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# TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: MAIN ACTORS AND INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS

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# TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: MAIN ACTORS AND INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS

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## INTRODUCTION

**M**ub-Saharan Africa has come to be one of the regions where ISIS and al-Qaeda gained influence and considerable visibility, both direct and indirect, particularly after 2014 and 2015. This region receives relatively less attention and scrutiny from academia, politicians and decision-makers compared to the Middle East and North Africa, which stand out as priority areas of global focus in recent years. In contrast, the region is of greater importance that is likely to increase due to the factors such as the increasing economic and political interest that the world has taken with regard to Africa and particularly to Sub-Saharan Africa, the rising competition among the great powers in the last two decades and Turkey's active policies toward Africa. At the same time, the region has a five percent average growth expectation in 2020-2030 and some of the fastest growing countries of the last decade are located in the continent, which increases its

global importance. Certainly, the small scale of regional economies and the international actors' rising economic engagement in the region play a significant role with these numerical data. While the international actors increase their engagement in the region, which enjoys a significant forward-looking potential, ISIS and al-Qaeda have taken an interest in the region resulting in remarkable outcomes that are likely to continue in the following years. Within this framework, this report first touches upon the current situation of the region in the context of terrorism and then examines al-Shabab and Boko Haram, the two organizations with allegiance to al-Qaeda and ISIS. Afterwards, it elaborates on the forward-looking expectations related to these groups' rising activities and Turkey's possible role and policies.

According to the data by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), which is the most important

Even though the focus of global terrorism shifted to the Middle East between 2012 and 2015 due to ISIS, it reverted back to its main course after 2015. Africa has gained more significance each year in the context of global terrorism and has turned into a region that surpasses the other two possible focal points, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

reference in its field based on the data collected by the Institute for Economics & Peace National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, forty percent of the ISIS-related deaths worldwide took place in Sub-Saharan Africa. Seven of the ten countries, which experienced the largest increase in terrorist activity on a global scale, are located in this region. While terrorism-related deaths decreased by 15.5% in the world between 2018 and 2019, it has risen by 67% in the region in the same period. The demography of the African continent, which is mobilized by the conflicts, genocides and forced migrations from Rwanda to Sudan, from Central Africa to Guinea and Liberia, suffers from systemic issues such as deprivation in new regions, integration problems and sociological and psychological problems that escalate the tension of the masses with the system. Nevertheless, the region has the potential to grow rapidly, has high human mobility and security problems, and thus has become one of the focal points of the world. Nonetheless, such a mobilized demographic entity is likely to pose important risks in terms of both hard security and human security. Therefore, the African continent has the potential to become the main source of international migration and related global crisis after the Middle East. The presence

of terrorism in the continent should be traced back at least to the period when al-Qaeda took hold in Sudan, which coincides with the religiously-motivated fourth wave of terrorism in the context of the terrorism waves conceived by Rapoport even if the anti-colonial movement in Algeria is ignored.

Even though it was sidelined by the key role of Afghanistan in the christening of and the fight against global terrorism, Africa is the region where the structure conceived its identity and upgraded its action capability to a higher level. Despite the fact that al-Qaeda gained its form and visibility after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Africa is the region that al-Qaeda managed to acquire the capacity for carrying out international and high-profile attacks. One should remember that al-Qaeda's first attacks against the USA were the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. For better understanding the Libyan crisis of today, one should consider the negative effects of ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates in North Africa on both the regional stability and human potential of the region. Even though the focus of global terrorism shifted to the Middle East between 2012 and 2015 due to ISIS, it reverted back to its main course after 2015. Africa has gained more significance each year in the context of glob-

al terrorism and has turned into a region that surpasses the other two possible focal points, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

Two Main Actors in Sub-Saharan Africa, Boko Haram and al-Shabab: History, Current Situation, Global Links and Relations with New Actors

Al-Shabab and Boko Haram stand out as the two organizations that were studied the most with regard to Africa, besides the direct recruitment of ISIS and al-Qaeda in North Africa and Sub-Sahara. Particularly after 2013, al-Shabab, which operates in East Africa and Somalia, is known to have ties with al-Qaeda, while Boko Haram originating in Nigeria has better relations with ISIS. Yet, one needs to consider the potential transitional nature of the recruitment, action and financing capacities of the groups since such a potential has become evident in recent years with regard to the new actors in the region resulting from divisions and separations, and their relations with the current actors.

## AL-SHABAB

One of the most meaningful and historically oldest approaches among studies on the origin of the organization underlines the Islamic Awakening Movement of the 1960s. Somalia took its place in the stage of history as an independent actor when the British and Italian controlled territories were merged in 1960. After the oil crisis of 1973-1974, the Wahhabi-Salafist movements gained power through funds from the oil-rich Saudi Arabia and that Salafist reactionary movement were

further strengthened when Sheikh Ibrahim Yaqoub El Zakzaky<sup>1</sup> sought to implement Shi-ite expansionist policies in the region after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Al-Itihaad al-Islami, which is one of the most important actors for the birth of al-Shabab, emerged with the merger of al-Wahdat al-Shabal al-Islamiyya and al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya and triggered the rise and spread of the Wahhabi-Salafist approach in the expense of mainstream Islamic understanding. In this framework, al-Shabab should be considered as the successor to al-Itihaad al-Islami which represented the aggressive Salafist wing that seceded from the Islamic Awakening Movement. Founded by the influence of the Saudi money that started to flow in the 1990s, The Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and its paramilitary wing that was established between 2004 and 2006 also constitute the foundations of al-Shabab. That paramilitary wing over time carried out resistance against Ethiopia and formed the backbone that would transform into al-Shabab.<sup>2</sup>

