A TALE OF TWO JIHADS: UNRAVELING THE ATROCITIES OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IN THE GREATER SAHARA (ISGS) AND JAMA'AT NASR AL-ISLAM WAL MUSLIMIN (JNIM) IN THE SAHEL

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Introduction

The Sahel is a large area that borders the Sahara Desert. It includes Chad, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania. Over the years, the Sahel is gradually being referred to as "the latest front in the war on terrorism" by the US military, according to the International Crisis Group (2005). Terrorist attacks within the Sahel region have increased nearly sevenfold in the last three years, according to Zenn and Clarke (2020) of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. In reality, Islamist militant groups spread unprecedentedly in 2019 in the Sahel and West African regions. The spread began in 2012 within Mali as an Islamic insurgency and progressed subtly across the region, first to Niger and then later to Burkina Faso. Concerning the orchestration of terrorist attacks in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the United Nations data estimated that about four thousand people were killed. Niger, in particular, recorded a quintupled figure in 2019 against the 770 people killed in 2016.

Furthermore, although extremist violence killed 306 people in Burkina Faso in 2018, 1,853 people were killed in 2019, representing a 506% rise over the previous year. A phenomenal deadly wave of attacks struck the Sahel at the end of 2019. Over 70 people were assassinated in pursuance to a military base attack in Inates, Niger, in December, while 39 gold miners were killed in a Burkina Faso ambush in November. Additionally, the Mali

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attacks in November of that same year (2019) recorded the killing of some 49 persons (Moody, 2020). Notwithstanding the operations undertaken by diverse militant groups in the Sahel, the two most prominent perpetrators of attacks in recent years have been the Al Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State (IS)-affiliated Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (Moody, 2020).

Although the two militant organizations operate in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the activities and operations of the JNIM have been broadened to Algeria, Mauritania, and Chad (CISAC, 2018). On the flip side, the Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama`at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) are both fighting for supremacy in the Sahel region. Their rivalry is becoming increasingly deadly, and civilians are trapped in the middle. Consequently, the area is experiencing an influx of refugees. As a result, the Sahel now has 3.1 million refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and stateless residents, with the number increasing. The number of internally displaced people in Burkina Faso has more than quadrupled since June 2019, rising from 193,000 to 848,000 at the end of April. As a matter of fact, if the issue continues, the Sahel's deteriorating condition may have significant ramifications for West African countries. Undoubtedly, Islamist extremist groups like ISGS and JNIM, which operate in the central Sahel (Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso), are presumed to create and establish offshoots in neighboring states like Togo, Benin, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire. The May 2019 kidnapping of tourists and the murder of the accompanying tour guide in Benin while on tour to the Pendjari National Park raised eyebrows. What makes it more alarming is that this atrocity is alleged to have been perpetrated by Islamist extremists in a country (Benin) where the activities of Islamist extremists were initially unheard of (Moody, 2020).

Consequently, the primary goal of this paper is to investigate Jihadism's trajectory in Africa's Sahel, as well as the rise of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). In addition, it investigates the coordinated activities of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and of the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM). Furthermore, it will look into the clashes between the Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).

Methodology

The content review method was adopted to gather information from extant literature and other secondary data of prime essence to conduct this

study. This research relies heavily on government reports, journal articles, reports from NGOs, knowledge from online media, and committee and expert reports, among other sources. Using the extant literature, data gathered were carefully studied and critically analyzed in order to arrive at a clear content conclusion (Carter et al., 2014). Per the aim of the research, that is, to comprehensively unearth the dynamics underpinning Africa's Sahel's seemingly uncontrollable and overfamiliar political crisis, it will undoubtedly enrich the debate and shed considerable light on the topic. The study would also promote a level of understanding that would enable stakeholders to formulate effective countervailing measures to return Africa's Sahel to its halcyon days.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

There is no precise or clear conceptualization of the term terrorism. Considering the differences in contextual usage between institutions, states, and even research communities, there seems to be a lack of a single definition (Tuman, 2003). Attempts to proffer a definition for the term 'terrorism' differ in many contexts per its usage (i.e., amongst researchers, states, and other specialized institutions). Owing to the absence of a clear definition and the varying perspectives (political, personal, and even emotional) ascriptions to 'terrorism' it makes it problematic and nearly impossible to reach a point of unanimity in identifying who a terrorist is and the tenets that constitute terrorism. The effect of this uncertainty creates the possibility for a hero in a particular jurisdiction to perhaps be [mis]construed as an insurgent in another. With the principles governing the activities of the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) insurgency as foci, the study explains terrorism as "the use of force or threat of the use of force to invoke or provoke a political change." Besides, from a religious viewpoint, our research describes terrorism as political violence that is faith-driven or believed and pursued as an aspect of some form of religion. Terrorist groups usually pledge allegiance to certain faith-based tenets by which they pursue inhumane terrorist activities in the name of and promotion of such faith doctrines.

