status quo, typified by a myriad of socio-economic and political issues. In doing so, returning alumni managed to rouse social movements through the mobilisation of resources, using their access to networks and actors while simultaneously highlighting discontent with existing socio-economic and political conditions and framing a series of actions, opportunities and identities to amplify and reinforce their particular ideology, all with the intention of mobilising new recruits.

Meanwhile, as much as al-Shabaab sought to expand its area of influence across the East African coast, it was unable to consolidate sufficient control and oversight over recruitment and propaganda networks in Kenya and Tanzania, which had ambitions towards active militancy. This occurred against a backdrop of warring factions within al-Shabaab and IS's battleground successes in the Levant, which made a shift of allegiance an attractive proposition.

With the collapse of its physical caliphate, IS came to recognise pledges in Somalia, DRC and Mozambique, thus creating ISS and ISCAP. This study has shown that the roles assigned to the two provinces by IS reflect a reality in which militants in the region are more interconnected than previously considered. This involves transnational recruitment networks, training and funding.

This study demonstrates the extent to which these transnational links across the region have been integral to the formation of militant networks and organisational affiliation. Doing this it helps to explain how a jihadist group like IS, which from the outset appears alien to Central and Southern Africa, managed first to attract attention and later to institutionalise in DRC and Mozambique.

The recent trajectory of the ADF in DRC and ASwJ in Mozambique is thus impossible to understand properly without contextualising the groups in the broader regional environment of Islamic extremism and militancy. Militant networks in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have all been central to the propagation of an extremist ideology as well as important to connect militants in DRC, Tanzania and Mozambique with the regional ecosystem of Islamic militancy. Through its expansion

to Somalia, IS was able to exploit this ecosystem eventually to find sympathy among militants in DRC and Mozambique. As was the case in Somalia, however, IS incursions did not go uncontested with, in particular, the ADF leadership fragmenting as a result.

In South Africa, the evolution of extremist activity has led to emerging reports of material support of ADF and ASwJ by criminal syndicates. This follows years in which foreign and, more recently, local terror suspects have sought to use South Africa as a logistical safe haven to facilitate training camps, recruit, generate revenue or evade arrest. The insurgency in Mozambique has direct implications on the threat of terrorism in South Africa. While it is worth noting that Islamic State has no official presence in South Africa at present, this does not eliminate the threat of lone wolf actors or cells.



CONTACT DETAILS

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact:

ICSR
King's College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
United Kingdom

T. +44 20 7848 2098

E. mail@icsr.info

Twitter: @icsr_centre

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