After Mohamed Siad Barre, the pro-Soviet and socialist military dictator of Somalia that ruled between 1969 and 1991, was overthrown at the end of the Cold War; the United States' efforts to exert influence in Somalia drew reactions from the Somalian people. The immense agitation caused by U.S. President George H. W. Bush's decision to deploy American troops in the region for protecting the United Nations aid convoys resulted in a high profile ending with the downfall of the American Black Hawk helicopters.<sup>3</sup> After this process, Osama Bin Laden sent "military advisors," in particular Abu Hafs al-Masri, who

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Zenn, Atta Barkindo & Nicholas A. Heras (2013), The Ideological Evolution of Boko Haram in Nigeria, The RUSI Journal, 158:4, pp. 46-53, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> David Shinn (2011), "Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia", Orbis, s. 203-215, sf. 204-206; Lise Waldek & Shankara Jayasekara (2011), "Boko Haram: The Evolution of Islamist Extremism in Nigeria", Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, 6:2, pp. 168-178, pp. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffret, Gettleman. (2009), "The Most Dangerous Place in the World". *Foreign Policy*, Feb 16, 2009.



Nigerian security forces during a military operation.

came to Sudan in 1992 and escorted bin Laden to Somalia. Al Masri played a vital role in establishing relations by making multiple visits, therefore the opportunities provided by the anti-US sentiments brought the shadow of al-Qaeda on the region.<sup>4</sup> In addition to all these, the perpetrators of the bomb attacks against the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Selaam in 1998 were hosted by the group that was then known as al-Itihaad al-Islami in Somalia and in this context some ICU targets were bombed by the U.S. in 2004.

However, it could be argued that the group has taken its current form after Ethiopia attempted invading Somalia in 2006 with the backing and encouragement of the U.S. The group stepped forward in defense of Somalia and its support base were reinforced particularly by young people. Operating as the armed wing of the Islamic Courts Union at that time, al-Shabab had made gains in 2006,

in the east and south of Somalia including Mogadishu from where it was forcefully expelled by Ethiopia in 2007. The group made further advances, only to be extracted from Mogadishu by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) once again.<sup>5</sup> After this process, the ICU disintegrated, and its moderate wing became involved in the Somalian political process while al-Shabab continued using violence. This cleavage counts as the last link in the chain that led to the emergence of al-Shabab as we know it. Known for its interest in propaganda and online visibility just like al-Qaeda and ISIS, al-Shabab had an online platform named kataaib.net, which was shut down in early 2009. The group announced later that year that it founded its media wing called al-Kataib.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Shabab was listed as a terrorist organization in 2008 by the United States. In the years 2008 and 2010 the group gained

<sup>4</sup> Dirk Baehr (2011), "The Somali Shabaab Militias and Their Jihadist Networks in the West", KAS International Reports 8, pp. 26-28.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Joosse, Sandra M. Bucarius and Sara K. Thompson (2015), "Narratives and Counternarratives: Somali-Canadians on Recruitment as Foreign Fighters to Al-Shabaab", *British Journal of Criminology*, 55, 811-832, p. 818.

<sup>6</sup> Baehr, pp. 23-26.

notoriety through terrorist attacks. In 2008, simultaneous terrorist attacks targeted the UN outpost, the Ethiopian consulate and the Presidential Palace in Hargesa killing more than twenty people. In 2009, another attack took place during the graduation ceremony of the Benadir University. The fact that three ministers were killed in this attack proves its sensational nature.<sup>7</sup> When al-Shabab carried out a terrorist attack in the West-Gate shopping center in Kenya in 2010, it proved its capability to undertake attacks out of Somalia.

Mutual compliments between al-Shabab and al-Qaeda started in the period between 2008 and 2010 (the video titled 'We are at your service Osama' in 2009 is a great example), yet al-Shabab's declaration of allegiance and its acceptance did not take place until 2012.<sup>8</sup> It was after the video of submission to al-Qaeda in February 2012 that the global war against terror took notice of al-Shabab. After that the U.S. designated it as a 'specially designated terrorist organization' and the FBI has put a price on the terrorist leaders depending on their seniority level. In terms of leadership, when Aden Hashi Ayro, who received the leadership position from the 'honorary leader' Sheikh Hasan Dahir Aveys in 2006, was killed in 2008 by the U.S., Ahmed Abdi Godan also known as Sheikh Abu Zubair assumed the mantle. Both Avro ad Godane received training and fought in Afghanistan<sup>9</sup>, where they forged closer and deeper ties with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Al-Shabab has avoided a grave mistake, which would be touched upon in the

chapter on Boko Haram in detail, and shaped its leadership cadre in accordance with the tribal diversity in the country, thereby increasing the likelihood that it receives support or at least faces non-hostile attitudes while dealing with various groups.

