THE FUTURE OF ISIS AND US COUNTERTERRORISM:
A STUDY OF ISIS, BOKO HARAM, AL-SHABAAB,
AND THE US POLICY RESPONSE

by
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ABSTRACT

This study is comprised of two parts. Part 1 focuses on ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, examining the structures, tactics, and motivations of the groups. Each group seeks territory in its respective region. After losing territories, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab both turned to guerilla attacks and suicide bombing, destabilizing the areas formerly under their control. Having lost much territory, ISIS is already showing signs of behaving more like an insurgency and employing tactics similar to Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab by resorting to attacks on soft targets as it continues to be deprived of territory. Part 2 focuses on the US policy response to ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab. After describing the Obama Administration's objectives, polices, and results against these groups, this study concludes that while President Obama's objectives were met fairly well and the groups were weakened in territorial capacity, the groups continue to thrive in certain capacities and the administration failed to deter the groups' escalating soft target attacks. In detailing and speculating upon the Trump Administration's policies towards ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, this study predicts the Trump Administration's potential departures from the previous administration and highlights the opportunities and challenges confronting President Trump in countering the groups. This study finds that the Trump Administration will likely increase US troop levels in the fights against ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, and that sustaining gains against the groups will necessitate a long-term US role of security and surveillance in areas vulnerable to the groups' attacks.

       The use of open-source data in this study is intentional so the sources are widely available. The plurality of these sources is online news reporting due to the recent and ongoing nature of this study's subject. Because this study uses so many news sources that can be found and read quickly and easily, a simple review of the source material as opposed to a full literature review is sufficient. A few of the news websites often cited are The New York Times, The Washington Post, and BBC. Other cited websites are devoted to the study of terrorist groups and national security, such as the Council on Foreign Relations, Brookings, and Stanford websites; these sources provide unrivaled information on the background and history of the jihadist organizations analyzed in this study. Cited online magazines like *Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs,* and *The Atlantic* are sources that present analysis on the developments and trends of the groups studied. The one book cited in this study is *ISIS: The State of Terror* by Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, which profiles the progress of ISIS. This study sometimes cites academic publications, which provide deep analysis into jihadist groups. This study has multiple US government sources including The White House website, Defense Department and State Department websites, and Congressional testimony, which display specific objectives, policies, and opinions of the US government. The cited Congressional Research Service publications provide comprehensive information and analysis on jihadist groups and US policies.

Methodology

        The research focus of this study is ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and the US response to these groups. The research question is what the future behaviors of these groups will look like and how best the US can respond to the groups. This study collects open-source data including news websites, academic publications, and US government sources. Media publications were utilized and assessed to present an overview of the issues from the perspective of open-source analysis. The study is therefore largely informational, although a significant portion involves original analysis based on open-source data. This thesis is based on a research style used in the intelligence field that assesses ongoing events. In open-source intelligence analysis, analysts rely on the availability of news publications to update their work and make assessments. An aspect of this is to understand the analysis of journalists and academics. Combining their reporting and analysis with this study's original analysis allows for an expanded viewpoint and a variety of perspectives. Part 1 evaluates data with an intelligence analysis approach, looking at certain trends of behavior and tactics in order to make predictions. Part 2 analyzes data with more of a policy analysis approach, looking at the objectives and results of policies and drawing conclusions on potential successes and errors based on the factors on the ground.

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Part 1: ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab

The first part of this study analyzes ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, and assesses future behavior. Specifically, Part 1 looks at the structure, history, status, ideology, and tactics of each group. The structures of the organizations reveal the key aspects that influence operations and group capacities. By analyzing the history and status of each group, one can better understand not only past behavior but also future actions. Studying each group's ideology aids the comprehension of the root causes behind certain notions, objectives of the groups, and how they justify their actions. In analyzing tactics, this study details the development of strategy for each group and how it has evolved. From that, this study identifies the trends of these tactics and predicts how the groups will act in the months and years ahead. Part 1 focuses its predictions on ISIS, as it presents perhaps the largest national security threat of the three groups and has received considerable attention in the US, especially in the realm of US counterterrorism policy, the subject of Part 2 of this study.

Although al Qaeda and certain other jihadist organizations are significant threats with many ties and similarities to these groups, this study singularly focuses on ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab. All three groups are inspired by Salafi-jihadism and have roots in al Qaeda, but are unique among jihadist groups in prioritizing the control of territory in their respective regions. Additionally, this study mostly focuses on the activities of these terrorist groups in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and Somalia. While these groups are active in other regions, these countries are relevant because the groups controlled territories within them and the groups' tactics are most prevalent within them.

ISIS

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also commonly known as ISIL, the Islamic State, or Daesh, is a Sunni jihadist organization that is rooted in an extremist group founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 1999. In 2004, this group became an al Qaeda splinter group, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The United States (US) State Department designated it as a terrorist organization in 2004.[1] AQI separated from al Qaeda after al-Zarqawi was killed in 2006, forming the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). After entering the Syrian Civil War, ISI proclaimed itself ISIS.[2] By 2013, the group was conducting dozens of deadly attacks a month inside Iraq and starting operations in Syria. After capturing vast areas of territory in both Iraq and Syria in 2014, ISIS declared the establishment of a caliphate. The group has shepherded recruits from around the world into Iraq and Syria, mobilized affiliates in multiple other countries, and inspired many radicalized followers. Since 2015, ISIS and ISIS-inspired individuals have carried out a wave of terrorist attacks that claimed hundreds of lives on four continents.[3]

Structure

ISIS has a detailed structure and hierarchy. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi is the proclaimed caliph and leader of ISIS and has supreme political and religious authority in ISIS territory. He has two deputies, one in charge of the administration of Iraq[4] and another in charge of Syria. Below the deputies are the Shura Council, the Cabinet, and local leaders. ISIS fighters from foreign countries hold many of the top administrative

[1] "Senior Administration Officials on Terrorist Designations of the al-Nusrah Front as an Alias for al-Qaida in Iraq," *U.S. Department of State*, December 11, 2012, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://2009-
[2] Jessica Stern and J.M Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, London: William Collins, 2016.
[3] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[4] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi,*. Accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.aymennjawad.org/14151/the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham.

posts in the bureaucracy. The Shura Council has the power to depose the caliph, but al

Baghdadi appoints all Council members.[5]

ISIS rules by Sharia law and does not recognize international borders. When ISIS

takes control of a city or province, it uses violent tactics to enforce fundamentalist

Islamism. ISIS governs its territories, having created court systems, schools, social

services, and local governments.[6] ISIS established a police force to enforce the religious

doctrine of the state, ensuring shops are closed during Muslim prayer and that women

cover their hair and faces in public. If the police find someone defying these standards,

then that person will be publicly executed or amputated.[7] Other forms of punishment for

violators of these standards include lashing (whipping) and stoning (throwing stones at

the violator).[8]

<u>History and Status</u>

After invading Iraq in 2003, the US disbanded Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Army and

banned the Ba'ath Party, the dominant party in Iraqi government. This process, called de-

Ba'athification, blocked many experienced people from participating in the new

government and therefore alienated many people. This alienation led some former

Ba'athists to turn to insurgency and eventually ISIS.[9] Many of the leaders of ISIS were

officers in Saddam Hussein's dissolved army who combined their military training with

[5] Cameron Glenn, "Al Qaeda v ISIS: Leaders & Structure," *Wilson Center*, March 14, 2016. Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-v-isis-leaders-structure.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Gregor Aisch, "How ISIS Works," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2014, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/16/world/middleeast/how-isis-works.html.
[8] Cameron Glenn, "Al Qaeda v ISIS: Leaders & Structure," *Wilson Center*, March 14, 2016. Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-v-isis-leaders-structure.
[9] Mark Thompson, "ISIS: How Disbanding the Iraqi Army Fueled the Extremist Group's Rise," *Time*, May 28, 2015, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://time.com/3900753/isis-iraq-syria-army-united-states-military/.

insurgency methods during years of battling American forces.[10] The Institute for the Study of War analyzed the operations of ISIS from November 2012 to November 2013 and concluded that ISIS functioned as a military rather than a terrorist network, most likely due to the influence of these officers. Thus, the organization has a military framework,[11] even as it engages in terrorist activities.

In 2011, ISIS entered the war against Assad in Syria and, in early 2014, seized areas in Iraq. As ISIS captured Mosul and quickly moved south in Iraq, it also seized and consolidated control of Raqqa and most of the surrounding area in Syria.[12] The group draws on resentment of the dominant powers in Iraq and Syria, thriving in Sunni areas facing exclusion from the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government and in areas hostile to Bashar al-Assad's Alawite regime.[13] It also advanced into Kurdish areas of Iraq, killing or enslaving thousands of the Yazidis.[14] The group controls hundreds of square miles in Iraq and Syria[15] and has 12,000 to 15,000 fighters in those countries.[16]

According to NBC News, ISIS is operational in eighteen countries throughout the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.[17] One critical goal of ISIS is to acquire more

[10] Gregor Aisch, "How ISIS Works," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2014, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/16/world/middleeast/how-isis-works.html.

[11] Robert G. Rabil, Daniel L. Davis, Richard Javad Heydarian, and Douglas Macgregor, "The ISIS Chronicles: A History," *The National Interest*, July 17, 2014. Accessed March 24, 2017, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-isis-chronicles-history-10895?page=2.

[12] Jessica Stern and J.M Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, London: William Collins, 2016.

[13] Clint Watts, "End Game: Al-Shabab as a Model for the Islamic State's Decline," *World Politics Review*, March 30, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/15418/end-game-al-shabab-as-a-model-for-the-islamic-state-s-decline.

[14] "Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps," *BBC News*, January 20, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034.

[15] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

[16] Associated Press in Washington, "Isis ranks dwindle to 15,000 amid 'retreat on all fronts', claims Pentagon," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2016, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/11/isis-ranks-dwindle-to-15000-amid-retreat-on-all-fronts-claims-pentagon.

[17] William Arkin, Robert Windrem, and Cynthia McFadden, "New 'Heat Map' Shows ISIS Branches Spreading Worldwide," *NBCNews.com*, August 03, 2016, Accessed March 24, 2017,

initiates and expand its recruiting efforts around the world. The call for the creation of a

caliphate inspired a surge in foreign fighters, including from many Western countries,

travelling to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. A 2015 report concluded that about 27,000

foreign jihadists had joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq; more than half of them were from the

Middle East and North Africa.[18]

An example of ISIS expansion is the ISIS presence in Libya. ISIS does not appear

to have much of an organizational infrastructure in the country, but may have as many as

6,000 fighters there. The group had a stronghold in the Libyan coastal city of Sirte, but it

came under siege and ISIS experienced losses in and around the city (facilitated by a US

military campaign).[19]

But even as ISIS expands globally, much of the land it once controlled has been

taken away. Since the beginning of 2015, ISIS has lost roughly 65% of its acquired

territory, approximately 60% of its acquired territory in Iraq and 30% in Syria.[20] At its

peak, around ten million people lived in ISIS-controlled territory; today it is estimated

close to six million.[21]

Kurdish-led forces have driven ISIS jihadists out of thousands of square miles in

Northern Syria. These forces are taking control of cities such as Manbij and Hassadjek

from ISIS. This has caused ISIS in Al-Bab to start evacuating troops and relocating them

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http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/new-counterterrorism-heat-map-shows-isis-branches-spreading-worldwide-n621866.

[18] "Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps," *BBC News*, January 20, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034.

[19] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

[20] Michael R. Gordon, "ISIS Leaders Are Fleeing Raqqa, U.S. Military Says," *The New York Times*, March 08, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/world/middleeast/syria-raqqa-isis.html.

[21] "Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps," *BBC News*, January 20, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034.

to Raqqa.[22] Turkey's armed forces invaded Syria and took control of Jarablus from ISIS in August 2016.[23] In March 2017, Syrian fighters backed by the US began to close in on Raqqa and seized a main route near the city[24] and the US will likely send 1,000 more ground troops ahead of the Raqqa offensive.[25] Some ISIS leaders have fled Raqqa although an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 remain in the city to fight in an impending battle.[26]

At its height, ISIS controlled nearly a third of Iraq; it has now lost more than half of its once-held territory in the country. In January 2016, Iraqi authorities recaptured the Western Iraq city of Ramadi. In late 2016, Iraqi and Kurdish Peshmerga forces with US-led coalition airstrikes and military advisors started an offensive to retake Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city. In February 2017 Iraqi forces reclaimed the eastern half of Mosul and western Mosul was completely surrounded.[27] Losing Mosul will likely put an end to ISIS's territorial ambitions in Iraq for the time being, but the fight for Mosul will likely be lengthy and destructive as ISIS has underground bunkers and stockpiles of food to last

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[22] "Best Map of Syrian Civil War - Live Map of Syria / Syria News," *Syrian Civil War Map*, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://syriancivilwarmap.com/.

[23] Lisa Barrington and Umit Bektas, "Turkish forces deepen push into Syria, draw U.S. rebuke over their target," *Reuters*, August 29, 2016, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN11305C

[24] Michael R. Gordon, "ISIS Leaders Are Fleeing Raqqa, U.S. Military Says," *The New York Times*, March 08, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/world/middleeast/syria-raqqa-isis.html.

[25] Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "U.S. military likely to send as many as 1,000 more ground troops into Syria ahead of Raqqa offensive, officials say," *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/03/15/u-s-military-probably-sending-as-many-as-1000-more-ground-troops-into-syria-ahead-of-raqqa-offensive-officials-say/?utm_term=.1caf1e892094.

[26] Michael R. Gordon, "ISIS Leaders Are Fleeing Raqqa, U.S. Military Says," *The New York Times*, March 08, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/world/middleeast/syria-raqqa-isis.html.

[27] Associated Press, "Mosul's ISIS-held neighborhoods surrounded, official says," *Fox News*, March 13, 2017, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/03/13/mosuls-isis-held-neighborhoods-surrounded-official-says.html.

for years in the city. The UN warned that the Mosul battle could displace another one million people.[28]

Ideology and Tactics

ISIS subscribes to a violent, hardline version of Salafi-jihadism.[29] This concept combines an emphasis on the military exploits of the Salaf (the early generations of Muslims) with jihad, the idea that religiously-sanctioned warfare is an individual obligation incumbent upon all Muslims. This idea gives violence a divine imperative. Adherents to this belief have an exclusivist view that their approach to Islam is the only authentic one and use it to justify violence against other Muslims. Salafi-jihadism is the ideological foundation for ISIS and serves as the footing for its agenda and tactics.[30]

Before 2015, the primary focus of ISIS was its geo-strategy of capturing territory in areas of the Middle East, especially Syria and Iraq, "cleansing" and controlling it, and then state-building within it according to the Salafi-jihadist and Wahhabi vision. Expansion was another key goal, achieved by attacking nearby enemies like al Qaeda's Jabhat al-Nusra, Syrian revolutionary forces, the Assad regime, or the Iraqi government.[31]

The main ISIS strategy in its campaign for territory was the surprise attack, inflicting mass casualties and spreading fear before withdrawing. ISIS then waited for unfriendly locals or Iraqi forces to flee the designated area. The use of excessive violence

[28] "Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps," *BBC News*, January 20, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034.