With faith as the premise, terrorists believe that by carrying out such atrocities, some form of clemency would be bestowed unto them in the life hereafter and even be recompensed for their unwavering support for upholding such faith. Martin (2015) advances that as long as a religious system sees the perpetration of violence as being in the deity's will, it could

succinctly be deemed an explicit authorization of violence by that religious body. Arguably, religion, in one sense or the other, fuels terrorist ideologies and pursuits. Furthermore, Jeffrey Seul (1999) contended that conflicts labeled as religious conflicts do not necessarily stem from religious matters but often have nonreligious origins. These conflicts are referred to as religious conflicts because religion acts as the binding and rallying identity. Seul's viewpoint is that religion should not be seen as the root cause of these conflicts; instead, it often serves as the boundary where intergroup identity and competition for resources converge.

With narrowed foci on the ISGS and the JNIM, this paper, as far as possible, examines how the activities of terrorists are rationalized and authenticated by religious beliefs. In this pursuit, the work is anchored in the deprivation theory espoused by Gurr (1970). This theory would be adopted to clarify the dominance of the ISGS and the JNIM revolts. Inference from Gurr Ted Roberts's (1970) concept of deprivation implies that when the citizenry is bedeviled with issues of scarcity, denial of legitimate entitlements, or starvation, there is a high propensity for disruption and termination of stability in a country. The fact remains that when citizens compare their condition of life to that of others, thereby recognizing the gaps and unfairness, they are inclined to become enraged and feel compelled to express their rage through illegitimate means such as violence. Gurr (1970) further advances that the measure to which group members feel deprived [degree of relative deprivation] nurtures a breeding ground for collective violence to sprout. He attributes this condition to people's eagerness to transcend their social means, so they also exhibit their asphyxiation and annoyance with systems whenever they encounter insufficient foundations to advance or realize their hopes.

Furthermore, Gurr (2005) asserts that structural poverty and inequality within nations serve as fertile soil for the emergence of violent political movements in general and terrorism in particular. By examining his research on relative deprivation and conflict in Northern Ireland, Birrel (1972) argues that tensions among groups arise due to the disparity between the desired "ought" state and the actual "is" state of fulfilling collective values. Similarly, Davies (1962) contends that political violence emerges from the overwhelming disparity between individuals' desires and actual attainments, highlighting the contrast between expectations and satisfaction. According to Davies, this divergence creates a profoundly unfortunate encounter of such magnitude and concentration that it can lead to either rebellion or revolution (Davies 1962). The underlying essence of these works revolves around the notion that acts of violence thrive within an environment marked by persistent grievances resulting from a sense of relative deprivation. To this end, the

deprivation theory's assumptions duly pre-empt and offer practical analogies as to why terrorist groups exist and operate, aside from the religious reasons earlier alluded to. Given the inequitable situation that led to the formation of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), our research appropriately utilizes the theory of deprivation as the conceptual and theoretical framework undergirding this work.

How did Jihadism gain a foothold in the Sahel region of Africa?

Liptako Gourma, um território nas fronteiras do Mali, Burkina Faso e NígeLiptako Gourma, a territory on the frontiers of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, has become a hub of Jihadism in the Sahel. The terrorist groups associated with this savagery are the Jamaat Al-Nusra Al-Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM) network in Mali, shaped by Al-Qaeda of the Maghreb (AQIM), Katiba Macina, Al-Mourabitoun and Ansar Dine; the Islamic State of the Great Sahara (ISGS) in Niger, connected to Daesh, and Ansaraoul Islam in Burkina Faso, which has a cozy relationship with the JNIM, In truth, less than 15 years ago, there was no fear of Jihadist terrorism in this area, and one of the key reasons for this is that the predominant Muslim tendency is Sufism rather than Salafism. Despite the fact that neither current is more predisposed to violence than the other, the Sufist tradition cultivates a personal relationship with God and is considered more mystical than the Salafist. The latter is more conservative, focusing on re-establishing the Islamic vision practiced by early Muslims. In the heterogeneous society of Liptako gourma, the Sufi trend can coexist with some customs of traditional African religions and even adopt some methods. The people who became Jihadist leaders were Sufist Muslims, heads of their communities, and traditional religious leaders (Beatriz de León Cobo,2020). However, two historical events must be considered in order to comprehend how jihadist groups were initially formed in West Africa.

The first is the Algerian Civil War, which began in 1992 when the military attempted to execute a coup in order to prevent the Islamic Party from winning national elections, resulting in anarchy. The Islamic fighters eventually departed the nation, seeking sanctuary in a remote region of northern Mali, where they proceeded to rebuild, engage in criminal operations, and form alliances with local rebel organizations. The overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011 was another momentous event. He was slain in an ambush by a local militia in his hometown of Sirte as the

Arab world's longest-serving tyrant (France24, 2011). Gaddafi's rule was a huge help to northern Mali, where the inhabitants felt abandoned by the Malian government in the south, and the pastoral industry had been ravaged by drought. Therefore, when the Gaddafi regime collapsed, northern Mali lost its prominent economic supporters, while fighters and weapons from Libya flowed into the region.