International military intervention has reduced piracy activities in the region, yet it should not be ignored that while piracy brings about a certain degree of contribution to economic wealth, it raises the risk level of regional trade, thus hinders the flow of funds to the region, which would contribute to regional stability. According to some claims<sup>10</sup>, al-Shabab had some deals with those groups that engage in piracy and provides weapons and ammunition to these groups through its tribal contacts across borders. In addition to that the port of Kismayo between 2008 and 2012, and the Bakara market until it was lost in 2011 provided significant income for the group. Just like its expulsion from Mogadishu in the period between 2011 and 2012, a joint operation in 2012 by Kenyan and Somalian forces put an end to its occupation in the port of Kismayo.<sup>11</sup> In the period after 2013, Al-Shabab's cross-border activities became more apparent. As the countries, who sent forces to AMISOM, were put in the crosshairs, multiple attacks killed more than 350 people between 2013 and 2015, in addition to a suicide attack in Djibouti in the same period. Two non-simultaneous suicide attacks in Addis Ababa, one targeting a soccer match and the other in a mall, were foiled. The most high-profile attack

<sup>7</sup> Abdi O. Shuriye (2012), "Al-Shabaab's Leadership Hierarchy and Its Ideology", *Academic Research International*, 2.1, pp. 274-285, p. 279.

<sup>8</sup> Shinn, pp. 207-208.

<sup>9</sup> A.g.e., p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> UNSC (2013), United Nations Security Council Committee Report pursuant to resolutions 751 and 1907 concerning Somalia and Eritrea, 12 Temmuz 2013; and "The Saga of MV Iceberg: One Ship, Three Different Stories", *Somalia Report*, 26 July 2012, <http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/3471>

<sup>11</sup> MGeoffrey Kambere (2012) "Financing Al Shabaab: The Vital Port of Kismayo". *Combatting Terrorism Exchange (CTX)*, 2 (3), <https://globalecco.org/financing-al-shabaab-the-vital-port-of-kismayo>.

**The rise of the Somalian ISIS, which was founded in 2015 by Abdul Qadir Mumin, a former al-Shabab commander, its call for the al-Shabab members to join and their participation, its expanding militant base and ongoing clashes with al-Shabab further complicate the security crisis in the region.**

of this organization is the attack in July 2011 that killed seventy people in Uganda.<sup>12</sup>

It can be observed that the killing of Godan, the leader of al-Shabab in a drone assault by the U.S. has not dealt a vital blow to the organization, which was able to recuperate to some degree after the strike. Al-Shabab continued its activity under the leadership of Ahmed Diriye. This development brought about questions related to the causality between leadership assassination and organizational survival and therefore questions about the timing of the attack. One should also remember the discussions concerning al-Shabab's 'substitute leadership cadre', the popular support it receives, and possible destinations for current militants in case of a possible organizational breakdown. In addition to that, al-Shabab suffered a setback from this blow, which provides a window of opportunity for ISIS. It can be observed that the Somalian branch of ISIS gained considerable influence and reached almost one thousand militants since 2018, when its numbers were only a few hundred. The rise of the Somalian ISIS, which was founded in 2015 by Abdul Qadir Mumin, a former al-Shabab commander, its call for the al-Shabab members to

join and their participation, its expanding militant base and ongoing clashes with al-Shabab further complicate the security crisis in the region. In 2018, the Somalian ISIS assumed responsibility for sixty-six attacks, which is more than the attacks perpetrated by al-Shabab in 2016 and 2017. The clashes between these two groups started to intensify after particularly late 2018, which are provoked and made visible by both groups.

The Mogadishu attack<sup>13</sup> in December 2019 that killed more than eighty people and the Kenya Manda military base attack in January 2020 that killed three American servicemen are regarded as the most important two examples of al-Shabab's rising mobility.<sup>14</sup> While al-Shabab carries out the majority of its activities in Somalia, the remaining group activities focus on Kenya. Even though there is a potential for expanding this geographical base, such a significant shift does not seem likely in the foreseeable future. That is because these two countries - despite all differences - represent the same level of importance that Iraq and Syria pose for ISIS. However, the region's vulnerable character in economic, social and political terms is likely to facilitate such an expansion.

<sup>12</sup> Matt Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabab: Strategy of Choice or Necessity?", CSIS, February 2014.

<sup>13</sup> "Al-Shabab claims deadly attack in Somalia's Mogadishu", Al Jazeera, 31 December 2019.

<sup>14</sup> "Al-Shabaab's attacks come amid backdrop of West's waning interest", The Conversation, 15 January 2020.



An image of the July 2018 attack in Mogadishu.