[29] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

[30] Rashid Dar and Shadi Hamid, "Islamism, Salafism, and jihadism: A primer | Brookings Institution," *Brookings*, July 28, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/.

[31] Omar Ashour, "ISIS Terror Strategy in Europe," *Middle East Institute*, April 7, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.mei.edu/content/article/isis-terror-strategy-europe.

was a strategic choice to drive the "undesirables" out of captured lands, providing a submissive population to make the holding phase less complicated.[32]

ISIS is massively outnumbered by the advancing coalition battling for Mosul, a 90,000 strong force including Iraqi troops and Kurdish fighters. This is likely the last stand for ISIS in Iraq; it is prepared for fierce resistance against opposing forces. Accordingly, ISIS now relies on asymmetric warfare tactics to inflict damage on its opponents and terrorize civilians. Coalition forces approaching the city must navigate roads lined with IEDs and avoid booby traps set by ISIS in recaptured towns. Suicide attacks have become signature methods of ISIS. The group commonly detonates bombs using cars, trucks, and suicide vests. ISIS has launched surprise attacks in other parts of Iraq, like Kirkuk and Rutba, to distract coalition forces and tie up resources elsewhere.[33]

The campaign for territory is not the only occupation of ISIS. The group also attacks soft targets, not only in the Middle East (Baghdad and Kabul) but also in the West, especially Europe (Paris and Brussels). Soft targets are characterized as locations such as marketplaces or halls where people are densely concentrated, it is hard to secure, and difficult to protect. Hard targets, on the other hand, are major targets but highly secure.[34] Hard targets, like military bases or large political conferences, are difficult to attack because of heightened security. Terrorists, including ISIS, often attack soft targets because of the difficulty of hitting hard targets.[35] ISIS sometimes hits hard targets, such

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[32] Metin Gurcan, "ISIS MILITARY STRATEGY," *Academia.edu*, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/7632564/ISIS_MILITARY_STRATEGY.

[33] Tim Hume, "Battle for Mosul: How ISIS is fighting back," *CNN*, October 24, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/24/middleeast/iraq-mosul-isis-tactics/.

[34] "Terrorist Targets," *History of War*, Accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/concepts_terrortargets.html.

[35] "Brussels Attacks Highlight ISIS' Focus On Soft Targets," *NPR*, March 22, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.npr.org/2016/03/22/471474829/brussels-attacks-highlight-isis-focus-on-soft-targets.

as the 2016 "crude" chemical attack at a US base outside Qayyarah in Iraq.[36] However, even if ISIS prefers attacking hard targets, there is a benefit in striking soft targets. Hitting soft targets creates the impression that an attack can happen anytime, anywhere. This impression spreads fear, and ISIS wants to be feared and thought powerful.

After losing territory in Syria and Iraq, ISIS has seemingly compensated with a shift in focus to soft target attacks all over the world. The number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq has decreased in accordance to the changing ISIS strategy.[37] ISIS initiated major attacks outside the Middle East, especially in Europe. Since October 2014, ISIS affiliates and sympathizers have conducted no less than thirty alleged plots and terrorist attacks against Western citizens and interests, compared to two alleged plots and one attack before that date. ISIS leadership increasingly directs these attacks.[38] ISIS propaganda has shifted its focus from legitimating ISIS rule and calling for Muslim migration into ISIS-controlled lands to inviting attacks on the West.

US officials have expressed concern over the ISIS strategy to attack the West. CIA Director John Brennan stated that ISIS is planning more attacks against the West and has a large number of Western fighters who could launch the attacks. Brennan voiced that ISIS's "foreign branches and global networks can help preserve its capacity for terrorism, regardless of events in Iraq and Syria," adding that as "pressure mounts" on ISIS, "it will intensify its global terror campaign." [39] He also expressed that ISIS is likely exploring

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[36] Lucas Tomlinson, "ISIS believed to have attacked US base in Iraq with chemical agent," *Fox News*, September 21, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/09/21/isis-may-have-attacked-us-base-in-iraq-with-chemical-agent.html.
[37] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[38] Omar Ashour, "ISIS Terror Strategy in Europe," *Middle East Institute*, April 7, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.mei.edu/content/article/isis-terror-strategy-europe.
[39] CIA Director John Brennan, Testimony before the Select Senate Committee on Intelligence, June 16, 2016.

means for infiltrating the West, including refugee flows, smuggling routes, and legitimate methods of travel.[40] FBI Director James Comey warned that Western countries are threatened by "hundreds of very, very dangerous people" that could emerge from Syria and Iraq, forming "a terrorist diaspora sometime in the next two to five years like we've never seen before."[41]

Attacks on the West can be conducted in many different ways. Former Defense Secretary Ash Carter stated that ISIS leadership has broad range in directing external attacks: personally directing ISIS fighters returning to their countries of origin, facilitating those that are recruited and trained but not in in-person contact with ISIS, and inspiring those who are simply moved by the ISIS message.[42]

Besides campaigns for territory and attacks, ISIS employs other tactics in accordance with its ideology. ISIS has regularly performed public executions and crucifixions beginning in 2004.[43] These acts include, among many others, the beheadings of several Westerners, including American journalists, posted online in 2014.[44]

Religious minorities in ISIS territory have faced expulsion, destruction or seizure of property, forced conversion, kidnapping, assault, sexual slavery, and death. ISIS classifies Jews and Christians as hostile parties to justify violence against them and ISIS

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[40] "After losing ground in Syria and Iraq, CIA chief says ISIS planning more guerrilla attacks in West," *National Security – National Security News and Information*, June 24, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.nationalsecurity.news/2016-06-24-after-losing-ground-in-syria-and-iraq-cia-chief-says-isis-planning-more-guerrilla-attacks-in-west.html.

[41] FBI Director James Comey, Testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, September 27, 2016.

[42] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

[43] Jessica Stern and J.M Berger, *ISIS: the State of terror*, London: William Collins, 2016.

[44] "ISIS Fast Facts," *CNN*, November 1, 2016, accessed March 24, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/08/world/isis-fast-facts/index.html.

leaders often refer to their enemies as part of a Jewish and Crusader-led conspiracy against Islam.[45]

ISIS is responsible for genocide against Yazidis in Iraq and Syria and Christians in Iraq, Syria, and Libya.[46] Moreover, as many as 7,000 Yazidi women were taken captive by ISIS and exploited as sex slaves.[47] According to a 2016 United Nations report, ISIS may be holding 3,500 people as slaves.[48]

ISIS attacks are not confined to non-Muslims, however. The jihadist group has carried out acts of genocide against fellow Muslims, such as the killing of the 322 members of Albu Minr tribe in Iraq.[49] ISIS leaders describe many Muslims as idolaters or apostates to justify violence against them. For example, ISIS considers Muslims that support democratic governance to be idolaters for elevating man-made law rather than God's law. The group is uncompromising in its condemnation and violence toward Shia and Alawites, whom ISIS considers apostates subject to death for their beliefs and practices.

ISIS effectively uses social media to carry out its objectives. Starting with 2012's *The Clanging of the Swords*, a video series that depicts combat and violent death to disseminate anti-Shi'a propaganda in Iraq, ISIS has used video and social media tools to spread its message globally. ISIS videos began depicting beheadings of Iraqi soldiers and Westerners alike, and the group used Twitter as a platform to spread propaganda; this

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[45] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[46] Bill Powell, "As ISIS's caliphate crumbles, Jihadist tactics are evolving," *Newsweek*, December 02, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.newsweek.com/2016/10/21/beating-isis-caliphate-terrorism-jihadism-508559.html.
[47] Jessica Stern and J.M Berger, *ISIS: the State of terror*, London: William Collins, 2016.
[48] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[49] Ibid.

media strategy has continued since.[50] Graphic material put online by ISIS is meant to inspire potential recruits and sympathizers and to create publicity. This notoriety produces feelings of strength and influence as well as fear; social media is therefore an integral strategy for ISIS.

ISIS has used its influence to disrupt the networks of other terrorist groups worldwide, including Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. ISIS has sought to change the leadership of its ally Boko Haram and has encouraged defections from Al-Shabaab in order to attract Somali recruits to its own ranks.

ISIS is especially involved in Somalia as of late. It has produced propaganda videos aimed at Somali viewers, claiming to be the only true defenders of Islam. While ISIS has had limited success in recruiting in Somalia, some leaders of Al-Shabaab have defected. These defectors have been forced to flee, often to Libya, or face arrest or death by the Al-Shabaab internal security network. Somali defectors to ISIS are predominantly in the region of Puntland and clashes have erupted there between the defectors and Al-Shabaab. Elsewhere, ISIS has attracted Somali-American recruits from Minnesota to fight in Syria and Iraq who otherwise may have joined Al-Shabaab.[51] ISIS will probably continue its practice of recruiting in Somalia, as the group sees an unstable, conflict-ridden, mostly Sunni Muslim, state from which it can bolster its dwindling ranks.

As the group is pushed out of Iraq and Syria, it seems to be moving toward volatile Somalia in an attempt to preserve its mission of building an Islamic caliphate. ISIS may also have trouble holding territory in Somalia, however, only increasing the likelihood that it escalates use of guerilla tactics and terrorist attacks to remain relevant.

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[50] Jessica Stern and J.M Berger, *ISIS: the State of terror*, London: William Collins, 2016.
[51] NCTC, "AL-SHABAAB," *National Counterterrorism Center | Groups*, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html.

In October 2016, ISIS captured Qandala, a Somalian port town on the Gulf of Aden. Qandala is the first major town ISIS captured in Somalia.[52] Although the ideology of ISIS can be attractive to Islamists in Somalia, the group will have difficulties challenging the dominance of Al-Shabaab in the country. Somalia is challenging to administer for non-natives unfamiliar with local clan politics. In Somalia, there is great suspicion of foreigners and local trust is extremely important.[53] The recent success of ISIS in Somalia may be due to the emergence of local Somali defectors from Al-Shabaab in ISIS leadership. A former recruiter and spokesman for Al-Shabaab reportedly led the ISIS faction that captured Qandala.[54] Although ISIS was reportedly driven out of Qandala by Somali security forces in December 2016,[55] its turn to Somalia signals a strategic shift.

<u>Boko Haram</u>

Boko Haram is an insurgent group originally based in northeast Nigeria.[56] Its name is roughly translated "Western education is sacrilege." The group promotes a form of Sunni Islamic fundamentalism that forbids Muslims from any political or social activity associated with Western society, such as voting in elections or receiving a secular education. The group desires to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria with strict Sharia law across the country.[57] Estimated at 4,000 to 6,000 fighters,[58] the group uses violent

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[52] Alex Tin, "ISIS faction raises black flag over Somali port town," *CBS News*, October 27, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-faction-raises-black-flag-over-somali-port-town/.
[53] NCTC, "AL-SHABAAB," *National Counterterrorism Center | Groups*, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html.
[54] Alex Tin, "ISIS faction raises black flag over Somali port town," *CBS News*, October 27, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-faction-raises-black-flag-over-somali-port-town/.
[55] Nizar Manek, "Islamic State Routed in Somalia's Puntland, President Says," *Bloomberg.com*, March 23, 2017, accessed March 31, 2017, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-23/islamic-state-group-routed-in-somalia-s-puntland-president-says.
[56] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Boko Haram," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 11, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boko-Haram.
[57] "Boko Haram crisis: Nigerian military chiefs given deadline," *BBC News*, August 13, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33913305.

tactics and commonly attacks civilians.[59] One of the world's deadliest terrorist groups, Boko Haram has killed an estimated 15,000 people[60] and more than 2.5 million people have been displaced as a result of the violence.[61] In 2013, the US State Department designated Boko Haram as a terrorist organization.[62] In recent years, Boko Haram has lost approximately 30% of its fighters since the inception of a regional force to reclaim territory from the group.[63]

Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015[64] and sought to rebrand itself as the Islamic State's West African Province,[65] though the group remains more popularly known by its original name.[66] Boko Haram's declared name change seemingly marked a shift in focus to expanding the group's influence to other regions of Africa, like ISIS with its presence in different regions of the Middle East.

Boko Haram sees the Nigerian government as illegitimate and overrun with

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[58] VOA News, "US Estimates Boko Haram Has Up to 6,000 Fighters," *VOA*, February 06, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.voanews.com/a/boko-haram-attacks-niger-border-town-/2631583.html.

[59] Dan Weku, "The Elusiveness of Boko Haram and al Shabaab: A Successful Protracted Guerilla Strategy or A Flawed Counterstrategy," *Academia.edu*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/25412636/The_Elusiveness_of_Boko_Haram_and_al_Shabaab_A_Successful_P rotracted_Guerilla_Strategy_or_A_Flawed_Counterstrategy.

[60] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[61] Hilary Matfess, "Boko Haram's Resilience," *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2017, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2016-12-19/boko-haram-s-resilience.

[62] "Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist group?," *BBC News*, November 24, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501.

[63] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[64] Sarah Almukhtar, "How Boko Haram Courted and Joined the Islamic State," *The New York Times*, June 10, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/11/world/africa/boko-haram-isis-propaganda-video-nigeria.html.

[65] "Islamic State ties broaden Boko Haram threat," *BBC News*, October 02, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34412956.

[66] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

Western influence. It regards the Nigerian state as being run by non-believers. Based in the mostly Sunni Muslim north,[67] Boko Haram opposes a perceived concentration of wealth in Nigeria among the political elite, chiefly in the southern, mostly Christian, part of the country. This divide between north and south Nigeria is one of the starkest historically, as the political, economic, and cultural differences have often produced violence. Nigeria is the richest country in West Africa, but one of the most violent.[68]

The Nigerian government and military has long suffered from corruption and mismanagement. Nigerian armed forces and police have also reportedly carried out human rights abuses, especially since the rise of Boko Haram. The group often uses these abuses as an effective propaganda tool. Because of these grievances and its stated mission, Boko Haram wishes to overthrow the Nigerian government and seeks to target neighboring states to grow a fundamentalist Islamic state.[69]

Structure

Boko Haram has a clear organizational structure based on a fluid number of cells and hierarchical layers. Abubakar Shekau is considered the leader. Like ISIS, its highest decision-making body is the Shura council, which commands the various cells.[70] A splinter faction of Boko Haram known as Ansaru emerged in 2012. Ansaru was critical of Boko Haram's killing of Nigerian Muslims. Thus, Ansaru primarily focuses its attacks

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[67] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016
[68] Assaf Moghadam, "The Connectivity between Terrorism, Insurgency, and Civil War," *Insite Blog: On Terrorism & Extremism*, April 01, 1967, accessed March 25, 2017, http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/about-us/21-jihad/4389-al-qaeda-terrorism-and-insurgency.
[69] Mohammed Aly Sergie and Toni Johnson, "Boko Haram," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 5, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/boko-haram/p25739.
[70] "Nigeria: Examining Boko Haram," *Stratfor*, July 15, 2014, Accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/nigeria-examining-boko-haram.

and kidnappings on foreigners. The State Department designated Ansaru as a Foreign

Terrorist Organization in 2013.[71]

Boko Haram apparently suffered from another internal power struggle in 2016.