These two events triggered what happened next. In March, a month-long military coup created a power vacuum that allowed the insurgents to occupy large areas of northern Mali. Since then, the insurgents have been hijacked by Islamic radicals. The French army intervened within a few days and regained the north from the jihadists, but they did not defeat them. In Burkina Faso alone, 500,000 people are currently displaced, and the recent surge in violence has forced thousands to flee their homes. Although some of these groups have adopted the brands of international terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State or Al Qaeda, they are still very localized organizations. This is one of the reasons why these organizations have been so successful.

The emergence of the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin(JNIM) and of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara(ISGS)

In the Sahel, the JNIM coalition began with four al Qaeda-linked Islamist militant organizations: The Macina Liberation Front (FLM), Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, and al-Qaeda the Islamic Maghreb's Sahara Emirate (AQIM Sahara). The merger was announced in a video published on March 2, 2017, including the four organizations' leaders declaring the formation of the JNIM. Amado Diallo, also known as Amadou Koufa [MLF commander], b) AQIM Sahel chief and deputy, Djamel Okacha and Abderrahman al-Sanhaji, respectively; c) AAD leader Iyad Ag Gali (Abu al-Fadhel), and finally d) Muhammad Ould Nouini, deputy leader of al-Mourabitoun, affirmed the foundation of the JNIM (under Mukhtar Balmokhtar). The composition of the organizations was crucial because the respective heads represented Arab jihadists from the Maghreb and Sahel, Fulani, and Tuaregs. The diversity of ethnic and regional representation has established the illusion of one community with far-reaching effects.

In fact, each of these component groups has its own set of interests, regional influences, and sources of inspiration (Thurston, 2020). The JNIM is currently driven by Ansar Dine's Iyad Ag Ghali and the FLM's Amadou Koufa and Katiba Serma, a less dynamic FLM branch-off led by Abu Jalil al-Fulani.

Iyad Ag Ghali, the founder behind Ansar Dine, is the emir of the JNIM. He founded Ansar Dine in 2011 after the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a Tuareg separatist movement in northern Mali, refused to name him its leader. Ag Ghali, an Ifoghas Kel Adagh Tuareg, hails from the Kidal Region of northern Mali, where he participated in Tuareg rebellions beginning in the 1990s. As commander of Ansar Dine, he formed an alliance with AQIM and MNLA in 2012 and declared northern Mali an Islamic State in May. By July 2012, Tuareg separatists had been defeated by Ansar Dine and the AQIM Sahara in Kidal and Timbuktu, respectively. For most of 2012, ultra-Islamic factions dominated northern Mali before advancing south into the more populous central provinces (Eizenga & Williams, 2020). Thanks to a French-African military operation (Operational Serval) launched at the request of the Malian government in January 2013, the insurgents were spread throughout the countryside, where they took refuge in northern Mali's difficult and wide terrain. Ag Ghali employed Ansar Dine fighters to construct a political enclave in the north of Mali and among the country's numerous armed groups since then.

Amadou Koufa began preaching radicalism in central Mali after Ansar Dine was dispersed following Operation Serval. After meeting with Pakistani preachers from the Dawa sect in the 2000s, Koufa, a Fulani from Niafunké, Mali, is reportedly radicalized (Le Roux 2019). Koufa used local concerns exacerbated by Fulani pastoralists to rally support while simultaneously pushing for the establishment of an Islamic theocracy. With the help of local relatives, Koufa successfully cultivated a following in central Mali in 2015. As the leader of the FLM, Koufa launched the deadliest rebellion of all JNIM parties in an attempt to destabilize established conventional experts and spread his Sharia-based ideology into central Mali. The activities and presence of the FLM spread to northern Burkina Faso through its association with Ansaroul Islam, a radical Islamic group in Burkina Faso founded by one of Koufa's disciples, Ibrahim Dicko.

After Dicko died in 2017, radical Islamist militants used existing criminal networks to expand operations on the Burkina Faso-Niger border. As the FLM moved south from central Mali into northern and north-central Burkina Faso, other remnants of Islam Ansaroul reintegrated into it. FLM has had significant success in these heavily populated locations, benefiting from a greater pool of potential recruits and sales. Experts believe that JNIM-affiliated groups earn between $18 and $35 million per year, mostly from extortion of transit routes under their control, communities engaged in artisanal mining, and, to a lesser extent, ransom kidnappings (Nellemann, Christian, et al., 2018). Despite the JNIM having ties to the AQIM, the AQIM could never

build up a significant local support system in the Sahel. Its regional relevance is also fading, even in Algeria, where it originated (Porter 2019). Al Qaeda-affiliated leaders like Abdekmalek Droukdel (AQIM), Djamel Okcha and Ali Maychou (AQIM Sahara), Mohamed Ould Nouini (al Mourabitoun), and others definitely expedited the decline of any direct influence the global al Qaeda network may have had over JNIM-affiliated fighters.

Meanwhile, uncertainty regarding the current status of AQIM Sahara and al Mourabitoun highlights a crucial role for JNIM. The JNIM coalition creates the appearance of cohesion, command, control, and invulnerability by putting up a united front that hides the numerous setbacks each of these factions has endured. Since 2016, the number of violent incidents and related fatalities in the Sahel has nearly doubled annually, contributing to this misperception. But FLM is almost entirely to blame for this. As a result of the FLM's affiliation with the JNIM coalition, foreign and regional forces are less likely to pay the group any attention despite its growing notoriety (Eizenga& Williams, 2020).