The international reach of al-Shabab particularly with regard to the Western countries brings about increasing concerns. The group seems to be harboring a degree of potential for expanding influence beyond the region since it succeeds in recruiting U.S. citizens in places such as Phoenix, Minnesota, Seattle, Columbus and San Diego where the Somali diaspora live, and stands out with its rhetoric that calls for targeting the U.S. military presence in east Africa.<sup>15</sup> It is also important that almost twenty percent of the Somali population lives abroad, Al-Shabab recruits militants from the diaspora that live in the U.S., Britain, Sweden, Canada, Germany and Denmark, and the perpetrator of the Benadir attack in 2009 is a Somali that grew up in Denmark. The risk is further underlined by the fact that one of the two suicide bombers that attacked the headquarters of the African Un-

ion Peace Force is a U.S. citizen of Somali descent.<sup>16</sup> Al-Shabab seems to be aware of this potential since it undertakes recruitment from the Western countries through language capabilities, utilization of art or through some figures such as Omer Hammami also known as Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, who is non-Somali, and encourages Somalis to carry out attacks in the countries they live in.<sup>17</sup>

## BOKO HARAM

Originating from Nigeria, Boko Haram operates in Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, and is known for its ties with ISIS, which stand out as one of the sources of legitimacy for particularly the French presence in the Sahel. Known earlier as the Nigerian Taliban, Black Taliban or Yusufiyya, the organization has come to be known as Boko Haram<sup>18</sup> -as

<sup>15</sup> Baehr, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Shinn, p. 211.

<sup>17</sup> Baehr, pp. 31-32.

<sup>18</sup> Hussein Solomon (2012), "Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria", The RUSI Journal, 157:4, pp. 6-11, p. 6.

**The Shiite Nigeria Islamic Movement led by İbrahim al Zakzaky and the Iranian support it receives, which are also believed to have triggered the emergence of al-Shabab, are very important factors in the rise of Boko Haram.**

deemed pejorative by some group members- rather than Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad<sup>19</sup>, its official name since 2002. The phrase Boko Haram refers to the understanding that Western style education is forbidden, since Boko means book or education in the tribal dialect of Havsa in Nigeria and haram means forbidden. However, its leaders including its founder Muhammad Yusuf, who founded the organization in 2002, have stated various times that they reject the culture of the West, not the knowledge of the West. Yobe and Borno are the provinces in Nigeria that Boko Haram is the strongest and these places count as its headquarters. However, Yobe is also of great significance since it is the birthplace of Muhammed Yusuf. The first attacks by the organization against police in 2003 took place in Yobe.<sup>20</sup> Just after the founding of the organization by Muhammed Yusuf in Borno, the headquarters were moved to Yobe in 2004. Kano and Bauchi are other important centers that the organization feeds on.<sup>21</sup> Kano

and Bauchi are the two provinces where the allegations that the groups receive payments from local administration to ensure non-activity or suppressing their rivals took shape.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that the north of the country covers the cities with the lowest per capita income stands as a possible reason as to why the center of the organization is located in the north of the country. Eight of ten poorest cities are located in the north and in some places the rate of Nigerians under the poverty threshold reaches ninety five percent.<sup>23</sup> Yobe, one of the main bases of Boko Haram, has an unemployment rate of approximately thirty to thirty five percent which is one of the highest in the country.<sup>24</sup> It is claimed that this situation is related to the damage that the agricultural sector suffered during the IMF program followed by the government of Ibrahim Babangida between 1986 and 1993.<sup>25</sup> The history of the country, which partially resembles the case of al-Shabab from this period on, has witnessed uprisings,

<sup>19</sup> Hakeem Onapajo & Ufo Okeke Uzodike (2012), "Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria", *African Security Review*, 21:3, pp. 24-39, pp. 26-27.

<sup>20</sup> Abee Olufemi Salaam (2012), "Boko Haram: Beyond Religious Fanaticism", *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 7:2, pp. 147-162, p. 149.

<sup>21</sup> Oarhe Osumah (2013), "Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria and the Vicious Cycle of Internal Insecurity", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 24:3, pp. 536-560.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Oyewole (2013), "Boko Haram and the Challenges of Nigeria's War on Terror", *Defense & Security Analysis*, 29:3, 253-262, p. 256.

<sup>23</sup> Onapajo & Uzodike, p. 32

<sup>24</sup> Osumah, p. 543.

<sup>25</sup> Abiodun Alao (2013), "Islamic Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Nigeria", *Conflict, Security & Development*, 13:2, pp. 127-147, p. 130; Onapajo & Uzodike, p. 34

coups, civil war and inter-tribal issues since the Egba Uprising of 1921.<sup>26</sup> For example, only during the civil war between 1967 and 1970, more than one million people were killed. Between the years 1980 and 2007, two coups and one coup attempt took place. When the Salafist-Wahhabi movements received Saudi funds in the 1990s, an intellectual background for the emergence of the organization took form in addition to such an economic background. The Shiite Nigeria Islamic Movement led by İbrahim al-Zakzaky and the Iranian support it receives, which are also believed to have triggered the emergence of al-Shabab, are very important factors in the rise of Boko Haram. Mohammed Yusuf, who was once a member of this organization, left this organization on the grounds that it was a Shiite group, and became a prominent figure in the Jama'at Tajdid-i Islam, assuming the role of 'CTI Emir' of Borno in this period. Boko Haram benefited mainly from the low intensity clashes that emerged after the rise of tensions in the 1990s between the movement of al-Zakzaky and Sunnis.