Shekau claims to remain the leader, but after Boko Haram allied with ISIS, ISIS

appointed Abu Musab al-Barnawi to lead in August 2016. Today, it appears that Boko

Haram is split between followers of Shekau and followers of al-Barnawi.[72]

Besides the core militants of Boko Haram who seemingly ascribe to violent

Salafi-jihadism, the group appears to draw support from a broad class of followers,

predominantly young men from the Lake Chad Basin region in Nigeria, Niger, and

Cameroon.

History and Status

Boko Haram was formed in 2002 around the Islamic scholar Muhammad Yusuf.

Osama bin Laden sent $3 million to Nigeria to help form the terrorist group, and Yusuf

co-opted a local youth group at a university in Maiduguri, starting Boko Haram with the

help of Al-Qaeda. From 2003 to 2009, Boko Haram grew its organization, recruiting poor

Nigerians (especially children) and establishing political power. Yusuf developed close

ties with politicians in northern Nigeria and became rich and influential.[73]

In 2009, Boko Haram initiated an insurgency against the Nigerian state, killing

800 people. Yusuf, as well as an estimated 700 members of Boko Haram, were killed,[74]

but the group continued its insurgency. In 2011, Boko Haram started striking areas in

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[71] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016
[72] "Boko Haram," *Counter Extremism Project*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/boko-haram.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Hilary Matfess, "Boko Haram's Resilience," *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2017, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2016-12-19/boko-haram-s-resilience.

northern Nigeria, mostly government or Christian targets, and attacked the United

Nations (UN) compound in Abuja.[75] The group engaged in hit-and-run attacks in mostly

urban areas until a state of emergency was declared in the Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe

states in 2013. Nigeria's military and police were able to push the group out of urban

centers,[76] but then Boko Haram overran smaller towns and came to control many rural

areas in northeastern Nigeria.[77] By early 2015, the Nigerian government lost between 40

to 70% of Borno state and border areas by Cameroon to Boko Haram[78]

After Boko Haram killed thousands and invaded neighboring countries, a multi-

national African force comprising the militaries of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon

began operations to fight the jihadist group in 2015;[79] these operations, most notably

from Nigeria and Chad, has retaken much of Boko Haram's self-described caliphate.[80]

Slowly, the Nigerian military uprooted Boko Haram's infrastructure in northern

Nigeria. In March 2015, the Nigerian government took back the city of Gwoza, a major

turning point.[81] Although Nigerian forces regained large swaths of territory from the

jihadist group, Boko Haram is still powerful in the region, even with the rival factions of

Shekau and al-Barnawi competing for control of the group. Since July 2016, the armies

of Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin are operating new assaults on Boko

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[75] Christopher Wall, "Boko Haram's History: Radical Islam in Nigeria," *Ntrepid*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.ntrepidcorp.com/timestream/boko-haram-history/.

[76] Hilary Matfess, "Boko Haram's Resilience," *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2017, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2016-12-19/boko-haram-s-resilience.

[77] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Boko Haram," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 11, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boko-Haram.

[78] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[79] Joe Bavier, "Multinational force conducting operations against Boko Haram: Niger general," *Reuters*, June 21, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security-niger-idUSKCN0Z72J8.

[80] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[81] Christopher Wall, "Boko Haram's History: Radical Islam in Nigeria," *Ntrepid*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.ntrepidcorp.com/timestream/boko-haram-history/.

Haram. Several operations, mostly conducted through the Nigerian military, are liberated vast areas from the group.[82]

<u>Ideology and Tactics</u>

Like ISIS, Boko Haram subscribes to Salafi-jihadism. This explains Boko Haram attacks against fellow Muslims, as this belief provides justification for such actions. The group regularly attacks mosques, churches, and schools, killing civilians en masse. Attacks attributed to the group usually feature IEDs, car bombs, suicide bombs, and small arms.[83] Often targeting "pro-Western" institutions like schools, Boko Haram wants to end the integration of their society with the West.[84] Boko Haram's leader publicly threatened to burn secular schools and kill their teachers, calling these schools a "plot against Islam."[85] The group's attacks against schools prompted the closing of more than 2,000 schools in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.[86]

The kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls was not an outlier in terms of Boko Haram tactics. Boko Haram often kidnaps women and children, sometimes for ransom, and the group has abducted as many as 2,000 women and children since 2012. Boko Haram is also known to kidnap Christian women in northern Nigeria; some of these women were reportedly forced to convert to Islam and have been used as sex slaves.[87]

Boko Haram also regularly forces captured women and girls to carry out their attacks, thus turning them into suicide bombers. In fact, Boko Haram has used at least

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[82] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[83] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016.

[84] "They Set the Classrooms on Fire," *Human Rights Watch*, February 16, 2017, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/04/11/they-set-classrooms-fire/attacks-education-northeast-nigeria.

[85] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

105 women and girls in suicide attacks since June 2014, and female bombers- many

children under the age of eighteen- carried out 41 percent of all Boko Haram-related

incidents in 2014.[88] While young boys are sometimes used as suicide attackers, female

bombers are ideal for Boko Haram. They are searched less thoroughly at security

checkpoints and can easily conceal explosives under dresses or gowns.[89]

Boko Haram attacks occur almost daily in northeastern Nigeria and are

increasingly frequent in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The group initially focused on

government targets like police stations, but it expanded targeting to civilians in schools,

churches, mosques, markets, bars, and villages. Cell phone towers and media outlets have

been attacked as well, likely for both tactical and ideological purposes. Furthermore,

Boko Haram has assassinated local political leaders and moderate Muslim clerics.[90]

Starting in 2002, as Boko Haram began to receive financial aid from al-Qaeda, the

group mimicked al-Qaeda's character extensively with a tactical focus on asymmetric

attacks against government and civilian targets. Although similar to al-Qaeda in

character, Boko Haram was notable for its narrow domestic focus. After Yusuf's death in

2009, many Boko Haram members went to Somalia to fight with Al-Shabaab or to the

Sahara and Sahel[91] to join al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In 2011, Boko

Haram began to combine vehicle-borne IEDs with shock tactics, using explosions to

draw out security forces, which are then ambushed with IEDs. These kinds of assaults

originated in Afghanistan and Iraq and it is likely that Boko Haram learned the tactics

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[88] Ibid.
[89] Dionne Searcey, "Boko Haram Turns Female Captives Into Terrorists," *The New York Times*, April 07, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/08/world/africa/boko-haram-suicide-bombers.html.
[90] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.
[91] Jonathan Masters and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shabab," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 13, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabab/p18650.

through its relationship with AQIM. Boko Haram's 2011 bombing of the UN compound in Abuja, its first international target, was likely a favor to AQIM because of its global, anti-Western message.[92]

In 2012, many Boko Haram fighters joined AQIM in northern Mali, fighting in the Mali Civil War. They came back to Nigeria with experience in guerilla warfare, leading to improved capabilities in raids and engagements with the Nigerian military.[93] Boko Haram seized tactical military vehicles from various Nigerian military bases,[94] boosting the group's capacity to engage military actors.

Boko Haram changed its focus in 2014 and moved toward a conventional offensive to seize and hold territory.[95] As ISIS captured territories in Northern Iraq and declared a caliphate, it inspired Boko Haram to capture territory and declare a caliphate. Boko Haram activities increased across Nigeria and the group attempted to disrupt the scheduled national elections in 2015. At the same time, Boko Haram expanded into Chad and Cameroon.[96] The group likely thought that expansion into neighboring countries would help to recruit young Muslims in the region. But, unlike ISIS, Boko Haram did not have a social media presence. Furthermore, the group was not bringing western fighters into the organization.[97]

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[92] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[93] Christopher Wall, "Boko Haram's History: Radical Islam in Nigeria," *Ntrepid*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.ntrepidcorp.com/timestream/boko-haram-history/.

[94] Dan Weku, "The Elusiveness of Boko Haram and al Shabaab: A Successful Protracted Guerilla Strategy or A Flawed Counterstrategy," *Academia.edu*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/25412636/The_Elusiveness_of_Boko_Haram_and_al_Shabaab_A_Successful_Protracted_Guerilla_Strategy_or_A_Flawed_Counterstrategy.

[95] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[96] Christopher Wall, "Boko Haram's History: Radical Islam in Nigeria," *Ntrepid*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.ntrepidcorp.com/timestream/boko-haram-history/.

[97] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

Boko Haram's strategy reverted to asymmetric warfare and is largely uniform in the wake of territorial losses, focused on bombing or ambushing crowded markets, places of worship, and bus stations in surprise strikes, largely against soft targets in northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon.[98] Robin Sanders, a former US ambassador to Nigeria, has said that Boko Haram transitioned to tactics of assymetrical warfare like guerilla attacks, which she notes are similar in style to Al-Shabaab. Additionally, Sanders contended that Boko Haram's tactical efforts were being driven by its connection to ISIS.[99]

It appears that Boko Haram views guerilla strikes as the best strategy moving forward. Now that the militant group no longer controls large swaths of territory, members see acts of terrorism such as suicide bombings and hit-and-run raids as the only way to ensure that their presence remains noticed in the region. The jihadist group has attacked camps for displaced people in northern Nigeria, aiming specifically to harm people that have escaped Boko Haram's violence.[100] As schools reopen, Boko Haram will probably target the institutions as they have in the past.[101]

The new strategy could be particularly concerning because the shift from ruling territory to conducting surprise attacks makes the actions of Boko Haram more difficult to predict. Moreover, it is difficult to discern where the fighters are based, as the group

[98] Ibid.

[99] Al Jazeera Staff, "Q&A: Boko Haram's changing tactics," *Al Jazeera*, February 11, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/qa-boko-haram-changing-tactics-160211045508486.html.

[100] Rick Gladstone, "Blast Kills 7 at Nigerian Camp for People Fleeing Boko Haram," *The New York Times*, September 13, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/12/world/africa/nigeria-blast-boko-haram-in-yolo.html.

[101] "Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist group?," *BBC News*, November 24, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501.

now appears to control or little or no territory.[102] Although many attacks have occurred in northeast Nigeria, guerilla tactics have also shifted to other parts of Nigeria and neighboring countries.[103] Attacks on different regions serve to distract military forces from the focus on northeast Nigeria and drain government resources elsewhere.

Deadly infiltrations outside of Nigeria, including attacks in Niger and Chad, likely serve to weaken the security of adjacent countries so Boko Haram could overrun the areas and obtain control. The multinational offensive against Boko Haram, comprising the militaries of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin, has been largely successful in its goal to regain territory from the jihadist group, but the growing guerilla attacks and bombings have not been contained. Boko Haram's change in strategy is particularly concerning for Nigeria as it attempts to rebuild the northeast region and ensure the safety of its citizens.

Boko Haram's behavior since losing its territory bears a striking resemblance to Al-Shabaab actions in Somalia. Al-Shabaab employed guerilla-fighting tactics after losing its own territory to multinational forces. Al-Shabaab changed tactics from campaign-style offense or defense to the sole aim of destabilizing the areas that were seized from the group.[104] The use of surprise attacks has evidently been effective, as Al

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[102] Chris Stein, "Boko Haram Still Lives - But Where?," *VOA*, September 04, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.voanews.com/content/boko-haram-still-lives-but-are-able-to-hide-in-nigeria-elsewhere-in-region/2948978.html.

[103] "Report on Boko Haram," *U.S. Department of State*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/rm/2016/252357.html.

[104] Muhyadin Ahmed Roble, "Al-Shabaab has changed its tactics. AMISOM must do so too," *African Arguments*, September 9, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://africanarguments.org/2015/09/09/al-shabaab-has-changed-its-tactics-amisom-must-do-so-too/.

Shabaab has retaken at least three towns from African Union forces since September 2015.[105]

Seeing that Al-Shabaab experienced success with guerilla tactics in Somalia, Boko Haram probably has a similar goal to reclaim towns in Nigeria. The regular attacks serve to destabilize areas of Nigeria and provoke fear in the people. Because Boko Haram now appears to control little or no territory, guerilla tactics like suicide bombings and surprise ambushes are the only means to make its presence felt. Northern Nigeria is the focus of these attacks, as the group looks to destabilize the regions that were formerly under its control. Boko Haram's ultimate goal is likely to recapture these areas amid the chaos of its destructive attacks, similar to Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

In February 2016, the connection between Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab was established further when it was reported that Boko Haram militants were receiving specialized training from Al-Shabaab forces in Somalia. The Boko Haram military was taught weaponry building and suicide attack methodologies in Al-Shabaab training camps. The national security advisor to Somalia's president also believes that operatives from both groups shared "tactical operational skills" and maintained "cyber and physical contact." [106]

In November 2015, ISIS claimed responsibility online for the attacks in Paris, France that killed 130 people. In this statement, ISIS mentioned the "dream to reclaim the wilderness in the interior Nigeria," before asserting a desire to take Rome, Paris, and

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[105] Abdi Sheikh and Feisal Omar, "Al Shabaab militants retake Somali town from African Union," *Reuters*, September 06, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/09/06/uk-somalia-attack-idUKKCN0R60MJ20150906.

[106] Stephanie Busari, "Boko Haram training in Somalia: Security chief," *CNN*, February 25, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/25/africa/boko-haram-al-shabaab-somalia/.

Andalusia.[107] The mention of Nigeria stresses the importance of the alliance between the

ISIS and Boko Haram.

The attacks in Paris demonstrated that ISIS could conduct an extremely deadly

operation in a Western city. These attacks in Paris seemingly encourage members of ISIS

and its affiliates to damage and terrorize Western civilization, as evidenced by the many

attacks in Europe in recent months. Boko Haram's leader has issued direct threats against

the United States, signaling an expanding focus toward the West for the group. The attack

on the UN building in Abuja may be its only significant international target so far, and to

date no American citizens are known to have been kidnapped or killed by Boko

Haram,[108] but the group's alignment with ISIS may mean an increase in targeting the US

and the West in the future.

Boko Haram has seemingly validated its allegiance to ISIS by partnering in the

fight for Libya. Boko Haram reportedly sent military equipment and 200 troops to Libya

to bolster the ISIS forces fighting for control of the country.[109] The allegiance and

connections to ISIS seem to indicate a shared goal between the jihadist organizations.

Just as ISIS established a caliphate in Iraq and Syria and desires to expand further,[110] it

seems that Boko Haram desires to control territory beyond Nigeria and into neighboring

countries. This goal to expand is evidenced by the group's wish to be called the Islamic

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[107] Micheal Oche, "ISIS Mentions Nigeria In Paris Attacks," *Nigerian News from Leadership News*, November 15, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://leadership.ng/news/474760/isis-mentions-nigeria-in-paris-attacks.
[108] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.
[109] Nick Gutteridge, "Boko Haram sends militants to ISIS in Libya as map shows horror plan for global domination," *Express.co.uk*, August 25, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/600500/Islamic-State-Boko-Haram-fighters-ISIS-Libya-Rome-Europe, accessed October 11, 2015.
[110] Adam Withnall and Danny Romero, "Isis, a year of the caliphate: What is it that the so-called 'Islamic State' really wants?," *The Independent*, June 29, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-a-year-of-the-caliphate-what-is-it-that-the-so-called-islamic-state-really-wants-10352950.html.