ISGS, on the other hand, was formed in 2015 by Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi from the merger of pre-existing radical Islamist groups. However, French forces have recently killed Adnan Abu Walid al Sahrawi, head of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), in a drone strike, the French government declared on Thursday, September 16, 2021. At a press conference, Florence Parly said Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi surrendered to his injuries, experienced in a strike on a motorbike conveying two individuals during a French-led air and ground operation in Mali, French minister for the armed forces. The activity occurred between August 17 and 22, 2021 (Joseph and Saskya, 2021). However, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi was born in Laayoune, the controversial capital of Western Sahara, in 1973 (counterextremism, 2022). He is the grandson of a Saharan chief, and his family is considered well-connected and wealthy.

In the 1990s, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawiwas resettled in a Saharan exile camp in Algeria. Around that time, he joined the Polisario Front, a movement for the liberation of the Sahara, which aimed to end the Moroccan presence in Western Sahara. Al Sahrawi's whereabouts in the 1990s and 2000s are largely unknown. He most likely navigated between the nascent factions of militant Islamist groups forming in the porous region between the Maghreb and the Sahel. Additionally, he traded with Tuareg militants from the Azawad movement in northern Mali. Around this time, in 2011, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) was founded (Le Roux, 2019). While the three founders were previously members of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), they wanted to create a katiba (military unit)

composed of Arab fighters from the north of Mali. MUJAO's ideology drew on references to Osama bin Laden, former Taliban leader Mullah Omar, and historical figures such as Usman dan Fodio (founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, 1804-1903), El Hadj Umar Tall (1797-1864) and Seku Amadu (who helped establish the Macina Empire in Mali, 1818-1862).

Al Sahrawi is believed to have joined MUJAO in 2012 and has served as the organization's spokesman since then (Thomas and Caleb,2016). The al-Mulathameen brigade, led by Algerian militants closely associated with AQIM, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and MUJAO, represented by al Sahrawi, announced the merger on August 22, 2013. Al Sahrawi has become a key leader of the new group al Mourabitoun. Al Sahrawi unilaterally proclaimed al-Mourabitoun's allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) commander, in 2015. Belmokhtar rejected this allegiance and, a few days later, reiterated al Mourabitoun's loyalty to al-Qaeda (Le point (2017). Al Sahrawi created ISGS, as it is currently known, after breaking away from al Mourabitoun. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi formally confirmed Al Sahrawi's vow more than a year later, in October 2016, following ISGS operations in Niger and Burkina Faso.

ISGS began operations in the Gao region of Mali, focusing on the town of Menaka, sometimes extending westward to the Mopti region. ISGS activities swiftly spread to Niger's Tillabéri region, although most of the original militants were Malians from the highlands. In October 2017, ISGS claimed credit for an attack at Tongo Tongo, Niger (near the Mali border) that killed five Nigerien Special Forces and four American soldiers (Callimachi 2018). As a result, ISGS expanded its operations into Mali's Gurma region and eastern Burkina Faso in 2017 and 2018. ISGS reportedly has a core of 100 warriors, but their survival depends on a network of informants and logistical support from sympathetic locals. It may have 300-425 members, including Niger and Burkina Faso supporters. Unlike other radical Islamist groups operating in the Sahel, ISGS does not appear to have developed a coherent, politically based narrative. ISGS focuses on expanding the battlefield, not convincing people, gaining moral support, or building a base. Its focus on mobility might explain how it could strike and remain active on the borders of three countries despite the limited number of active fighters. One goal appears to be to pressure the few security forces available to police these large border areas. Despite its official separation from the AQIM network, ISGS continues to work with al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. In this way, ISGS is close to the AQIM offshoot. While ISGS uses the ISGS brand to increase its visibility – and ISIS benefits from an active global network – for all practical purposes, it operates within its own organizational framework, goals, and resources (Le

Roux, 2019).

Coordinated activities by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin(JNIM)

Despite the JNIM and ISGS being members of rival terrorist organizations, they found ways to communicate and work together. European Eye on Radicalization (2020) states that when it comes to the ISGS and JNIM, it is well known that up until 2017, there was communication between the two groups' senior leadership, and there have been rumors of interactions at a lower level. The two parties draw on comparable and (literally) related ethnic and tribal groups in order to achieve their shared objective of driving out Western powers. Colin Clarke (2020) asserts that the literature on terrorist collaboration explains why organizations cooperate in the first place. It has to deal with resources, fending off existential threats, and learning, among other things. Also, according to Brian J. Phillips (2012), when terrorist organizations cooperate, they may be able to share resources, spread information, and possibly enhance their capabilities. Collaborations provide terrorist groups access to cutting-edge equipment and methods. In general, allied groups are deadlier than unallied ones. Perhaps for these reasons, terrorists collaborate in a wide range of contexts. Nsaibia, Héni, and Caleb Weiss (2020) claim that cooperative actions typically lead to the formation of a special bond between the two parties. The collaboration between the ISGS and the JNIM on raids can be cited on at least five occasions, though there may be more. It is worth noting that, unlike other attacks mentioned later in this section, none of these groups were dual or conflicting in these cases. Instead, in each of the five instances, the attack was alleged by one of the parties, although independent sources later reported that ISGS and JNIM activists took part in the raid. Aside from the five coordinated actions carried out by two terrorist organizations, which will be discussed in more detail later, for instance, the war in Niger's western Tillabéri area, which borders Burkina Faso and Mali, has gotten much worse since the year 2021 (Amnesty International, 2021).