Increasing its activity from the beginning of the 2000s onwards, the organization was called the 'Nigerian Taliban' or the 'Black Taliban'<sup>27</sup> and did not refrain from openly imitating the Taliban and its modus operandi. After the assault against a police convoy in late 2004, where fifteen police officers were killed and the attack against a police station in Bor-

no, where eight police officers were killed, intense operations and a hardening attitude by the police forced the organization to disperse to Niger and Chad. Mohammed Yusuf was among those who fled and orchestrated the emergence of Boko Haram in this period. The most important break in the history of the organization was the intense operation by the Nigerian security forces in 2009 after the bombing of Maiduguri in July 2009, in which eight hundred Boko Haram militants were killed.<sup>28</sup> During ensuing imprisonment periods after the operation, Mohammed Yusuf<sup>29</sup>, the leader of the organization, who was subjected to lawsuit for terrorism charges between 2006 and 2008 but not sentenced to prison, Buji Foi<sup>30</sup>, the financial mastermind of the group and Mohammed Yusuf's father-in-law al-Haji Baa Fugu Mohammed<sup>31</sup>, whose ties with the group remain unclear, were killed. The deaths of these three figures under custody and in an unlawful manner were the most critical factor that triggered Boko Haram to adopt a more aggressive attitude under the leadership of Abu Bakr Shekau and that legitimized adoption of an aggressive stance in the view of its supporters. The outrage grew even worse when the videos about the killing of Mohammed Yusuf were uploaded to the Internet. These developments have provided a background for the adoption of 'revanchist' rhetoric from the Jos and Maiduguri attacks in 2010 onwards.<sup>32</sup> The Bauchi prison attack in 2010, which resulted in the release of approximate-

<sup>26</sup> Osumah, p. 536.

<sup>27</sup> Solomon, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram", *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5:1, February 2014, pp. 46-57, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Lise Waldek & Shankara Jayasekara (2011), "Boko Haram: the evolution of Islamist extremism in Nigeria", *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 6:2, 168-178, p. 170

<sup>30</sup> Solomon, p. 6 ve Waldek & Jayasekara, p. 173.

<sup>31</sup> Hakeem Onapajo & Ufo Okeke Uzodike (2012) Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, *African Security Review*, 21:3, 24-39., p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Zenn, Barkindo & Heras (2013) p. 46



Somalian policemen receive Counter-terrorism training in Turkey.

ly seven hundred convicts and resembles the prison raids of ISIS, raised alarms about the capacity of the organization.<sup>33</sup> At times, Boko Haram killed the religion scholars who opposed it thereby demonstrating its attitude to the Muslims standing in opposition.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it has clearly drawn a line distinguishing itself from the mainstream and historical Islamic understanding of the country, just like the al-Shabab case.

After Mohammed Yusuf, the leadership of Shekau boosted the capacity of the organization, which is related to the funds from al-Qaeda or affiliated groups and to the increase in expertise that basically feeds from the same sources.<sup>35</sup> The impact scale, targets and meth-

ods of the attacks after 2011 demonstrate that increase in capacity. The kidnapping of a French family in Cameroon in 2013 has further fueled the debates about Boko Haram's capacity expansion. That is because this attack was a cross-border move by Boko Haram and is likely to have been carried out with the cooperation of Ensaru<sup>36</sup>, a splinter group from itself. It has shown the merits of the argument that Boko Haram engages in cooperation with both the Maghreb branch of al-Qaeda and the other local actors with a similar discourse.

The vehicle-based suicide attack against the United Nations building in Abuja in 2011<sup>37</sup> is one of Boko Haram's most high-profile attacks up to that date and it has drawn atten-

<sup>33</sup> Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniyi (2014) "One Voice, Multiple Tongues: Dialoguing with Boko Haram", *Democracy and Security*, 10:1, pp. 73-97, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> A.g.e. p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Nathaniel Manni (2012), "Boko Haram: A Threat to African and Global Security", *Global Security Studies*, 3: 4, pp. 44-54 ve Samuel Oyewole (2013), "Boko Haram and the Challenges of Nigeria's War on Terror", *Defense & Security Analysis*, 29:3, 253-262, p. 257.

<sup>36</sup> "Nigeria's emergency: countering Boko Haram, *Strategic Comments*", (2013), 19:5, pp. 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram", *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5:1, February 2014, pp. 46-57, sf. 47; Lise Waldek & Shankara Jayasekara (2011) Boko Haram: the evolution of Islamist extremism in Nigeria, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 6:2, 168-178

tion to the organization. Its favored method after 2012, abduction of people, particularly women, has drawn tremendous reactions. In return, Shekau has many times responded on behalf of the organization that abduction tactics constitute reprisal against the practices by the Nigerian government that involves the abduction of the families of Boko Haram militants.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the counterterrorism measures in Nigeria, which are executed through extralegal practices such as this example and the killing of Mohammed Yusuf, provide justification for Boko Haram's terrorism in a militant Salafist line. Considering the breaches of law by the joint task force<sup>39</sup> founded after the declaration of state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa after mid-2013, the nature of the fight against Boko Haram shows the importance of a strong relationship between law and fight against terrorism.