State in West Africa province,[111] suggesting a claim to a continental region, rather than only Nigeria.

Because it lacked the capacity to wage a transnational insurgency in West Africa, Boko Haram's infrastructure fell apart when the countries it attacked joined together and committed to uproot the jihadist group with their military forces. Boko Haram turned to copying strategies used by ISIS: vigorous use of social media and production of execution videos.[112] Going forward, Boko Haram will probably use these materials to create a perception of strength, even in the face of lost power and territorial control. Ultimately, Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to ISIS and emulation of ISIS social media may prove most effective as a propaganda tool, increasing the profile of the group.

Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab, translated "The Youth," [113] is a jihadist militant group fighting for the creation of a fundamentalist Islamic state in Somalia. Also known as Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen or Al-Shabab, the group has links to al-Qaeda and is a US-designated terrorist organization like the previous groups.[114] Al-Shabaab emerged from the ashes of the Islamic Courts Union, a coalition of local Sharia courts that combined to briefly govern large swaths of Somalia.[115] Al-Shabaab took over most of southern

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[111] "Islamic State ties broaden Boko Haram threat," *BBC News*, October 2, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34412956.
[112] Christopher Wall, "Boko Haram's History: Radical Islam in Nigeria," *Ntrepid*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.ntrepidcorp.com/timestream/boko-haram-history/.
[113] Jonathan Masters and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shabab," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 13, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabab/p18650.
[114] Marina Koren, "American Strikes Against al-Shabaab," *The Atlantic*, March 07, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/somalia-al-shabaab/472647/.
[115] Clint Watts, "End Game: Al-Shabab as a Model for the Islamic State's Decline," *World Politics Review*, March 30, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/15418/end-game-al-shabab-as-a-model-for-the-islamic-state-s-decline.

Somalia in 2006. Even after being defeated by Somali and Ethiopian forces in 2007, the group continued its insurgency and sustained control over certain areas. It became a formal Al Qaeda affiliate in 2012.

Like Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab is successful partly because of deep and historical divides in Somalia. Antagonism toward government and outside authorities drive support or acquiescence of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in their respective countries. The apparent human rights abuses of the Nigerian military seemingly created resentment. These abuses include the reported indiscriminate killings of suspected Boko Haram members and other civilians who resided in Boko Haram stronghold areas. Similarly, Al-Shabaab's substantial growth between 2006 and 2008 was likely primarily driven by the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopian troops. This invasion instigated a rise in Somalian nationalism, leading to more Al-Shabaab membership.[116] The group held considerable power over Mogadishu and important locations in the Somali countryside, but the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali Federal Government (SFG) military campaigns against the group weakened it. However, Al-Shabaab remains a threat to Somalia due to the volatile, war-torn nature of the state.[117]

Structure

Today, Al-Shabaab boasts between 7,000 and 9,000 troops. The group is successful in recruiting members from Western countries, including over 40 Americans,

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[116] Dan Weku, "The Elusiveness of Boko Haram and al Shabaab: A Successful Protracted Guerilla Strategy or A Flawed Counterstrategy," *Academia.edu*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/25412636/The_Elusiveness_of_Boko_Haram_and_al_Shabaab_A_Successful_P rotracted_Guerilla_Strategy_or_A_Flawed_Counterstrategy.

[117] Jonathan Masters and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shabab," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 13, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabab/p18650.

mostly from California and Minnesota. Many of these recruits have been used on suicide missions.[118]

Even though it has been pushed out of major urban areas, Al-Shabaab still controls and governs certain territories and controls thousands of square miles in Somalia. In the first form of Al-Shabaab government, regional and local administrations included offices for education, missionary propagation, taxation, the judiciary, and collection of religious charity and taxes. This type of governance is similar to that of ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Now, Al-Shabaab still operates many of these functions, but on a diminished scale.[119]

<u>History and Status</u>

Since 2011, AMISOM-led forces have degraded Al-Shabaab's control in key regions and major southern cities of Somalia, including Mogadishu, the country's capital. Nevertheless, the group has remained resilient and adaptable, strong enough to act as a "shadow government" in Somalia.[120] Despite internal divisions and shifting alliances in recent years, the group has carried out many attacks against government officials and AMISOM forces as well as military bases in Somalia. Since 2013, Al-Shabaab has also conducted operations in Kenya, such as the attack on the Westgate mall in Nairobi that killed at least 67 people and the attack on a Christian university in Garissa that killed 148

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[118] Dan Weku, "The Elusiveness of Boko Haram and al Shabaab: A Successful Protracted Guerilla Strategy or A Flawed Counterstrategy," *Academia.edu*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/25412636/The_Elusiveness_of_Boko_Haram_and_al_Shabaab_A_Successful_P rotracted_Guerilla_Strategy_or_A_Flawed_Counterstrategy.
[119] Christopher Anzalone, "The Resilience of al-Shabaab," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, April 22, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-resilience-of-al-shabaab.
[120] Matt Bryden, "Remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies event" (Address, The Race Against Time in Somalia, March 24, 2016).

people. [121] The group has conducted attacks in other neighboring countries as well, like its suicide bombing of a restaurant popular with Westerners in Djibouti. [122]

In October 2014, Al-Shabaab lost control of Baraawe, its last major urban stronghold and access point to the Indian Ocean. Despite mounting pressure and lost territory, Al-Shabaab has remained resilient. After implementing guerilla tactics, the group retook several towns from AMISOM in 2015. [123] These towns included Buqda, an economic center in the Hiran region, El Saliindi, south of Mogadishu, and Kuntuwarey, near Barawe. [124]

The leaders of Al-Shabaab desire to seize back territory from AMISOM and SFG. They also seek to publicly recapture villages and towns that government forces are unable or unwilling to protect. Al-Shabaab achieved a propaganda and tactical victory by temporarily taking back the cities of Merca and Afgooye. Even though the jihadist group was soon forced to withdraw from the areas, raising their flags in these locations created a perception of Al-Shabaab power. [125]

Al-Shabaab's emir announced the intention to expand territorial control. He stated that Al-Shabaab still engages in social services, education, and judicial affairs. The

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[121] NCTC, "AL-SHABAAB," *National Counterterrorism Center | Groups*, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html.
[122] Carla E. Humud, "Al Qaeda and U.S. Policy: Middle East and Africa," *Congressional Research Service,* August 11, 2016.

[123] Christopher Anzalone, "The Resilience of al-Shabaab," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, April 22, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-resilience-of-al-shabaab.
[124] Matt Bryden, "Remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies event" (Address, The Race Against Time in Somalia, March 24, 2016).
[125] Christopher Anzalone, "The Resilience of al-Shabaab," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, April 22, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-resilience-of-al-shabaab.

organization also declared it will continue to exercise governing authority and use violence to carry out that authority.[126]

Since August 2016, Al-Shabaab has killed a number of high-ranking Somali officials, including a senior intelligence officer, a district commissioner, and a general in the national army. Al-Shabaab continues to regularly attack the Somali capital of Mogadishu and AMISOM military bases.[127] The group is enjoying its most successful run of attacks against the Somali government in years, just as the Somali electoral process is in a transition period with a new parliament and new president.[128] But even as Al-Shabaab is expanding its attacks, the group itself is fairly unstable because of defections to ISIS, which has recently started operations in Somalia.[129]

Ideology and Tactics

Al-Shabaab, like Boko Haram and ISIS, believes in Salafi-jihadism. All three groups prescribe to Islamic fundamentalism and jihad. The Wahhabi movement, which promotes the establishment of Islamic caliphates governed by Sharia law, strongly influences the three groups. These guiding principles are successful rallying points in recruiting, organizing, and sustaining attacks on their countries' governments and regional forces. While all the groups condemn the West, they differ slightly in perception of Westernization. Boko Haram and ISIS denounce all Western or modern education,

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Associated Press, "African Union Force in Somalia Needs Troop Surge, Chief Says," *Bloomberg.com*, March 11, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-11/african-union-force-in-somalia-needs-troop-surge-chief-says.

[128] Joshua Meservey, "Al Shabab's Resurgence," *Foreign Affairs*, March 03, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2017-01-03/al-shabab-s-resurgence.

[129] Kevin Samolsky, "AU and U.S. Forces Inflict Heavy Losses on Al Shabaab," *Center for Security Policy*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2016/03/10/au-and-u-s-forces-inflict-heavy-losses-on-al-shabaab/.

music, and literature ("the Quran is the only literature one should read"). Conversely, Al-Shabaab does not condemn most Western technology or its characterization.[130]

Starting in 2008, Al-Shabaab tightened its relationship with al Qaeda. The group shifted more closely to al Qaeda in ideology and tactics, emphasizing the struggle in Somalia as part of a global jihad. It began to align with al Qaeda in ideology and tactics, targeting civilians through suicide attacks much more frequently. Al-Shabaab leadership included al Qaeda members and attracted foreign fighters and donations from al Qaeda supporters. Al-Shabaab forces even trained abroad with al Qaeda.[131]

Al-Shabaab's decision to carry out major attacks on civilian targets marked a sharper focus on terrorism against soft targets. While it may look like the group is no longer interested in insurgency, soft target attacks are linked to Al-Shabaab's evolving military strategy, as guerilla and surprise mass attacks on AMISOM and SFG are still often carried out.[132]

Even as the group has shifted toward soft target attacks, Al-Shabaab military operations do not always target civilians. The group continues small-unit, hit-and-run attacks and thoroughly planned, coordinated assaults on AMISOM, SFG, and other opposing forces. After spectacular losses when telegraphing and launching mass frontline attacks on AMISOM and SFG positions, Al-Shabaab shifted to guerilla tactics. Since

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[130] Dan Weku, "The Elusiveness of Boko Haram and al Shabaab: A Successful Protracted Guerilla Strategy or A Flawed Counterstrategy," *Academia.edu*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/25412636/The_Elusiveness_of_Boko_Haram_and_al_Shabaab_A_Successful_Protracted_Guerilla_Strategy_or_A_Flawed_Counterstrategy.

[131] Daniel Cassman, "Boko Haram," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, August 26, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/553?highlight=boko%2Bharam.

[132] NCTC, "AL-SHABAAB," *National Counterterrorism Center | Groups*, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html.

then, the group usually employs lower-risk attacks, many involving IEDs, against opposition forces, checkpoints, camps, and along roads and supply routes.[133]

After IEDs, the most common Al-Shabaab attacks include grenades and mortar fire and the use of snipers. The group often assassinates officials or members of AMISOM and SFG. Al-Shabaab targets police, journalists, peace activists, international aid workers, diplomats, and private citizens, and it engages in kidnappings and attacks on property. Additionally, Al-Shabaab suicide bombings escalated since 2008.[134] This combination of attacks is meant to destabilize Somalia and prevent AMISOM and SFG from establishing peace in the country, therefore enabling Al-Shabaab to eventually reclaim territorial control amidst its created destruction.[135] With this in mind, Al-Shabaab conducted direct strikes on AMISOM forward operating bases. The group overran bases in Leego, Janaale, and El Adde, and killed more than 170 soldiers.[136]

After Kenyan military forces entered the fight against Al-Shabaab, the jihadist group began carrying out deadly raids, ambushes, and bombings inside Kenya. Al-Shabaab attacks on Westgate Mall in Nairobi and Garissa University College exemplify the group's attempts to pressure the Kenyan government to withdraw its troops from Somalia by inflicting harm on Kenyan citizens and creating domestic instability.[137]

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[133] Ibid.

[134] Daniel Cassman, "Boko Haram," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, August 26, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/553?highlight=boko%2Bharam.

[135] NCTC, "AL-SHABAAB," *National Counterterrorism Center | Groups*, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html.

[136] Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shabab's Strength, Not Weakness," *Foreign Policy*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/.

[137] NCTC, "AL-SHABAAB," *National Counterterrorism Center | Groups*, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html.

Al-Shabaab, like ISIS and Boko Haram, uses AK-47 rifles, automatic machine guns mounted on non-tactical vehicles, rocket propelled grenades, and vehicle-borne and person-borne improvised explosive devices to launch spontaneous attacks in different regions. Al-Shabaab perfected hostage-taking tactics: storming villages, cities, government buildings, or shopping malls, and it often carries out suicide bombings.[138] The group has also shown a new level of technological sophistication when it nearly brought down a commercial airliner with a bomb hidden in a laptop and through multiple massive car bomb attacks.[139]

Al-Shabaab, like Boko Haram, has in recent years reverted to unpredicted killings, hit-and-run attacks, kidnappings, and bombings. These strategies serve to ensure that both groups remain a powerful presence in their respective regions and carry on the groups' purposes and goals. Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram seek to root out the West in their regions and believe they are justified in doing whatever necessary to accomplish the task. Although both groups do not hold the territory or as much territory as they once did, their ideas of creating caliphates in their regions remain potent. It seems that their ultimate goal is to recapture territories amid the chaos of surprise attacks, looking to acquire enough land in the aftermath to establish a caliphate. Al-Shabaab was successful in recapturing some territories in 2015, displaying a desire to continue holding territory.

The collapse of Yemen after the Saudi-led intervention reinvigorated Al-Shabaab's longtime ally, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). US intelligence

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[138] Dan Weku, "The Elusiveness of Boko Haram and al Shabaab: A Successful Protracted Guerilla Strategy or A Flawed Counterstrategy," *Academia.edu*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.academia.edu/25412636/The_Elusiveness_of_Boko_Haram_and_al_Shabaab_A_Successful_Protracted_Guerilla_Strategy_or_A_Flawed_Counterstrategy.

[139] Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shabab's Strength, Not Weakness," *Foreign Policy*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/.

agents are convinced that AQAP was training Al-Shabaab fighters and sending them

weapons and ammunition since 2011. Yemen's breakdown led Al-Shabaab and AQAP to

strengthen their ties, as the transfer of weapons and training between the two groups

seemingly accelerated. The Somali Foreign Minister cites Al-Shabaab's new

technological sophistication as evidence of increased collaboration between the group

and AQAP. Moreover, the gradual escalation of Al-Shabaab attacks since 2015 could

partly reflect the ease of procuring weapons from AQAP in war-torn Yemen.[140]

The campaign of attacks against the Somali government intensified in 2016 in the

middle of the election season. Disrupting the electoral process is consistent with an old

Al-Shabaab strategy of discrediting any competing sources of authority and legitimacy.

At the same time, Al-Shabaab increased its attacks in northern Somalia, outside its

normal southern area of operations; in August 2016 it carried out the deadliest terror

attack ever in the northern region of Puntland, killing nearly 30 people through suicide

bombings in Galkayo. By expanding north, Al-Shabaab has more space operate and

decreases its chances of being squeezed completely out of Somalia, while also prompting

Somali and AMISOM forces to expend resources and attention in wider areas. An

increased presence in the north also seemingly makes association with AQAP even more

likely in the future.[141]

Al-Shabaab, like ISIS, has benefitted from the chaos of the failing states in its

region. This region has been battered by many years of continuous conflict and is home

to many disenfranchised tribal communities. Al-Shabaab became powerful by harnessing

the resentment of these disenfranchised communities. The group drew its leaders from

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[140] Ibid.
[141] Joshua Meservey, "Al Shabab's Resurgence," *Foreign Affairs*, March 03, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2017-01-03/al-shabab-s-resurgence.

lesser tribal clans in Somalia, intervening on their behalf against dominant clans. By focusing on ideology as a vehicle for governance, Al-Shabaab was able to inspire trust from the lesser clans and move past traditional clan loyalties.