In addition to being slain, kidnapped, denied the chance to attend school, and forcibly displaced, children have also been recruited to fight. Girls have sometimes been compelled to marry warriors and suffered restrictions on their ability to leave the house in some places. Armed groups have destroyed schools and intimidated teachers throughout the region to protest what they view as secular or "Western" teaching (BBC,2019). As of June 2021, this led to

the closure of at least 377 schools in the Tillabéri region, displacing more than 31,000 students (Amnesty International, 2021). The Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which has ties to Al-Qaida, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) are the two primary armed organizations in charge of the uprising in the region that straddles Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Both organizations operate across shifting borders and defy state dominance. While the JNIM has established itself close to populations along the Niger-Burkina Faso border, recruiting and exerting control over daily life, ISGS has been carrying out frequent large-scale attacks on people along the Niger-Mali border since early 2020 and forcibly displacing entire villages. Given the intensity of the violence and the degree of ISGS and JNIM organization, according to an Amnesty International study from 2021, the situation in the tri-border region of Niger is a constitute non-global armed conflict that has been ongoing since late 2019. Both parties have killed civilians and targeted schools in the Tillabéri region, among other war crimes. Children may also be the target of or adversely impacted by crimes against humanity committed by ISGS. Back to the two terrorist organizations' five synchronized operations, to start with, in November 2017, the two groups launched a harmonized attack on a joint MINUSMA and Malian military grouping in the region of In-Delimane, situated among Ansongo and Menaka in northeastern Mali. On May 14, 2019, during that time, ISGS fighters conducted an intricate ambush close to Tongo Tongo, Niger, killing nearly 30 Nigerien soldiers (Aljazeera,2019). Later, a JNIM commander, Inkarouta Ag Nokh (or Abu Alghabass), allegedly provided fighters for the operation, after which spoils were shared among various organizations. Not long after that attack, in August 2019, ISGS launched another large-scale assault against a military station in Koutougou, Burkina Faso. However, in a December 2019 report, French researcher Mathieu Pellerin concluded that it was likely another joint attack with JNIM. After a month, JNIM asserted a near concurrent attack against a Malian national guard camp in Mondoro and the regional G5 Sahel Force base in Boulkessi, both located in focal Mali's Mopti Area along the border with Burkina Faso (Pellerin,2019)

Similarly to Pellerin, a coordinator of an NGO based in the Sahel, one of the writers pointed out that ISGS fighters had participated in the double assault. At long last, on December 10, 2019, the ISGS launched the single deadliest attack on security forces ever in Niger, murdering more than 70 soldiers. Subsequently, Malian media claimed that two of the combatants killed in jihadi ranks were members of the Malian rebel organization HCUA, but they were later revealed to be connected to the JNIM locally, indicating that the JNIM was probably behind the raid. These incidents were clearly part of

a larger coordinated attack in the Liptako-Gourma area (or the tri-state border area of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso), in which both groups successively invaded various military stations. These forced militaries from both countries to withdraw tactically from their respective border regions, leaving previously disputed areas under JNIM and ISGS control (Nsaibia& Weiss, 2020). In certain instances, actions claimed by each association seemed to demonstrate some degree of cooperation between the franchises — albeit without engaging in joint assaults. For example, the assassination of the mayor of Koutougou, Burkina Faso, Hamid Koundaba, by ISGS militants on April 8, 2018. After the assassination the next day, JNIM claimed responsibility for an improvised explosive device (IED) on Burkinabe forces sent to reinforce the area. In the Menaka district of Mali, intermittent clashes between the jihadists and a variety of organizations, such as the pro-Bamako Tuareg and Dawsahak militias, the Imghad Tuareg, the Allies Self Defense Party (GATIA), and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA), revealed this form of coordination. JNIM announced a series of assaults in the Gao and Menaka districts in mid-2019, claiming to be fighting MSA and GATIA. These assaults were taking place simultaneously as ISGS attacks on militias. The United Nations has also confirmed specific instances where JNIM and ISGS collaborated, such as the attacks on GATIA and MSA in Menaka. As previously stated, numerous instances of the JNIM and the ISGS collaboration in Mali have existed. ISGS had the option of working unhindered in Kidal in northern Mali, the historical stronghold of JNIM leader Ag-Ghali, evidenced by numerous assaults in Algeria directly across the Algeria-Mali line, indicating a certain level of JNIM acceptance. Indeed, these attacks suggest that ISGS was active in the area until late 2019, months after fighting between the two groups erupted in other parts of the region.