Boko Haram has declared allegiance to ISIS in March 2015 thereby drawing the attention of the Global Coalition on itself. Having adopted a much more aggressive approach under the leadership of Abu Bakr Shekau after its first leader Mohammed Yusuf was killed in 2009, the organization has started to target barracks, outposts and UN representative buildings, and its visibility was boosted after its declaration of allegiance to ISIS. One of the most important weaknesses of Boko Haram is about the intertribal balance of power that al-Shabab is able to operate strategically. The fact that the leader and the leadership cadre are from the same tribe is a source of restlessness within the organization, which has members from various main tribes such as Havsa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, İcav, and Kanuri. Especially the prevalence of the Kanuri tribe,

which is dominant in Borno and has branches in Chad, Cameroon and Niger, and the fact that suicide bombers are selected among non-Kanuri tribes, caused discomfort in the Havsa and Fulani tribes in Northern Nigeria, the main power base of the organization. This situation creates potential problems about the inner harmony of the organization. It was also an important reason why some militants who left Boko Haram formed the Ensaru group. Other reasons are sharing the funds from the Maghreb al-Qaeda, Boko Haram's indifference to civilian casualties, and the priority given to Nigeria as the main field of activity.<sup>40</sup>

Operations against Boko Haram were intensified in the years 2015 and 2016 after its allegiance to ISIS. Military activities by Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria in the years between 2016 and 2017 were supported by the Obama administration's decision to deploy three hundred soldiers in Cameroon and reinforce its presence in Niger. Boko Haram has also played an important role in the attack against the military base in Burkina Faso assumed by ISIS in December 2020 that killed seven soldiers and thirty-five civilians, and in the execution of eleven Christians in Nigeria. Africa and particularly the Sub-Saharan region stand out among others for ISIS, al-Qaeda and affiliated groups since the organization has controversially assumed responsibility for the abduction of four hundred children in December 2020 and the activities highlights the 'West Africa province' of ISIS.

Even though these groups, for the moment, seem to lack the capacity to carry out attacks in Europe and the U.S.A., some people from these countries feed on such a background and may carry out attacks in these re-

<sup>38</sup> Zenn and Pearson, pp. 47-49

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> Zenn, Barkindo & Heras, p. 51

gions. One of the simplest examples for that is Umar Farooq Abdulmuttalip, the Nigerian known as the 'Underwear Bomber'. Furthermore, considering the fact that ISIS was able to carry out high-profile attacks particularly in Europe, even with fewer cells and resources and far away from its main power bases, some cells even with a few militants from diasporas with some access will be able to carry out attacks if these actors continue their presence in Africa.

### **GLOBAL DYNAMICS, ENGAGEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL ACTORS, COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND FUTURE SCENARIOS**

Limited capacity of the African Union, the volatile and/or weak nature of the regional dynamics in economic, social, political and security terms and the difficulties related to preventing the groups confiscating the external aid to the region make it difficult to paint a rosy picture for the region in the short to middle term. In addition to the ISIS activity in the region and Boko Haram's allegiance to ISIS, al-Shabab and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb are regarded as among the most important branches of the cross-border al-Qaeda presence. At this point, one should remember the potential of transition between al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates in the regions where they are located together. Therefore, these groups form a common manpower pool for the future that increases in both qualitative and quantitative terms in addition to their current cadres. That pool will provide an important resource for the current organizations, their stronger forms in the future or newly-emerging local or regional organizations. The insufficiency of the African Union Peace Force up to now and individual countries' struggles in rooting out these groups from Africa and the lack of

capacity of various individual states provide a fertile ground for these groups and encouragement for further illegal groups, which harbors various motivations for benefiting from the current dynamics.

After the losses in Iraq and Syria, Africa is gradually becoming a center of gravity for ISIS. Therefore, the international actors are provided with an important argument for access to the region and improving their presence. An important aspect of the regional equation is the tension that France experiences with the U.S.A and the EU that is ever present in the instances of which has become more apparent in the Libyan crisis and the north of Syria, and while being ever present in the instances of the de Gaulle line, the process of France's abandonment of NATO's military wing, the intra-EU tensions, the European army debates and related military movements. France seeks to boost its influence in Africa through several measures such as adopting a dominant position over some regional initiatives such as G-5 that consists of Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Mali, and utilizing the EU military elements for deepening its presence. Meanwhile, the USA seems hesitant about the cooperation of an actor such as France, which is less predictable in Africa. the region of important potentials that is the most important expansion area for China. Therefore, the USA aims to boost its African Command (AFRICOM), which was founded in 2007 (until then Africa remained within the area of responsibility of the European Command), and seeks to attain a presence in the region that transcends or at least balances France in the medium term. Yet, the Biden administration has a preference for repairing the ties between the USA and the NATO allies, which were damaged during the Trump administration. Therefore, the relations between France and the USA will be subject to review in both



AMISOM Security Forces service member.

general terms and in the specific context of Africa. Since the Biden administration is expected to adopt a more apparent anti-Russia attitude, the common NATO stance against Russia in Africa, where it seeks to build influence, is likely to force these actors to carry out their competition in a covert manner. The Russian visibility and influence are observed in the Central African Republic through military companies and equipment transfers similar to its presence in Libya.