Al-Shabaab's leaders have threatened attacks in the US and against US targets in the region, displaying an anti-American ideology at least somewhat similar to ISIS and Boko Haram. At least five US citizens have been killed in Al-Shabaab attacks in East Africa since 2010.[142] The group's ability to recruit abroad and attract foreign fighters, including some US citizens, also suggests an interest in global reach.

Like ISIS and Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab's media tools are strong and effective, including video, audio, and text formats. It has local media capabilities within Somalia like domestic radio broadcasts. The group uses the media platforms to recruit regional foreign fighters, particularly Swahili-speakers, from around East Africa to Somalia. East Africans are prominently featured in the group's propaganda videos; the group uses Swahili in its films, as well as Arabic and English. Al-Shabaab propaganda highlights discrimination from African governments, including claims that Kenyan Muslims are being persecuted.[143]

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[142] Carla E. Humud, "Al Qaeda and U.S. Policy: Middle East and Africa," *Congressional Research Service,* August 11, 2016.
[143] Christopher Anzalone, "The Resilience of al-Shabaab," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, April 22, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-resilience-of-al-shabaab.

Implications

ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab each have roots in al Qaeda but are independent from the organization. The groups certainly have a similar worldview as al Qaeda, which is also grounded in global Salafi-jihad and guerilla attacks. Like al Qaeda, the groups carry out attacks with conventional weapons and explosives, and perpetrators often commit suicide in the acts. They strike against opposing militaries and civilians alike. Like al Qaeda, each group is ideologically opposed to the West, although to different degrees. ISIS frequently attacks Western targets; Boko Haram's main ideology is opposition to the West; and Al-Shabaab embraces Western inventions more openly. The aversion to the West partially explains the groups' hatred toward the governments of their respective countries, which the groups perceive as pro-Western. ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab each use antipathy toward local governments to create support for themselves and encourage attacks against government forces.

The difference between these groups and al Qaeda is the central, short-term goal of establishing their own governments with a strict interpretation of Sharia law and, in the case of ISIS, creating an Islamic caliphate; al Qaeda also desires a caliphate, but sees it as a long-term goal and instead focuses on high-profile attacks.[144] Each group succeeded in acquiring territories in their respective homelands or even further, such as the ISIS moves into Syria and Libya. They all also lost significant amounts or all of their territories after military defeats. Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have turned to guerilla tactics and suicide bombings, seeking to destabilize and eventually retake lost areas. In the early aftermath

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[144] Kristina Wong, "Five ways ISIS, al Qaeda differ," TheHill, February 04, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://thehill.com/policy/defense/218387-five-ways-isis-is-different-than-al-qaeda.

of losing large swaths of land, ISIS is conducting attacks similar in a nature to Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab.

These jihadist groups seemingly inspire each other and feed off each other's tactics and successes. In addition to coordination and mutual support in some cases, they model each other's activities at given times. For example, now that ISIS and Boko Haram are allies, Boko Haram has clearly modeled its current social media and execution videos from ISIS. And while Al-Shabaab and ISIS are enemies, their fighting strategies are similar and the groups likely look to each other for tactical improvements or new strategies.

ISIS is following a trajectory similar to the other two groups, as it is starting to engage in more guerilla attacks and suicide bombings in Syria and Iraq. It is possible that using these tactics is the natural next step, maybe the only option to ensure that its presence remains in the region and continue to be perceived as a strong force to be feared. But it also seems that ISIS is purposefully following the examples of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. This is especially apparent in the ISIS strategy of randomly attacking disparate areas of Iraq to confuse the enemy, as Boko Haram has followed the same plan in its respective region. It is likely that the shift in ISIS tactics is due to a sense that the change is both necessary to survive under its new constraints and also a purposeful imitation of the somewhat successful tactics of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab.

ISIS is likely preparing for the long and treacherous insurgency in Iraq. General Joseph L. Votel, the commander of American forces in the Middle East, said that ISIS is increasingly fighting less like a conventional army and more like a terrorist force. ISIS has doubled its use of suicide bombers and ambushes to attack Iraqi security forces. The

2016 ISIS attack in Baghdad, which killed 330 people, foreshadowed a tactical change.[145] Surprise attacks and bombings can be an effective tool in spreading fear and chaos and ultimately destabilizing an area. Al-Shabaab recaptured towns from Somali government forces precisely because it destabilized the areas with guerilla tactics. Boko Haram is attempting the same method in Nigeria. ISIS will likely increase its use of surprise attacks, especially if or when it loses control of Mosul. The group will likely follow the examples of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, relentlessly attacking formerly controlled areas until the area is destabilized and ISIS can reclaim it. The idea of establishing Islamic caliphates is powerful for these groups, as the Wahhabi movement motivates each of them; it is not likely that any of the groups will give up on the aspiration.

At the same time, ISIS has a larger global presence than Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. ISIS will undoubtedly continue to attack the West, and Europe in particular. These attacks strike at the fears of Westerners, and ISIS desires to be perceived as a grave threat to Western civilization. The recent ISIS capture of a town in Somalia also signals another possible change in strategy. Even as ISIS will probably not give up on Iraq and will remain in Syria, the group may attempt to take over areas that are more feasibly overpowered; Somalia is a good target because of its instability, although conflict with Al-Shabaab seems inevitable. ISIS may be on a down spiral in Iraq, but the group will likely shift to insurgency as a tactic to one day taking back control, increasing guerilla tactics globally, and seeking other unstable regions in the Middle East as possible new homes. If anything is certain, ISIS will not go down without a fight, and its prevailing use of guerilla tactics will make it even more difficult to defeat.

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[145] Mara Revkin and Jacob Olidort, "Does ISIS Need Territory to Survive?," *The New York Times*, October 20, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/10/21/does-isis-need-territory-to-survive.

Part 2: US Counterterrorism Policies

After analyzing the organizations and tactics of ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab and discussing implications in Part 1, the second part to this study focuses on how the US government is meeting the challenges presented by these groups and offers potential best practices in confronting the groups in the future. Part 2 does not analyze US policies toward al Qaeda and other terrorist groups in countries like Afghanistan and Yemen, but focuses on the groups from Part 1 because of their aforementioned desire to control territory and similar tactics. Furthermore, this study does not analyze the amount of money spent on military actions or humanitarian aid to victims of these groups, but follows the specific US objectives, policies, and results against these groups.

Part 2 first analyzes the counterterrorism policies toward ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab during the Obama Administration. This study then offers an analysis of President Obama's policies against the groups, looking at whether objectives were met, policies were successful, and if some criticisms were valid. Part 2 then looks at policies of the Trump Administration toward ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al Shabaab. Since much of President Trump's counterterrorism policies have yet to be enacted, this section mostly analyzes statements of US officials and new reports on potential policies. It will be some time before Trump's strategy and departures from the previous administration's policies against these groups become clear, but this study does speculate on new approaches. Finally, Part 2 analyzes the problems presented by all three groups, predicts how the Trump administration may respond, and offers potential best practices in confronting the groups.

Obama Administration Policies

<u>ISIS</u>

<u>Objectives</u>

President Obama and the leaders of the anti-ISIS coalition of countries often expressed their goal to "degrade and ultimately defeat" ISIS by curtailing its territory, manpower, and finances.[146] The stated objectives of the US policy against ISIS under the Obama Administration included narrowing the group's hold on its core areas of control in Iraq and Syria, preventing additional support from affiliates and foreign fighters, and expanding efforts to thwart ISIS supported-and-inspired attacks outside of ISIS-held territory. The US military strategy under President Obama aimed to disrupt the ability of ISIS to operate freely within and between Iraq and Syria and to eventually isolate and recapture ISIS strongholds in Mosul, Iraq and Raqqa, Syria. Additionally, the administration's overarching strategy was predicated on the principle of working by, with, and through US-supported local partners as an alternative to large-scale, direct applications of US force in the region.[147]

The Obama Administration's objectives consisted of several lines of effort including alliances with European and Arab states, support for Iraqi government and Syrian rebel ground forces, intelligence gathering and sharing, efforts to restrict the flow of foreign fighters, obstruction of ISIS finances, and elimination of its leaders.[148]

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[146] Zachary Laub, "The Islamic State," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 10, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811.
[147] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[148] Ibid.

President Obama consistently argued that either drastically increasing or decreasing US and coalition military pressure on ISIS could serve the interests of ISIS, stating that a massive surge in troops would do little to alter the conditions that facilitated the rise of the group. After ISIS claimed responsibility for several terrorist attacks in Western countries, President Obama restated his judgment that deploying large-scale US ground forces for combat was not necessary to achieve US objectives. Rather, he argued that the US policies already in place, supporting local partners, were sufficient to achieve the administration's objectives.[149]

Policies

The armed offensive of ISIS across Iraq and Syria in 2014 prompted a US response; multiple US troops were deployed to Iraq to provide security to diplomatic personnel and facilities, advise Iraqi security forces, and gather intelligence.[150] In the fall of 2014, the US began a campaign of targeted airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and in Syria; additional countries joined the US in an international coalition to defeat the group.[151] The US military operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria became known as Operation INHERENT RESOLVE.[152] In 2015, President Obama ordered new deployments to Iraq and a small deployment of special operations forces to Syria to advise allied armed forces but also to perform unilateral US operations. In 2016, US military operations and deployments in the campaign against ISIS expanded further.[153] As of March 19, 2017, 6,000 US troops were in Iraq and Syria and about one-third were

[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ashley Fantz, "Who make up the coalition against ISIS?," *CNN*, October 09, 2014, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/09/world/meast/isis-coalition-nations/.
[152] "Special Report: Inherent Resolve," *U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE*, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve.
[153] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

special operators, many of whom were advising local troops and militias on the front lines.[154]

As of March 14, 2017, US and coalition forces have conducted approximately 11,356 and 7,592 strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, respectively. US and partner-nation aircraft have flown approximately 143,510 sorties in support of operations in Iraq and Syria since 2014.[155] US strikes support the defensive and offensive military operations of Iraqi military and Kurdish forces in Iraq and seek to erode the remaining territory of ISIS in Syria. Specifically, US strikes and Special Forces operations support local militaries in efforts to recapture Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria.[156] US strikes are also targeting ISIS oil production infrastructure and cash stores.[157]

About two thirds of the US military personnel deployed to Iraq are trainers for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Kurdish *peshmerga*; the rest support these local forces and protect US personnel in Iraq. As of December 2016, the force management level for the US military in Iraq was 5,262, though US forces in Iraq may exceed that number periodically. US officials reported that more than 65,000 Iraqi personnel had received training, including ISF, Kurdish *peshmerga*, police, and Sunni tribal fighters.[158]

In October 2015, after it was revealed that the program to train and equip vetted Syrians in the fight against ISIS had yielded only four or five fighters, the Obama

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[154] Eric Schmitt, "Trump Continues U.S. Use of Special Forces, Keeping Wars at Arm's Length," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/world/africa/trump-special-forces-navy-seals.html.

[155] "Special Report: Inherent Resolve," *U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE*, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve.

[156] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

[157] CBS News, "Flow of foreign ISIS recruits much slower now, U.S. says," *CBS News*, April 26, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/less-foreign-isis-recruits/.

[158] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

administration altered its approach.[159] The administration described the overhauled

program as transactional and performance-based and it shifted away from training and

equipping New Syrian Force units. Instead, it focused on equipping and enabling a select

group of vetted leaders and their units fighting ISIS under a Kurdish-Arab coalition force

known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria and under a force known

as the New Syrian Army (NSA) in southeast Syria. Equipment including weaponry and

ammunition are provided to SDF and NSA forces, and US Special Operations personnel

deployed in Syria are advising and assisting the SDF in anti-ISIS operations.[160]

The US military's Operation ODYSSEY LIGHTNING has conducted a campaign

of airstrikes against ISIS in Libya and assisted local militia forces in recapturing territory

from ISIS. Small numbers of US military personnel were also deployed to gather

intelligence and build relationships with local anti-ISIS groups. In late 2015, the US

military conducted an airstrike that presumably killed the Iraqi leader of ISIS operations

in Libya, the first such airstrike on ISIS operatives outside of Syria and Iraq. A February

2016 US strike on the western Libyan town of Sabratha targeted an ISIS camp and killed

dozens of ISIS fighters.[161]

Results

The coalition partners and the US are positive that they have succeeded in

escalating military pressure on ISIS. In Syria, ISIS fighters have lost territory in the

northeast to Kurdish and Arab forces backed by US airstrikes. US and Turkish-backed

local forces have cut off ISIS's access to the Turkish border and pushed ISIS fighters out

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[159] Zachary Laub, "The Islamic State," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 10, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811.

[160] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

[161] Ibid.

of a significant enclave in northwest Syria. Furthermore, US-backed Syrian rebels have advanced southward, progressing in a campaign to eventually retake Raqqa from ISIS. ISIS is resurgent in central Syria, however, where Syrian government and Russian forces withdrew from Palmyra to focus on Aleppo, creating a vacuum for the group.[162]

In Iraq, ISIS fighters have suffered losses to Iraqi forces in Tikrit, Baiji, Sinjar, Ramadi, Hit, Haditha, Rutbah, Fallujah, and other surrounding areas. US-backed Iraqi forces isolated Mosul in early 2017, with ISIS reduced to controlling the western half of Mosul and isolated areas of Salahuddin, Ninawa, and Anbar Provinces.[163]

In Libya, the U.S. military's Operation ODYSSEY LIGHTNING has facilitated ISIS losses in and around Sirte since mid-2016. The strength of ISIS in the country may be waning and the sustainability of its future operations there is uncertain. In another possible sign of declining power in Libya, ISIS members who sought to impose their will on the eastern city of Darnah faced resistance from other armed Islamist groups that do not recognize Baghdadi's leadership.[164] So, ISIS legitimacy in the country is seemingly in question.

Looking specifically at the Obama Administration's stated objectives, results of the policies against ISIS are mixed. The US has continued its reliance on working with local forces and small operations instead of large-scale applications of US military force, a key objective. ISIS forces have experienced significant attrition and lost vast amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria since 2014,[165] but still maintain much of their core domains. The campaigns for Mosul and Raqqa, though, are ostensibly heading in the right

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[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.

direction. The number of foreign fighters traveling to Iraq and Syria to join the group has

declined sharply. ISIS is also having difficulties meeting expenses due to coalition

airstrikes eroding its oil production and cash stockpiles and as a result of the global drop

in oil prices.[166] At the same time, ISIS has intensified its campaign of planning,

executing, and inspiring terrorist attacks outside of Iraq and Syria.[167]

Boko Haram

Objectives

In the aftermath of Boko Haram's abduction of 270 schoolgirls in Chibok, the

Obama administration announced in 2014 that it would help the Nigerian government

find and free the girls and broadly combat Boko Haram in partnership with Nigeria, its

neighboring countries, and other allies. The stated singular goal of policy in Nigeria was

to dismantle Boko Haram. Objectives included advisory support to the Nigerian

government, isolation of Boko Haram leaders, continued engagement to counter Boko

Haram, and support to populations affected by Boko Haram.[168]

Humanitarian impact, assessments of direct threats, US interests, and US-Nigeria

relations have guided US strategy toward the group. The Obama Administration saw

Boko Haram as a local but potential regional threat to West Africa. AFRICOM's theater

campaign plan for 2016-2020 includes containing Boko Haram among its five planned

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[166] "Flow of foreign ISIS recruits much slower now, U.S. says," *CBS News*, April 26, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/less-foreign-isis-recruits/.