Additionally, it is possible that the two organizations planned a hostage-taking attempt in Benin. Jihadis took two French tourists hostage in northern Benin in May 2019. The two were then taken to Burkina Faso, where they were to travel through northern Mali. Later, after two French soldiers were killed in an operation by French special forces in Burkina Faso, the two were set free. After the raid, French officials claimed that the JNIM was the organization that funded the operation. According to the French Newspaper Le Monde, in May 2019, Burkinabe intelligence discovered that the kidnapping in Benin was carried out by ISGS-linked militants who were then planning to transport the French citizens to Katiba Macina (Sophie Douce et al. 2019). Military authorities in France and the United States have confirmed collaboration between the JNIM and the ISGS. General Bruno Guibert, the former commander in chief of France's Sahel Operation Barkhane, reported in 2018

that JNIM and ISGS had launched joint attacks in the Sahel but cautioned against any broad alliance between the two parties. Brigadier General Dagvin R.M. Anderson, commander of the United States Marine Corps, said: In an interview published in February 2020, the US Special Operations Command in Africa stated that the US had found instances where JNIM and ISGS collaborated and organized attacks. General Anderson spoke after tensions between ISGS and JNIM erupted before their relationship fully deteriorated. "JNIM gives solidarity of intent, unity of exertion but not necessarily unity of order," Anderson said at the time, adding that JNIM and ISIS-ISGS "can work together, and even coordinate attacks together."

Anderson also said that JNIM and ISGS "are less concerned than those who have full oversight and have instead focused on spreading their extremist ideology and working for the greater cause of establishment." Like his French counterpart, he avoided implying a grand merger between al-Qaida and the Islamic State in the Sahel. It's worth noting that there have been several cases of dual accusations in which two organizations claimed responsibility for the same attacks (Nsaibia& Weiss, 2020). JNIM claimed responsibility for an improvised explosive device attack on the Barkhane convoy near In-Delimane in February 2018, but ISGS later claimed responsibility. JNIM and ISGS claimed a few assaults in the Mansila region of Burkina Faso's Yagha Province in January 2019, just over a year later. With similar claims, the two organizations also announced an ambush against the Malian army near Boulkessi in March 2020. Dual claims could indicate competition, but they could also suggest that JNIM and ISGS are having difficulty separating themselves from one another, especially regarding how their respective chains of command recognize actions by the rank-and-file.

The clashes between the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin(JNIM)

The number of violent incidents involving Islamist groups in the Sahel almost quadrupled in one year, from 1180 to 2005, according to the African Center (2022). The two parties have engaged in battle at least 125 times, from the start of the fighting in 2019 until January 2, 2021, killing at least 731 fighters on each side and injuring thousands of civilians. The ongoing war between JNIM and ISGS forced residents of Tessit and its surroundings to escape to Ansongo, Gao, and Niamey in February 2022. Several causes can explain the conflicts between these two terrorist organizations.

The recent confrontation between JNIM and ISGS has several causes,

according to research by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point 2020. The primary ones are stoked ideological conflicts; pressure from Islamic State Central on ISGS to challenge JNIM after its official reorganization under the ISWAP banner; and tensions brought on by ISGS's expanding ambition in the region, including competition for fighters and resources. Also, the JNIM's willingness to engage in negotiations with the Malian government, which the ISGS views as a betrayal of jihadist principles and labels them as apostates. Another element fostering armed conflict between these two terrorist groups is the regular desertion of JNIM members to the ISGS and vice versa.

The conflict between the Macina Katiba, commanded by Amadou Kouffa, and former Katiba members who joined the ISGS in 2020 is a recent example (WAMAPS, 2022). In addition, the fact that the JNIM and the ISGS take various approaches to jihad is another factor contributing to the rivalry between the two organizations. Although all sides favor the use of force and the implementation of Sharia law, there are differences of opinion, such as the targeting of civilians. Lastly, the Islamic State is a terrorist organization in the "territorialization" business, according to Dr. Aly Tounkara, an expert at the Center for Security and Strategic Studies in the Sahel (CESS). The Islamic State seeks to occupy and maintain control of various occupied areas by enforcing Sharia law. The JNIM, on the other hand, prefers to build a close relationship with the local chieftains rather than systematically trying to occupy the land. In the case of Tessit, the control of the main routes for the trafficking of drugs, ISGS and JNIM, according to Heni Nsaibia and Caleb Weiss (2020), have engaged in several physical clashes in the Sahel region of Mali and the Burkina Faso border region.

The conflict then shifted to the eastern part of Burkina Faso along the Niger-Benin border from the Inner Niger Delta of Mali and the Gourma region of Mali and Burkina Faso, according to estimates from the Army Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). These armed commitments have resulted in the deaths of more than 300 jihadis on both sides since the start of the hostilities. In its April 2020 briefing, the International Crisis Organization also noted that fighting in Burkina Faso's Soum province "caused at least 100 deaths" in that month alone. As a result, it is evident that the "Sahelian exception" proposed by JNIM and ISGS is no longer valid. After a skirmish near the border town of Ariel, Burkina Faso, the conflict between JNIM and ISGS officially began in July 2019. A new conflict between Gao and Ansongo was recorded in Haoussa-Foulane, Mali, in September 2019. According to records, clashes between the two organizations occurred in the southern part of Mondoro (Douentza), Dogo (Youwarou), and In-Abelbelbel in December 2019 and January 2020 (Gourma-Rharous).