The statement by the AFRICOM commander Waldhauser in 2018 that the most important threats against the USA from Africa stem from al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates, the presence of five hundred American soldiers in Somali in late 2017 and the perpetration of more than thirty drone strikes in Somalia until the end of the year after Trump was elected show the priority given to Africa by the US and in this context the importance of Somali as the place of birth and the main area of activity for al-Shabab. Currently, the US presence in the region exceeding seven thousand personnel, its active support to the counterterrorism operations, the drone facility founded in Agadiz-Niger that houses more than eight hundred US soldiers and that cost 110 million dollars should be taken into consideration since improving its footprint in Africa will likely be one of its most important foreign

policy agenda items in the following year. The increasing American attention toward the AMISOM (African Union Mission to Somalia) and the moves to make it dependent on American resources may be regarded as a counter by the Trump administration against France's move towards the G-5. While the relationship between AMISOM and the USA is a product of the Trump administration's withdrawal approach that seeks to leave the risks to local actors, the Biden administration is highly likely to boost its direct presence. In such a case, the US role in the region will be strengthened with the withdrawal of the AMISOM forces. Therefore, it is a high possibility that the liberal interventionist approach represented by Biden will reverse the controversial decisions to withdraw from the region during the Trump administration. For this move, the international terrorism argument will be used for more regions than before.

China aims to be the main global power of the region and carries out significant investments through its companies, social ties and Confucius Institutes while at the same time keeping its hard power away from Africa for now in accordance with its rhetoric of reciprocity and accord. Even though China remains distant from a major portion of the components that define hegemony and its access to some of these components seems impossible due to the way it designs itself, it is considered to be a primary challenger. Any possible damage inflicted upon the current hegemon by China or other powers carries the potential for shaking the system. Whether these powers will turn into hegemons is another matter of debate, each step they take for this purpose will concern many powers on different scales due to their systemic effects. On the one hand, the fact that China does not benefit from security and/or counterterrorism rhetoric for its access to Africa seems to

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prevent it from expanding with keen and solid steps on the one hand. On the other hand, such an approach brings along a potential for making permanent and deeper impact through a less competitive profile that is more acceptable in local levels. When China starts to exert its hard power in the region, the already-prioritized Chinese soft power will provide advantages over its competitors, who maintain their aforementioned position. It is possible to observe the game-changing power of soft power and institutionalized asymmetrical relationship through the institutionalized and partially-internalized imperialistic designs that France seeks to maintain and its outcomes that affect the dynamics in this framework.

With the growth of the terrorism threat, the 15,000 strong UN military mission in Africa led by France was boosted by 300 troops that Britain sent to Mali. This development signifies the importance that these actors attach to the threat. At the same time, it shows that tensions between Britain and France in particular and the EU and Britain in general are prone to deepen in Africa and particularly in Sahel. In the post-Brexit period, when Britain is expected to improve its policies that will highlight its individual-global importance, Africa is one of the most important regions that serves this purpose.

This is inevitable in this atmosphere and has low social and economic costs in such a strategy for turning toward former colonial territories. All these reasons will be a factor for Britain to prefer a pivot to Africa.

Turkey and Israel stand out as newly emerging regional powers with interests in Africa. While Turkey prioritizes defense industry contracts and global military and diplomatic projections, Israel seeks to come to a position of significant power in this strategically important region for better serving its policies toward the Arab geography, to evaluate the region for its resource and agricultural needs and expand its export markets in this rapidly growing region. Coming to the fore with its historical and sociological links, Turkey's aid and assistance policies as well as the attention Turkish political figures receive in the region highlight its exceptional position while its power receives a multiplier effect that enables it to compete with global and nuclear actors as seen at times in Libya as well as in Sub-Saharan.

Therefore, the attacks by al-Shabab targeting specifically the Turkish military presence in Somalia do not seem coincidental. Two factors highlight the importance of the region and Somalia in particular for the efforts by al-Qaeda and ISIS to find a new base for facilitating their mobility. One is the high-profile West-

mall attack carried out by al-Shabab even during the period between 2011-2016 that has marked forced withdrawal from residential areas and partial silence following its dominance of central and south Somalia between 2008-2011. The other factor is the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa came to the forefront in the context of post-2016 global power bases of ISIS. Since 2013, major attacks have taken place in Somalia, which is of great importance for Turkey that claimed the lives of Turkish citizens. These attacks targeted the aid convoy by the Turkish Red Crescent (2013), the annex of the Turkish Embassy complex (2013) and a vehicle of the Maarif Foundation. Yet, Turkish citizens were frequently killed in other attacks as well and Turkish contractors were deliberately targeted. The visit by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Somalia in 2011, when significant security risks hindered visits by other international actors, were the second visit to Somalia by a non-African state since the Second World War. In addition to that, Turkey's aid to Somalia has passed one billion dollars

since then, which proves Somalia's importance for Turkey and constitutes an important point to keep in mind when thinking about the attacks against the Turkish presence. It should not be overlooked that the Somalian police's special operation forces receive education in the TURKSOM headquarters, the Turkish base in the country, as well as in the Gendarmerie Commando Training Center in Foça. Turkey's investments in the region, contributions to the Somalian infrastructure, training of security forces and good relations between the people of the two countries receive the ire of the criminal groups such as al-Shabab that seek to benefit from the power fluctuations in the country. The groups who openly declare their hostility to Turkey are likely to have frequently cooperated in their operations. As of January 2020, Turkey extended the bill that allows the presence of its maritime forces in the region for the purposes of fighting against terrorism and piracy. Since AMISOM is expected to withdraw by the end of 2020 and leave the responsibility to the 20,000-strong Somalian



Somalian police during their training in Turkey.