[167] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

[168] "FACT SHEET: U.S. Efforts to Assist the Nigerian Government in its Fight against Boko Haram," *The White House: President Barack Obama*, October 14, 2014, accessed March 26, 2017, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/10/14/fact-sheet-us-efforts-assist-nigerian-government-its-fight-against-boko-.

"lines of effort."[169] According to the State Department, the primary goal of US assistance in Nigeria is to support the development of a stable democracy and reduce extreme poverty.[170]

<u>Policies</u>

While the US has concentrated most its energies on ISIS in Iraq and Syria, recent policies have stretched further. The Obama Administration considered groups and individuals associated with ISIS and engaged in hostilities against the US and or its coalition partners to be legitimate military targets. One of those groups is Boko Haram, or ISIS in West Africa Province. Since 2014, US counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger has grown substantially and the Lake Chad Basin region became a priority of US Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) programs.[171] Nigeria receives peacekeeping support through the State Department's African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, and receives counterterrorism, anticorruption, and maritime security assistance through the West Africa Regional Security Initiative (WARSI).[172]

In 2014, the US dispatched a team to Abuja, Nigeria to advise locals on how to secure the safe return of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls, to encourage an exhaustive approach in addressing vulnerabilities, and to establish capacities to respond more effectively to Boko Haram. This team offered guidance to the Nigerian government on protecting civilians and respecting human rights in the response to Boko Haram attacks.

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[169] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.
[170] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016.
[171] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[172] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016.

The US also provided Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) to aid

the endeavor to find the kidnapped girls,[173] deploying approximately 80 US military

personnel and surveillance aircraft to Chad to monitor Boko Haram activity in this

effort.[174] That specific mission reportedly ended in late 2014,[175] but the US Air Force still

flies surveillance drones from small bases in Niger and Cameroon to keep Boko Haram

activity under surveillance.[176]

The Obama Administration sought programs to improve counterterrorism

coordination between Nigeria and its neighbors and to improve each country's ability to

suppress Boko Haram.[177] Accordingly, the State and Defense Departments created a

Global Security Contingency Fund for Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to counter

the jihadist group. This program provides technical expertise, training, and equipment to

the four countries to develop capabilities in fighting Boko Haram and lays the

groundwork for increased cross-border cooperation in this fight.[178]

Niger is the largest recipient of US security assistance in the region and US

assistance to Cameroon and Chad increased substantially in recent years.[179] 400 US

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[173] "FACT SHEET: U.S. Efforts to Assist the Nigerian Government in its Fight against Boko Haram," *The White House: President Barack Obama*, October 14, 2014, accessed March 26, 2017, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/10/14/fact-sheet-us-efforts-assist-nigerian-government-its-fight-against-boko-.

[174] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016.

[175] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[176] Eric Schmitt, "Trump Continues U.S. Use of Special Forces, Keeping Wars at Arm's Length," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/world/africa/trump-special-forces-navy-seals.html.

[177] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

[178] "FACT SHEET: U.S. Efforts to Assist the Nigerian Government in its Fight against Boko Haram," *The White House: President Barack Obama*, October 14, 2014, accessed March 26, 2017, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/10/14/fact-sheet-us-efforts-assist-nigerian-government-its-fight-against-boko-.

[179] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.

troops are stationed in Niger and the US is building a $50 million drone base in Agadez to monitor Boko Haram insurgents.[180] President Obama sent roughly 300 US troops and surveillance drones to Cameroon to provide ISR support in a noncombat operation. Around 40 US troops are also in Chad to assist in the campaign against Boko Haram. Counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria's military has been comparatively small because of Nigerian soldiers' apparent human rights violations.[181]

Reports of serious abuses by Nigerian government forces have constrained greater US support and counterterrorism collaboration in the past. US legal provisions prohibit assistance to foreign security forces implicated in human rights violations, impairing US-Nigeria security cooperation. US Defense officials have also described Nigeria as an "extremely challenging partner" and "slow to adapt with new strategies, new doctrines, and new tactics." [182]

The State Department reported that Nigerian security forces, partly in response to Boko Haram, engaged in extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, arbitrary detention, mistreatment of detainees, and destruction of property. Amnesty International reported that Nigerian military forces have extra-judicially executed more than 1,000 people and arbitrarily arrested at least 20,000 people; at least 7,000 people have died in military detention from starvation, overcrowding, and denial of medical assistance.[183]

The State Department also announced that Nigeria has government-supported armed groups that recruit or use child soldiers. Nevertheless, President Obama waived the

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[180] Eric Schmitt, "Trump Continues U.S. Use of Special Forces, Keeping Wars at Arm's Length," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/world/africa/trump-special-forces-navy-seals.html.
[181] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016.

application of restrictions on foreign aid established under the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008 and the State Department cleared more than 1,000 members of the Nigerian security forces and hundreds of military and police units for US assistance.[184]

US officials have not ignored the reported abuses, however. When former Secretary of State John Kerry visited Nigeria in 2013, he stated, "One person's atrocity does not excuse another's." [185] Nigerian officials regard US accusations of human rights abuses as interference in internal affairs and have been dismissive of certain US counterterrorism training offers at times. These factors strained the relationship between Nigerian security branches and US defense officials, as evidenced when Nigeria suspended US Special Forces advanced infantry training for an elite Nigerian army unit in 2014.[186]

A US Defense official indicated that the US military is "exceedingly cautious" when sharing information with Nigerian security forces because of their "unfortunate record" and have pursued assurances from Nigeria that shared US intelligence would be used "in a manner consistent" with human rights law.[187] This caution prompted the decision to block Israel's sale of US-manufactured Cobra helicopters to Nigeria in 2014.[188]

Former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari was elected president of Nigeria in 2015, marking the country's first peaceful, democratic transfer of power. The Obama

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[184] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.
[185] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016.
[186] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Tomas F. Husted, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* Cong. Rept. March 11, 2016.

Administration had a relatively favorable view of President Buhari, seeing that his steps to address security abuses went further than those of the previous Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan.[189] In an example of improved relations, the US donated 24 Mine-Resistant-Armor-Protected vehicles to Nigeria's military forces in 2016.[190]

The US was instrumental in the UN action to prohibit arms sales to Boko Haram and freeze its assets. The US designation of Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) triggers the freezing of any assets the group might have in US financial institutions, bans group members' travel to the US, and criminalizes transactions with the organization or its members.[191]

Results

Even though Boko Haram suffered extensive losses to several governments' armed forces in the Lake Chad region and has been deprived of much of its former territory, the group remains a significant threat in West Africa. It continues to carry out asymmetric attacks against civilians, from ambushes to suicide bombings. A UN official related that a military approach would not bring an end to Boko Haram, stressing that affected countries must tackle the root causes of extremism.[192]

Boko Haram is facing significant financial difficulties according to UN officials. Boko Haram's monetary resources are drained and the internal power struggle within the group is exacerbating the problem.[193] However, these difficulties do not appear to be the

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[189] Ibid.
[190] "Nigeria," *USCIRF*, https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_AR_2016_Tier1_2_Nigeria.pdf.
[191] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. March 29, 2016.
[192] "Boko Haram Still Threatens Civilians in Lake Chad Basin, Officials Warn Security Council, Urging United Front to Repair Material, Social Damage | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," *United Nations*, January 12, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12679.doc.htm.
[193] Kingsley Kanayo, "Boko Haram is Broke – UN," *SIGNAL*, February 08, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.signalng.com/boko-haram-broke-un/.

result of UN sanctions or the US FTO designation, which had no discernable effect on Boko Haram due to the group's informal structure.[194] The extent to which the group raises funds from abroad is unclear. Boko Haram seemingly funds its operations through bank robberies, kidnapping for ransom, assassinations for hire, and other criminal activities. The group also seized considerable amounts of Nigerian military equipment and ammunition in 2014 and 2015 and is suspected of selling stolen cattle.

There has been some progress in the objective to free the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls, one of the main goals of the Obama Administration's Nigeria policy. In October 2016, Boko Haram freed 21 of the kidnapped girls following mediation with Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). But, as of December 2016, an estimated 195 girls were still in captivity.[195] Talks to free the rest of the girls are ongoing, but recent negotiations only involved 83 of them.[196]

Few of the Obama administration's objectives against Boko Haram have been met. First, Boko Haram has not been dismantled up to this point. It has lost much of its territory, but its attacks are as prevalent as ever. While the US has offered some advisory support to Nigeria, it has not provided as much to the country as it has to Nigeria's neighbors (for a plethora of, apparently good and wise, reasons). Of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls, nearly 200 remain captive. That said, the peaceful transfer of power in Nigeria from one presidential administration to another in 2015 was a first for the country and a promising step for the durability of its democracy.

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[194] Christopher Wall, "Boko Haram's History: Radical Islam in Nigeria," *Ntrepid*, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.ntrepidcorp.com/timestream/boko-haram-history/.
[195] Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, "Nigeria's talks with Boko Haram over Chibok girls could lead to peace: mediator," *Reuters*, March 01, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN1684ER.
[196] Isha Sesay and Stephanie Busari, "Freed Chibok girls return home for Christmas," *CNN*, December 28, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/26/africa/chibok-girls-nigeria-journey/.

<center>Al-Shabaab</center>

<u>Objectives</u>

The primary US interest in Somalia is to prevent the country from becoming a refuge for terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab to plot attacks against the US and further destabilize the Horn of Africa.[197] The overarching strategy under President Obama was to support policies and reforms in Somalia aimed to eliminate underlying sources of violence and increase regional stability. A key US objective has been supporting the Somali National Army and AMISOM in their efforts to push Al-Shabaab out of its strongholds.[198]

<u>Policies</u>

Hitherto, Al-Shabaab has been a greater concern for US officials than Boko Haram because of evidence that Al-Shabaab has effectively recruited US citizens into its ranks. As a result, the US has been directly engaged in efforts to defeat the group.[199] Since 2007, the US has trained and equipped AMISOM forces battling Al-Shabaab. The US has also conducted drone strikes and special operations raids on Al-Shabaab targets. In an approach called offshore balancing, the US employs air and sea assets in the region in support of local counterinsurgency forces in Somalia including AMISOM. To develop a diplomatic presence in Somalia, the US formally recognized the Somali government in

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[197] Jonathan Masters and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shabab," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 13, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabab/p18650.

[198] "FACT SHEET: Partnering to Counter Terrorism in Africa," *The White House: President Barack Obama*, October 14, 2014, accessed March 26, 2017, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/06/fact-sheet-partnering-counter-terrorism-africa.

[199] Robert A. Dowd, "Violent Religious Extremism and U.S.–Africa Policy," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, June 20, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15570274.2016.1184441.

2013 after a twenty-year hiatus. In 2015, President Obama nominated the first US ambassador to Somalia since 1991.[200]

The only permanent US military installation in Africa is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. The base comprises 4,000 US service members and civilians and operates as a hub for counterterrorism campaigns and training.[201] A makeshift base in Baledogle, Somalia is also used to train a Somali military unit to fight Al-Shabaab.[202]

In 2016, the US escalated its military involvement against Al-Shabaab in Somalia; 200 to 300 US Special Operations troops carried out more than a half-dozen raids per month with the help of soldiers from Somalia and other African nations. These operations combined ground raids and drone strikes; the US Navy's Seal Team 6 was heavily involved in many of the raids. American troops are also working with Somali forces to interrogate Al-Shabaab fighters after completing ground operations.[203]

The Obama Administration loosened the legal scope of the war against Al Qaeda, deeming Al-Shabaab to be part of the armed conflict that Congress authorized against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. The move shores up the legal basis for the intensifying campaign of airstrikes and counterterrorism operations in Somalia.[204]

The Treasury Department also attempted to economically starve Al-Shabaab through several sanctions against Somalia. Private financial institutions are suspending

[200] Jonathan Masters and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shabab," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 13, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabab/p18650.
[201] Eric Schmitt, "Trump Continues U.S. Use of Special Forces, Keeping Wars at Arm's Length," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/world/africa/trump-special-forces-navy-seals.html.
[202] Mark Mazzetti, Jeffrey Gettleman, and Eric Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/africa/obama-somalia-secret-war.html.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Charlie Savage, Eric Schmitt, and Mark Mazzetti, "Obama Expands War With Al Qaeda to Include Shabab in Somalia," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/27/us/politics/obama-expands-war-with-al-qaeda-to-include-shabab-in-somalia.html.

money transfers from the US to Somalia in an effort to prevent American money from reaching Al-Shabaab.[205]

Results

US drone strikes and US financial and material assistance to a 22,000-strong AMISOM force have succeeded in driving Al-Shabaab from most urban areas,[206] yet the group remains the most significant threat to peace and security in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.[207] Regional security is in constant flux due to Al-Shabaab attacks and suicide bombings on civilians, Somali government, and AMISOM targets.[208]

US airstrikes against Al-Shabaab have a varied record. Some strikes have been decidedly successful. A March 2016 strike, one of the deadliest in any country in recent years, killed more than 150 Al-Shabaab fighters in what US military officials called a graduation ceremony. A September 2016 strike, however, killed more than a dozen Somali government soldiers. Somali officials were outraged and stated that the US was duped by Somali clan rivals and given bad intelligence.[209]

There are countless complexities of waging war against Al-Shabaab. US allies have struggled to sustain success against the group, largely due to internal rifts and clan-based politics in the region. Many of Kenya's counterterrorism policies have been

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[205] David Francis, "How the United States is Trying to stop al-Shabab," *Foreign Policy*, April 02, 2015, accessed March 26, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/02/how-the-united-states-is-trying-to-stop-al-shabab/.

[206] Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shabab's Strength, Not Weakness," *Foreign Policy*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/.

[207] Jonathan Masters and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shabab," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 13, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabab/p18650.

[208] Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shabab's Strength, Not Weakness," *Foreign Policy*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 25, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/.