In the year 2020, the clashes intensified. In March 2020, JNIM and ISGS clashed near Fassala, Mauritania's border town with Mali. Except for Haoussa-Foulane and In-Abelbel, these areas are within JNIM's KatibaMacina zones of operation, indicating that the conflict began within JNIM's zone of impact as it attempted to push ISGS out of the Inner Niger Delta before spreading to other zones and katibas. Despite these conflicts, neither side recognized their vicious conflicts in the Sahel until a May 2020 issue of the Islamic State's weekly Al Naba bulletin. The Al Naba article addressed the clashes between the two jihadi heavyweights in Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Burkina Faso-Niger border area in the previous month. The Islamic State stated that its fighters in central Mali "repelled two assaults" from the JNIM in the Mopti region. It specifically mentioned the area near Nampala, close to Mauritania's borders, and the Sego region's zones "east of Macina." Over the last few weeks, local media have confirmed clashes between jihadist groups in the same regions, lending credence to the Islamic State's statements.

Conflicts were registered in the Mopti villages of Dialloube, Koubi, Diantakaya, and Ninga in early April 2020. The Islamic State's May 2020 announcement also mentions recent battles south of Boulkessi, Mali. Fights have also been registered in the Gourma region of Mali and Burkina Faso, similar to the jihadi-on-jihadi fighting in Mopti, Mali (Nsaibia& Weiss, 2020). For example, on April 13, 2020, the Islamic State attacked JNIM's men near Tin-Tabakat. Al Naba recorded a three-day encounter between JNIM and ISGS near the town of In-Tillit in Mali's Gao region. While local reports contradict this point, the United Nations noted that the Islamic State's presence in Gao has grown since earlier this year, making this situation entirely fair. On April 18, 2020, in the Ndaki region of Mali's Gossi commune, one of the biggest battles between the two is said to have taken place. According to local media sources, JNIM militants targeted members of the Islamic State in four separate villages in the district. The JNIM convoy had up to 40 vehicles, according to media reports in Mali and Burkina Faso. The Islamic State appears to have confirmed these events on a different date. The aim of JNIM, according to the party, is to establish Islamic State positions in the Boula area, West of Korfooueyouey on the Mali-Burkina Faso border, with "dozens of motorcycles and vehicles" on April 26, 2020, according to the Islamic calendar.

Following a suicide car bomb against al-Qaeda members, the Islamic State declared that its fighters had taken the lead in the fighting. According to the study, JNIM was also said to have confiscated 40 motorcycles and three cars. On April 20, 2020, another firefighter was reported near the village of Pobe in Burkina Faso's Soum province, while another incident occurred in Kerboule in the province's Koutougou department. In Burkina Faso, more

battles were registered near the towns of Arbinda and Nassoumbou. In another issue of Al Naba, published in June 2020, the first direct reference to clashes with Ansaroul Islam was made. The Islamic State stated in the June 2020 bulletin that Jafar Dicko, the leader of Ansaroul Islam, which was formed with the help of JNIM's constituent groups, had lost more than 170 fighters in clashes with the Islamic State's men in the Mali-Burkina Faso border region in late May 2020.

In the June 2020 Al Naba issue, another conflict in Burkina Faso between JNIM and ISGS was recorded near Ghana, most likely corresponding to an affirmed episode near Pama, Burkina Faso, on May 28, 2020. Fighting was also registered near the Burkina Faso-Niger border in the Yagha province of Burkina Faso at the end of May 2020. Despite this, al-Qa'ida Telegram stations had a different version of events. Al-Qa'ida supporters say that Al Naba's account of events is false and that JNIM has recently assassinated several ISGS members in Burkina Faso. Another argument made by pro-al-Qa'ida sources suggested that Abdelmalek Droukdel asked JNIM to "destroy the Islamic State and eliminate them from the land of the mujahideen," implying that Droukdel's role in the battle between Islamic State and al-Qa'ida franchises in the region was much more significant than previously believed. However, the specifics of each claim are yet to be verified. Furthermore, at the time of publication, official al-Qa'ida outlets had made no public comments on the battle between the two groups (Nsaibia& Weiss, 2020).

The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal muslimin's (JNIM) funding, recruitment, membership, ideology, and goal, targets, and tactics

This section will center its discussions on the financing, recruitment, membership, ideology, goals, targets, and tactics of both the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM). Furthermore, we will highlight the different operational methods employed by these groups and the potential targets they aim to pursue.

Funding

The ISGS derives funding from robbery, ransom kidnapping, extortion protection, and smuggling of cigarettes and illegal narcotics. All these are

ways that the ISGS raises revenue. According to Firewatch Solutions (2020), it is not known to the public whether it is receiving funding from outside sources. The JNIM party, on the other hand, inherited many of its revenue inflows from the AQIM and its other member groups and employs these well-established income generation techniques through its affiliates and contacts. Kidnapping and ransom are thought to provide a significant portion of the JNIM's funding. Smugglers and traffickers who paid "taxes" for the safe transit of territories governed by the JNIM in the area provide another important source of funds for JNIM. With the increase in European demand, some analysts claim that facilitating cocaine trafficking is quickly becoming JNIM's most profitable source of revenue.