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army, it is a high probability that the region will experience greater mobility that was outlined above. Therefore, this situation underlines the importance of the training provided by Turkey to both the Somalian police and the one third of the Somalian army. The timing of the attacks in Somalia targeting the most important Turkish presence in the region represents an interesting character. That is because in this period, there is a harsh competition against Turkey countries such as France, which confronts Turkey in Libya, and the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which seek to contain Turkey and facilitate Israeli policies in the region.

The transition potential of the human resources pool is one of the most important matters that the author sought to highlight with respect to the regions where ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates are located together. Such a potential does not mean that the total number of militants are divided among the two organizations. Rather, a newly-emerging organization constitutes a center of attention drawing militants from both this pool and from outside of the region. In response, the confronting actors recruit new members from outside and escalating clashes provide these actors with opportunities for further recruitment. Therefore, the norm of the region involves the growth of the pool that is close to the in-

tellectual approach of ISIS and al-Qaeda, rather than the division of the current pool. At this point, there is a substantial risk to be highlighted which involves the emergence of a new actor that is capable of expanding and unifying the pool. In such a case, it is likely that one of the two groups will prevail over the other and the former militants of the defeated group will find it more rational to fight under the banner of the remaining single actor, or one stronger actor will emerge and swallow the affiliates of the both groups. The fact that similar scenarios have been partially and/or totally experienced in different regions support this claim. Therefore, the presence of two actors in the same region does not divide up the manpower pool and drag the actors to clashes resulting in attrition. Rather it provides a multiplier effect to the threat.

This general international framework needs to be incorporated in any analysis regarding the presence of ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates and their tendency to expand influence. It should not be forgotten that beyond the security threats that these groups pose, they can act as proxies and accelerators as well as inhibitors or incentives of international competition. Since such similar groups in Iraq and Syria paved the way for new actors, tested the power of older actors in the battlefield while breaking

their power in some periods, and changed the regional dynamics in a radical way, it would be realistic to assume that these actors will have a big role in the shaping of Africa's future while at the same time their presence will be utilized by some other actors.

For Turkey, Africa represents a region with common cultural and historical links as well as a route of expansion for the defense industry and a venue for military presence. In this region which has a significant geographical position vis-a-vis the alliance formed against itself after the Gulf crisis, further and deeper engagement has become a necessity for the purposes of defending its presence and interests. Until the crisis is overcome and the polarization subsides, it will be one of the main points of tension in the region. Turkey's efforts for shaping the fight against terrorism in the region, which benefits from its experience and current presence, are crucial for the regional stability and Turkey's presence as well as for foiling the attempts by some actors who seek to implement their regional designs through terrorism and for making the expansion of the Turkish foreign policy vision permanent. Regarding international conjuncture, one needs to follow the way some actors such as Germany and Italy, who state their displeasure with the Africa policies of the USA and France, will shape their relations among themselves and with Turkey against terrorist activity that will boost international engagement in the region. It is highly likely that new dynamics among these actors will emerge considering several factors such as Turkey's counterterrorism efforts with its presence centered in Somalia, its tensions with France despite signals of resolution, rapprochement signals in relations with Israel that is another actor in the region, and growing discontent of some EU members with the abuse of the European military machine by France in service of French overseas

interests. Therefore, there are growing signals that the years ahead will bring about a period that Africa and particularly Sub-Saharan Africa will be prominent in the global agenda, in which Turkey will likely be one of the main actors. The way for Turkey for making a gain in Africa proportional to the continent's rapidly growing importance in Turkey's grand strategy depends on ensuring the rational and optimal combination of soft and hard power components on the one hand, and on ensuring the careful and timely analysis of the complex international competition and cooperation possibilities on the other. In this context, while Turkey's great diplomatic leap is followed by institutional components of soft power, it needs efficient yet rational utilization of historical links, deepening of defense industry relationship, public diplomacy, humanitarian aid, counterterrorism support that will bring along stability and security to the region and more assistance to local and regional security initiatives for reinforcing its position in the entire continent in addition to its centers of influence in Libya in the north and in Somalia in Sub-Saharan Africa. At this point, the dynamics on the ground need to be followed closely in order to prevent short, middle and long-term damages that increased terrorist activity may cause in the region and to avoid further shattering of regional dynamics by international competition. Middle to long term planning depending on the optimal balance between the capacity and the current and possible power elements and/or quickly review under new circumstances might be necessary. Yet one needs to keep in mind several factors such as the different characteristic of the region in projecting its logistical capability in the field, the potential to form new equation against the actors dealt in the immediate neighborhood in a new field, and the direct and indirect relation of the region to the Eastern Mediterranean, a region of vital importance to Turkey.







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