[209] Mark Mazzetti, Jeffrey Gettleman, and Eric Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/africa/obama-somalia-secret-war.html.

counterproductive, as the Kenyan government has rounded up masses of Somali immigrants and refugees. Entire communities in the country have been made scapegoats for Al-Shabaab actions. Accusations of corruption, torture, and extrajudicial killings by Kenyan government forces are widespread. These reported abuses have slowed US counterterrorism training and assistance to Kenya through the Security Governance Initiative just as similar abuses inhibited US support to Nigeria in the effort against Boko Haram.[210]

Meanwhile, AMISOM efforts have been hindered by the difficulties of training Somali national forces, still torn by clan rivalries. Counterterrorism assistance through US airstrikes and special operations have interfered with Al-Shabaab operations, but the balance of power on the ground remains unchanged. AMISOM forces are largely confined to their bases, and many roads in Somalia are still controlled by Al-Shabaab. The group's deadly attacks on AMISOM bases in the last two years have slowed AMISOM-Somali offensives.[211] Even in cities where AMISOM is nominally in control, its forces rarely conduct active patrolling or anti-Al Shabaab operations. Rarely are there any "holding and building" efforts in AMISOM-run cities. Moreover, coordination, intelligence sharing, and joint planning between AMISOM forces in Somalia is uncommon.[212]

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[210] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why are efforts to counter al-Shabab falling so flat? | Brookings Institution," *Brookings*, July 29, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/04/05/why-are-efforts-to-counter-al-shabab-falling-so-flat/.

[211] Associated Press, "African Union Force in Somalia Needs Troop Surge, Chief Says," *Bloomberg.com*, March 11, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-11/african-union-force-in-somalia-needs-troop-surge-chief-says.

[212] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why are efforts to counter al-Shabab falling so flat? | Brookings Institution," *Brookings*, July 29, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/04/05/why-are-efforts-to-counter-al-shabab-falling-so-flat/.

Stig Jarle Hansen, an Al Shabaab expert and research fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University, is pessimistic on the results of US policy against Al-Shabaab, saying, "It's not only the US failing to defeat Al Shabaab, it's actually the US failing to defeat almost any jihadi group in Africa…" [213]

Criticisms aside, some objectives in US policies against Al-Shabaab were met under President Obama. US-backed AMISOM and Somali forces have pushed Al-Shabaab out of many areas of Somalia. Additionally, Al-Shabaab has not plotted and carried out an attack in the US, although the group has killed US citizens abroad. Still, the Horn of Africa is an extremely unstable region, partly due to Al-Shabaab, and the underlying causes of violence and conflict in the region have not been neutralized. While Al-Shabaab has been forced out of many cities in Somalia, it still controls vast areas in the country and continually plagues populated areas with deadly attacks.

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[213] Conor Gaffey, "WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT DONALD TRUMP'S AFRICA POLICY," *Newsweek*, January 16, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-president-elect-africa-policy-us-543298.

Analysis of Obama Administration Policies

In terms of merely meeting counterterrorism policy objectives, the Obama Administration had a mixed record. In anti-ISIS policy, objectives were met fairly successfully, albeit the rise of ISIS terrorist attacks against the West and around the world. Objectives were not met as often in Africa, where Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab continue to thrive despite lost territory and increased US involvement in the fights against the groups. Since meeting objectives is only one criteria of success, one should consider whether President Obama implemented the proper strategy, proclaimed reasonable goals, and understood certain assumptions or underlying premises in totality.

The Obama Administration's strategy in counterterrorism efforts against ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab was largely built around "sustainable efforts."[214] This involved building the capacity of partners, placing multi-directional military pressure on opposition fighters, addressing regional and local political disputes, and avoiding possible costly and counterproductive military interventions.[215] President Obama's strategy was ostensibly constructed with the perceived excesses of the previous administration's invasion and occupation of Iraq in mind. In avoiding similar policies, the Obama administration clearly sought to refrain from large-scale US troop commitments or massive investments in theaters of combat. Instead, the administration usually focused on supporting local forces through means of airstrikes and small groups of special operators.

Certain critics of Obama's policies, like James F. Jeffrey,[216] Matthew Levitt,[217] and Michael Morell[218] argued that the US should increase the use of military force and

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[214] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[215] Ibid.
[216] James F. Jeffrey, "The U.S. Must Send Ground Forces to Eliminate the Islamic State," *Washington Post*,

prioritize defeating ISIS in response to its continuous terrorist acts. They generally

believed that greater direct military commitment than the Obama Administration was

willing to provide was necessary to ultimately defeat these groups.[219]

Near the end of Obama's final term, the US military stepped up its fight against

ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab. This acceleration was likely necessary to protect

national security interests, and while it may not have featured a drastic increase in

military force, it was a slight departure from earlier strategy. The US began implementing

more military power against ISIS with airstrikes and arming and training of local forces,

quite costly investments. The fights against Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab involved US

military force on a much smaller scale, but nonetheless US involvement in efforts against

both groups accelerated substantially since 2015.

Some critics still argued that the administration's reported caps in troop levels and

strict limits on combat hampered more immediate outcomes in these fights, but generally

supported the move toward increased military involvement in these conflicts. Whether

the Obama Administration felt more investments were simply necessary or realized some

validity in those critics' arguments for more muscular policies is unclear, but changes

were enacted. These changes, at the very least, weakened the three groups (especially

ISIS) and pushed them out of many areas. Those developments made the ultimate goal of

defeating all the groups seem attainable and now ground offensives against the groups are

trending in a positive direction.

November 16, 2015.

[217] Matthew Levitt, "How to Beat ISIL without 50,000 Troops," *Politico*, November 18, 2015.

[218] "Fight against ISIS needs troops to be effective, Michael Morell says," *CBS News*, February 4, 2015.

[219] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

But while many developments in these fights are favorable, terrorist attacks carried out by these groups are rampant. ISIS soft target attacks in Europe became increasingly common in recent years and US citizens have been killed in ISIS-inspired attacks on US soil. These attacks have led some to call for an even stronger response to ISIS and a substantial increase in US troops in Iraq and Syria. President Obama stated that a large increase in US military presence would do little to alter the political and security conditions that give rise to such attacks. However, some charge that Obama's underlying assumptions were wrong, and that a massive US operation to destroy ISIS would not only nullify the group's fighters and areas of control, but also deter future terrorist attacks because the rallying cry and great cause of ISIS or ISIS-inspired terrorists (the caliphate) would no longer exist.[220]

Other critics of Obama's approach believe that US policy toward ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab should look toward containment, not defeat. They view the goal of ultimately defeating these groups as unreasonable considering partner capabilities and the current will of the US public regarding Middle East conflicts. They also think that the linkage between the amount of territory of a terrorist group and the number of attacks carried out by the group is tenuous. Last, critics of a military driven approach argue that operations to defeat ISIS do little to undermine its ideology and may even strengthen its appeal by fulfilling ISIS predictions.[221]

In Part 1 of this study, it was concluded that when these groups lose territory, they often respond with asymmetric tactics and soft target attacks. So, there might indeed be some linkage between controlled territory and terrorist attacks. It is possible that these

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[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

groups respond in a way opposite to conventional thinking and even to the thinking of certain critics'; for these groups, *less* territory may correspond to *more* terrorist attacks.

Therefore, it is not likely that an accelerated US surge against the groups will deter terrorist attacks, as some critics of the Obama Administration's strategy believe, at least in the short-term. And if there is more than a tenuous link in the other direction between territory and terrorist attacks, advocates of a containment strategy may conclude that this makes their approach even more advantageous than if the link did not exist. The US would probably be ill advised to implement a less vigorous strategy against these groups, however. While depriving ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab of territory will not deter guerilla tactics in the short-term, the US is likely best served to maintain its goal of ultimately defeating the groups in the long-term. This means continued targeting of the leaders and fighters of these groups and eroding their core centers of operations. After all, in the post-2003 occupation of Iraq, the US military suffered mightily from insurgents' brutal ambushes and bombings. The US sustained operations in Iraq, fighting insurgents and developing security, and attacks decreased significantly by the time the US withdrew armed forces from the country in 2011.[222]

In order to fully debilitate the functions of these groups, a larger US military presence in the fights against them is probably essential. Nonetheless, there are no simple solutions in dismantling the operations of the groups. As seen in the campaigns against Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, even if the groups are pushed out of territory and defeated in conventional warfare, they just revert to guerilla tactics, which are difficult to hamper even for a large, capable security force. Hesitation on the part of the Obama

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[222] "Terrorism: number of attacks in Iraq 2006-2015 | Statistic," *Statista*, accessed April 01, 2017, https://www.statista.com/statistics/202738/number-of-terrorist-attacks-in-iraq/.

Administration to vastly expand US military force against these groups was presumably a cautious attempt to avoid committing to protracted fights similar to the post-2003 occupation of Iraq. Although such fights involve great expense and sacrifice for the US, in the long-term it is likely in US national security interests to suppress these groups in order that they not metastasize and conquer more territory, making them even greater geopolitical threats. These considerations may have contributed to the Obama Administration's refashioned strategy starting in 2014.

Ultimately, while the Obama Administration seemingly desired a departure from the previous administration's policies, factors on the ground prompted a stronger approach to ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al Shabbab than was being pursued earlier in Obama's presidency. The realities and complexities of the War on Terror caught up to the administration, and in its final years it implemented a fairly strong military approach toward these groups. President Obama preserved the strategy of focusing on assisting local forces and limiting US troop levels, but operations against the three groups still ended up a costly endeavor. The Obama Administration's approach succeeded in thwarting the progress and largely isolating the operations of ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, but the asymmetric tactics enacted by all three groups in response has created an entirely new set of problems.

Trump Administration Policies

<u>ISIS</u>

President Trump has signaled that his administration may reexamine and redefine US strategies toward ISIS with a goal of defeating ISIS quickly and decisively. During his nomination hearing, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson described defeating ISIS as "the most urgent step in thwarting radical Islam," adding, "defeating ISIS must be our foremost priority in the Middle East."[223] Press reports suggest that elements of the State Department may be reorganized to focus more on counterterrorism and combatting violent Islamist extremism. Secretary Tillerson also recognized that defeating ISIS globally will be "extremely challenging" and that depriving the group of its "caliphate" will not totally defeat ISIS but that the group will "simply morph into its next version."[224] More direct and accelerated US military operations against ISIS are distinct possibilities under the Trump Administration.

In February 2016, Defense Secretary James Mattis delivered a plan to the White House on how to accelerate the fight against ISIS. This plan likely involves an increase in US troops in Syria and strategies to constrict ISIS funding; Secretary Mattis has publicly stated a desire to accelerate the capture of Raqqa.[225] A Pentagon official indicated that the plan is "global" and looks beyond Iraq and Syria.[226]

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[223] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Rowan Scarborough, "McMaster supports Trump's goal to defeat ISIS, no longer says group 'can't be contained'," *The Washington Times*, March 05, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/mar/5/hr-mcmaster-national-security-adviser-supports-tru/.
[226] Jeff Daniels, "Pentagon delivers plan to speed up fight against ISIS, possibly boosting US troops in Syria," *CNBC*, March 02, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/27/pentagon-delivers-plan-to-speed-up-fight-against-islamic-state.html.

The planned deployment of 1,000 more US troops into northern Syria to aid the Raqqa offensive would potentially double the number of US forces in Syria, if approved. Along with this move, the Trump Administration is likely planning to officially abolish the troop caps that were in place for the US military under President Obama. The previous administration capped the number of troops at 5,000 in Iraq and 500 in Syria. Speaking about the potential cap removal, a US defense official stated that "military doctrine promotes agility, and it would help us respond as conditions dictate."[227]

While many US military officials embrace reductions of combat operation limits against ISIS, a more unimpeded approach carries risks. Since Trump took office, there are some allegations that US airstrikes are resulting in an alarming amount of civilian casualties in Iraq and Syria. On March 17, 2017, the US launched an airstrike against ISIS at the request of Iraqi forces in a densely populated neighborhood in Mosul; residents of this neighborhood claim that a strike on that day killed 137 civilians. The US military is investigating the incident, but if the strike did result in the death of that many people, it would mark the greatest loss of civilian life in a single strike since US operations against ISIS started in 2014. The US military is also investigating a separate strike alleged to have killed civilians at a mosque in Syria.[228]

US officials maintain that so far no changes to existing rules for military operations have been enacted under Trump. While this potential rise in civilian casualties may be the result of ISIS fighters' increasing use of human shield tactics (placing

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[227] Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "U.S. military likely to send as many as 1,000 more ground troops into Syria ahead of Raqqa offensive, officials say," *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/03/15/u-s-military-probably-sending-as-many-as-1000-more-ground-troops-into-syria-ahead-of-raqqa-offensive-officials-say/?utm_term=.1caf1e892094.
[228] Missy Ryan and Loveday Morris, "U.S. military acknowledges strike on Mosul site where more than 100 were allegedly killed," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/03/25/u-s-military-acknowledges-strike-on-mosul-site-where-over-100-were-allegedly-killed/?utm_term=.cb7e9acb313f.

civilians with them to deter strikes at their location), it may still undermine the US and its partner forces' relations with civilians.[229] Even if limits on combat have not changed, there is now an appearance of less caution in these matters.

<div align="center">Boko Haram</div>

Before Donald Trump's inauguration as US President, his transition team submitted a four-page list of questions concerning US policy in Africa to the State Department. This list indicated possible skepticism about US counterterrorism policy on the continent and raised questions about the perpetuation of aid programs. Specifically, this document asked why the US cares to be involved in the fight against Boko Haram in Nigeria and why all the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls had not been rescued.[230]

In early February, President Trump had a discussion with Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari over the phone and conveyed America's continued support in the struggle against Boko Haram.[231] Trump reportedly promised to "cut a new deal" to sell more weapons to Nigeria and praised the "strides being taken by the Nigerian military."[232]

The Trump Administration's aggressive stance on terrorism has been well received in Chad, where government forces fighting Boko Haram appreciate US assistance in the effort to degrade the group. In March, US Special Operators and military

[229] Ibid.
[230] Helene Cooper, "Trump Team's Queries About Africa Point to Skepticism About Aid," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/13/world/africa/africa-donald-trump.html.
[231] K. Riva Levinson, "Trump's Africa policy finally gets going, and there's reason for hope," *TheHill*, February 13, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/319302-trumps-africa-policy-finally-gets-off-the-ground-and-the.
[232] Geoffrey York, "Trump promises Nigeria weapons to fight Boko Haram," *The Globe and Mail*, February 13, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/trump-promises-nigeria-weapons-to-fight-boko-haram/article33998329/.

instructors from multiple Western countries conducted a three-week counterterrorism exercise in Chad to train African troops. Soldiers and security forces in Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon largely welcome the US presence in the fight against Boko Haram, and many want to see an even larger US military force to help combat the threat.[233]

<u>Al Shabaab</u>

The Trump presidential transition team's list of questions to the State Department also inquired about the effectiveness of the counterterrorism effort in Somalia. The document asks, "We've been fighting al-Shabaab for over a decade, why haven't we won?"[234]

Monde Muyangwa, the director of the Africa program at the Woodrow Wilson Institute, noted that "the framing of some of their questions suggests… a more transactional and short-term approach to policy and engagement with African countries," and that the queries could signal a "dramatic turn" in US policy in Africa.[235]

J. Peter Pham, director of the Africa Center at the Atlantic Council and rumored as a possible Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs in the Trump Administration, expects at least some stability in relations with Africa and thinks that President Trump will focus on fighting extremism in Africa.[236] Similarly, Al-Shabaab expert Stig Jarle

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[233] Eric Schmitt, "Trump Continues U.S. Use of Special Forces, Keeping Wars at Arm's Length," *The New York Times,* March 19, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/world/africa/trump-special-forces-navy-seals.html.

[234] Helene Cooper, "Trump Team's Queries About Africa Point to Skepticism About Aid," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/13/world/africa/africa-donald-trump.html.

[235] Ibid.

[236] Ibid.

Hansen does not expect President Trump to pull the US out of Somalia, but thinks that Trump is likely to focus more on training local security forces to eradicate Al-Shabaab.[237]

As of March 19, 2017, President Trump is expected to soon approve a Defense Department proposal to remove constraints on Special Operations airstrikes and raids in Somalia to target Al-Shabaab militants. Trump Administration officials show no signs of reversing Obama's strategy to train, equip, and support local armies and security forces in this fight. This probably means, like under President Obama, a considerable reliance on Special Operations forces without the political and economic risks of large-ground wars, although Trump is signaling more latitude to the Pentagon in terms of troop levels. Considering the Trump Administration's proposed deep budgetary cuts to foreign aid and the State Department,[238] it means that Special Operations will still be one of the main instruments in projecting overseas power, even as Trump prioritizes a defense buildup.

As far as diplomatic relations are concerned, President Trump's revised executive order placing a 120-day ban on all refugees and a 90-day ban from six mainly Muslim nations, including Somalia, created quite a stir. Somalia's president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, a dual US-Somali citizen, said, "we have to talk about what the Somali people have contributed rather than a few people who may cause a problem."[239] Increased US involvement in the fight against Al-Shabaab, however, may have the potential to mitigate rifts created by the travel ban.

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[237] Conor Gaffey, "WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT DONALD TRUMP'S AFRICA POLICY," *Newsweek*, January 16, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-president-elect-africa-policy-us-543298.

[238] Eric Schmitt, "Trump Continues U.S. Use of Special Forces, Keeping Wars at Arm's Length," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/world/africa/trump-special-forces-navy-seals.html.

[239] "Trump travel ban: Targeted nations condemn new US order," *BBC News*, March 07, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39194875.

Current Challenges and the US Response

Although President Trump often sounded radical and militaristic when stating his plan to crush ISIS during the 2016 presidential campaign, he could very well end up following counterterrorism policies quite similar to his predecessor. Trump clearly has no issues with projecting a muscular military strategy, but, as a harsh critic of the Iraq War policies under President George W. Bush, he also admonishes supposed military adventurism abroad. If Trump indeed prioritizes smaller investments and fewer footprints, it seems entirely possible that the new administration will continue many of Obama's counterterrorism policies, albeit with more emphasis on explicit military actions.

The earliest reports of the Trump administration policies in this area seemingly reveal a reliance on Special Operations forces to intensify the campaigns against ISIS and other terrorist groups even as senior officials partly embrace Obama's strategy to minimize the US military's presence abroad. The president's first counterterrorism mission was the SEAL Team 6 raid against Al Qaeda in Yemen in which Navy SEAL Ryan Owens was killed.[240] The raid was example of reliance on Special Operations, likely to remain a theme in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, President Trump will likely look to remove many of the constraints on military operations in place during Obama's presidency. This could mean a possible change in the rules of warfare against ISIS and the removal of caps on troop levels in Iraq and Syria. In fact, it has been reported that a few thousand more conventional troops may eventually be sent to Iraq and Syria.

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[240] Eric Schmitt, "Trump Continues U.S. Use of Special Forces, Keeping Wars at Arm's Length," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/world/africa/trump-special-forces-navy-seals.html.

A more muscular and unrestricted approach to ISIS may have its drawbacks, however. US officials have stated that the Trump Administration has not changed the rules of warfare against ISIS as of yet, but the alleged upsurge in civilian casualties resulting from US airstrikes have already created an impression of heedlessness. The appearance of a new, brash airstrike policy- valid or not- threatens to undermine the new administration's strategies even before enactment.

President Trump has inherited a counterterrorism policy that succeeded in its efforts in some ways but also had its holes. Many acknowledge that ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab have all been weakened in at least some way, whether in territory or capacity or recruiting. But while the groups were weakened in certain conventional capabilities, all three turned to asymmetric tactics and soft target attacks. Seeing that Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab were able to use guerilla warfare to disrupt their respective countries and bring about unstable environments for governments attempting to consolidate control of retaken areas, it is likely that ISIS will use similar strategies as local forces begin the process of governing former ISIS-controlled areas.

Of the campaigns against ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, the battle countering ISIS has the largest scale, as it is a focal point of US military operations and receives much attention from media and casual observers. Besides the far-reaching nature of the anti-ISIS offensive, the fight will present a formidable challenge in future years. Even as the US and local partners have seized the military initiative on several fronts, the conflict against ISIS will likely be lengthy, costly, and complex. ISIS's global appeal and its committed fanatics are still grave threats to international security. The Trump Administration is reportedly looking to increase troop levels in Iraq and Syria to

accelerate the removal of ISIS from Mosul and Raqqa,[241] but even if the new administration is successful of depleting ISIS of much of its territory, new issues will arise in the effort against the group.

The involvement of Russia, Iran, Turkey, and several of the Arab states in Syria adds to the complexities of the strategies and policies against ISIS. The introduction of Russian military force in support of the Assad regime constricts US combat options because the US now has to deal with another airpower in a combat zone. The US military has been forced to improve communication with the Russian military in Syria to avoid mishaps between the separate air campaigns. Although the US and Russia ostensibly share the same goal of defeating ISIS, Russia's backing of the Assad government complicates relations as Russia has reportedly targeted rebel groups with at least tacit US support in its airstrike campaigns.

Iranian military forces and Iran-backed Hezbollah also entered the Syrian conflict in support of Assad, spreading influence even after the US attempted to ameliorate relations and curb Iran's nuclear weapons development with the 2015 nuclear agreement. Turkey, broadly a US ally in the anti-ISIS fight, is antagonistic towards Kurdish military forces in northern Syria due to historic hostilities. The Arab states involved in Syria are generally supportive of the US-led coalition against ISIS and hostile toward the Assad

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[241] Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "U.S. military likely to send as many as 1,000 more ground troops into Syria ahead of Raqqa offensive, officials say," *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2017, Accessed March 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/03/15/u-s-military-probably-sending-as-many-as-1000-more-ground-troops-into-syria-ahead-of-raqqa-offensive-officials-say/?utm_term=.1caf1e892094.

regime and Iran, although it appears that some are backing hardline Islamist rebel groups that are too extreme and similar to ISIS for the US to support.[242]

The Iraqi government's involvement with other powers in the campaign against ISIS also complicates the US role in Syria and Iraq. Military officials in Iraq have stated that they are cooperating with Russia and Iran regarding intelligence and security operations.[243] A potential alliance between Iraq, Russia, and Iran has detrimental consequences for the US because it means that two generally anti-American powers are building their spheres of influence in the Middle East, hindering US strategy in the region, and strengthening ties with Iraq after the US has gone to great lengths for the state to remain a friend and ally.

Iraq's bolstered ties to Russia and Iran could worsen relations with the US, which is relying on Iraq to be an accountable partner in the fight against ISIS. A deteriorating bond would only exacerbate the difficulties of countering ISIS in Iraq. Iraqi forces already may be susceptible to divisions amongst themselves if they experience setbacks, and if US influence wanes, it will be nearly impossible to create order and follow through a successful anti-ISIS campaign. Discord within the Iraqi military and between the US and Iraq could create openings for ISIS to exploit, as the state is still torn by religious and ethnic animosity between different groups. [244]

Besides other powers frustrating US strategy against ISIS, the tactics of the group itself will encumber US policies. Part 1 of this study concluded that ISIS will likely turn

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[242] "Islamic State: Where key countries stand," BBC News, December 03, 2015, accessed March 31, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29074514.

[243] Stephen Kalin, "Iraq says Russia, Iran, Syria cooperating on security issues in Baghdad," *Reuters*, September 27, 2015, accessed March 31, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-russia-idUSKCN0RQ0RY20150927.

[244] Christopher M. Blanchard and Carla E. Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, Cong. Rept. January 18, 2017.

to asymmetric tactics after losing its territory in Iraq and Syria. Upticks in ISIS attacks in the West and globally, as well as early signs of this tactic in the Middle East, provide evidence for such a change. As ISIS changes its strategy, though, the US will have to respond in a purposeful way to confront the group and change its own military strategy.

After ISIS is forced out of its areas of control, US and local forces in Iraq and Syria will have to adapt to new policies if they want to consolidate the areas retaken from ISIS. This will likely mean a focus on security and surveillance in these areas as ISIS turns to guerilla attacks and bombings to disrupt its former territories and attempt to create enough instability to eventually move back in. The group will continue to fight for territory because of its firm belief in creating an Islamic caliphate. While it may seem like an irrational strategy for ISIS, it has worked at times for Boko Haram and especially for Al-Shabaab.

While the threats of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab are less severe and the fights against them have a smaller scale, the obstacles to ultimately defeating these groups are significant and abundant. To defeat Boko Haram, the US will likely have to address the resource constraints (exacerbated by corruption) of Nigerian security forces and fill the training gaps that slow its effort against the militant group; that struggle will not likely end soon.[245] Moreover, even though President Trump promised a new weapons deal for Nigeria, any such deal will bring about controversy due to the country's reported human rights abuses. The Trump Administration does not seem to prioritize humanitarian issues as much as the previous administration, but the US will likely look for an explicit attempt by Nigeria to reform its practices before reaching a major new weapons deal.

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[245] Hilary Matfess, "Boko Haram's Resilience," *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2017, accessed March 25, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2016-12-19/boko-haram-s-resilience.

The factors on the ground in Somalia and concerning Al-Shabaab may be the most complex of all three counterterrorism efforts. For one, politics in Somalia continue to be clan-based and cutthroat.[246] The emergence of ISIS in Somalia and the reemergence of AQAP as a major terrorist group in the region further complicate US strategy in the region. The US may still increase military pressure on Al-Shabaab, and the revamped military strategies against the group enacted near the end of Obama's final term will almost certainly continue under President Trump.

US limited targeted airstrikes had minimal impact on Al-Shabaab for a long period. The group has been quick to regroup and retaliate with attacks on soft targets, so the US slightly changed its strategy. US airstrikes have recently targeted not just small groups of Al-Shabaab leaders, but its training bases. By targeting these facilities, US and AMISOM forces may be trying to hinder Al-Shabaab's ability to fight instead of just eliminating operational leadership. This type of targeting, because of its apparent success, will likely continue. And with Al-Shabaab currently dealing with internal divisions due to defections to ISIS, the Pentagon may look to widen attacks on the group.[247]

In regards to the overall US military strategy against Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, there is still much to do in order to create stable environments in Nigeria and Somalia. In the past, local forces did not have the correct strategies or the capacity to fight off these groups after taking control of former terrorist-controlled areas. Government forces in Nigeria and Somalia suffered from a lack of coordination,

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[246] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why are efforts to counter al-Shabab falling so flat? | Brookings Institution," *Brookings*, July 29, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/04/05/why-are-efforts-to-counter-al-shabab-falling-so-flat/.
[247] Kevin Samolsky, "AU and U.S. Forces Inflict Heavy Losses on Al Shabaab," *Center for Security Policy*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2016/03/10/au-and-u-s-forces-inflict-heavy-losses-on-al-shabaab/.

intelligence sharing, and planning after making gains against Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Patrols in retaken areas and sustained operations against the terrorist groups were uncommon, as these forces only understood conventional warfare tactics.[248]

The introduction of US Special Operations forces has improved the capabilities of local forces to respond to the asymmetric tactics of these groups, especially in coordination and intelligence sharing, but consolidating retaken areas will ultimately mean not only understanding counter-insurgency techniques, but likely a significant investment of manpower to "hold and build" these areas.[249] Seeing that Nigerian, Somali, and AMISOM forces have a limited capacity, another boost in US troop presence in Nigeria and Somalia may be necessary at some point during the Trump presidency.

Similarly, if local forces in Iraq and Syria want to "hold and build" newly retaken areas from ISIS, they will have to implement counter-insurgency strategies involving patrols, intelligence gathering, and continual operations against ISIS.[250] Also, like the situations in Nigeria and Somalia, local forces may not have the capacity to fully sustain these kinds of strategies. The US has already indicated that it will increase US troops to defeat ISIS, but when it comes to consolidating areas gained back, it will take considerable effort and political will on the part of the US to maintain its troops on the ground in the long-term, especially once ISIS is pushed out of its remaining territories.

As seen during the Iraq War, such long-term operations can become complex, controversial, and unpopular. President Trump himself has been critical of the Iraq War policies and may possibly look for a quick exit from Iraq and Syria once ISIS is squeezed

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[248] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why are efforts to counter al-Shabab falling so flat? | Brookings Institution," *Brookings*, July 29, 2016, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/04/05/why-are-efforts-to-counter-al-shabab-falling-so-flat/.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.

out of its controlled-areas. However, such an exit might create a similar situation to the one that gave rise to ISIS in the first place. Although local forces seem more equipped to better handle the conflict than at times in the past, they may not have the capacity to keep up counter-insurgency efforts alone. Sustained US power in these regions may be the only option to continue to suppress ISIS and other groups. Ultimately, US military officials will likely push for continued operations in Iraq and Syria, even after pressing ISIS out of its territory, because of the military's apparent institutional awareness of the consequences of withdrawal and lessons coming out of the Iraq War.

Even if US forces stay in Iraq and Syria long-term, it will be difficult to deter ISIS attacks and protect soft targets at home and abroad. The Trump Administration stresses protecting national security and has implemented a temporary travel ban on six majority-Muslim countries and a temporary ban on refugees.[251] This policy was enacted with the proposed goal of safeguarding the homeland, but it also created widespread confusion and backlash. Such issues will not likely go away during Trump's term, as the administration's policies on securing the US will at times conflict with the values of some people. These kinds of debates are occurring in Europe as well, as the difficulty of balancing security and liberal values become apparent.

While depriving ISIS of its so-called caliphate may curtail the morale of its fighters and inspired fanatics, it is not clear that it will mean fewer attacks. As discussed earlier, it may even mean more attacks. ISIS may see high-profile attacks as the only way to remain relevant and continue targeting the West to galvanize its supporters.

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[251] "Trump travel ban: Targeted nations condemn new US order," *BBC News*, March 07, 2017, accessed March 26, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39194875.

There are significant issues in the effort against jihadist terrorism that are difficult to reconcile with public policy. Radicalization of young people, even in the West, is a recurring and remarkable phenomenon. To ultimately defeat groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, it may be necessary to confront the ideology that unites them. But reversing such an ideological movement will likely take decades and even centuries. US government policies can bring about change on the ground against these groups, but other social and religious movements will likely have to occur before the ideology itself loses its appeal, and that kind of action is seemingly out of the US government's purview.

The Trump Administration is signaling a robust military commitment to defeating Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and especially ISIS; US counterterrorism policies of this era will likely be defined by increased numbers of troops to fight these groups overseas and then confronting the following asymmetric attacks with counter-insurgency methods. While President Trump may not desire to continue operations against these groups in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and Somalia in the long-term, it will probably be necessary. For if the US loses interest these fights and withdraws, these countries will stand little chance against the jihadist groups clamoring for another opportunity to cultivate their own extremist, barbarous states.

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