Furthermore, JNIM has gradually benefited from the rise in human trafficking in recent years, which has been linked to the dramatic increase in migrants attempting to reach Europe. The community has also been known to engage in other forms of taxation on local communities within its area of influence in exchange for goods and services. These services primarily include "defense" and "governance," but they can also include "education," "electricity," and "health care," among other things. Another funding source is donations from supporters abroad, especially from non-governmental organizations, such as charities, many of which have a religious mission. Before the merger that produced JNIM, it was rumored that Qatari and Saudi charities supported the AQIM in Mali in 2013 and that several citizens in Western European countries had previously been detained for monetary donations to the organization. It was also speculated in the past that AQIM had received state support. The Algerian government, for example, has previously accused Iran and Sudan of supporting the party. While it is believed that JNIM is potentially eligible for indirect funding sources, state-funded assistance is doubtful (Constellis, 2018).

Recruitment

Since 2017, the ISGS has evolved due to its ability to organize many fighters in the Mali-Niger borderlands during intercommunal ferocity. Many ISGS fighters are indigenous to the areas in which they work. The ISGS, like the JNIM, uses "local concerns to attract public support" and capitalizes on oppressed ethnic groups' "sense of injustice" and their "desire for self-defense" and security (Constellis,2018). The ISGS has 46 fighters from various ethnic groups, including Fulanis from Niger and Mali, Dawsahak from Ménaka and Gao, Tuaregs, Sahraouis, Bambaras, and Mossis. According to the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), the JNIM, on the

other hand, has successfully incorporated into local societies in Mopti to understand how to identify local grievances and contexts. Armed Islamist groups linked to Al-Qaida 'based their recruiting efforts' on the Fulani people group, according to a Human Rights Watch study, and found out how to acquire recruits by manipulating the Fulani community's dissatisfactions with destitution, lawlessness, abusive security services, political corruption, and struggle for land and potable water (Constellis, (2018).

Targets and tactics

The ISGS is highly mobile and capable of attacking vast regions, according to the Georgetown Security Studies Review 2020(GSSR), although it "does not appear to claim full control over the territories it occupies and has not established organized governance structures." Despite having a small number of fighters, ISGS could "inflict massive losses" due to its "maneuverability and increasingly complex tactics." The group uses motorcycle combatants to launch quick attacks, allowing them to withdraw "before army reinforcements have time to react" (Demuynck & Coleman, 2020). ISGS "uses mortar, heavy machine guns (AK-47), and rocket-propelled grenades in its attacks, in addition to trucks loaded with explosives and suicide bombings," according to CISAC (2018). More recent attacks in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, which occurred in late 2019, have also been identified as "sophisticated and extremely deadly" with the ISGS technique of using drones for reconnaissance prior to attacks (European Eye on Radicalization, 2020). Local and international military forces, ethnic groups, and local government officials are all targets of the ISGS. In terms of civilian targets, the ISGS launched several attacks in 2017 and 2018 against Malian civilian nomad camps, markets, and villages. Since 2018, the ISGS has "repeatedly attacked colleges with disastrous consequences" (CISAC, 2018). Several civilians were killed during clashes between ISGS and JNIM in the Gao, Mopti, and Menaka regions in 2020.

JNIM's previous targets included Malian forces, UN forces, tourist hotspots, and French counter-terrorism forces, who were declared the organization's historic enemy. JNIM used suicide bombers, burned cars, kidnapped people, and engaged in gun battles. An assault on a resort outside of Bamako, as well as attacks on the French embassy and army headquarters in Burkina Faso's capital, were all carried out by the group. JNIM launched its first attack on the G5 Sahel headquarters in Mali in June 2018 in response to the formation of the G5 Sahel to coordinate regional counter-terrorism efforts (Africanews 2018). The group released a high-quality video in March 2018

highlighting the breadth of its operations and the training camp's strength and paid tribute to the leaders. JNIM has also been embroiled in racial tensions in the city(Weiss, Caleb 2018). In a war with the Bambaras in central Mali, JNIM fighters battled alongside the Fulanis (Weiss, Caleb 2018). According to the party, the Bambaras' military operations are supported by the Malian army. Ghali officially revealed the JNIM's list of enemies, which includes countries from Africa, the Americas, and Europe: The United States, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Chad, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Niger, the Netherlands, Sweden (Mapping Militant Organizations,2018).

Ideology and goal

According to Joscelyn, Thomas, and Caleb Weiss. (2018), ISGS derives much of its tactical approach and philosophical objectives from the Islamic State (IS). As an IS affiliate, the ISGS has vowed its allegiance to the Islamic State's (IS) ambition of restoring the Islamic caliphate in West Africa. ISGS founder Sahrawi acknowledged Baghdadi as "Emir ul-Mu'minin," a designation indicating the caliph's status, in a video declaring the group's loyalty to IS policy. On the other hand, JNIM's philosophy and aims are very much in line with the global Salafi-jihadi tradition of splitting the world into two utterly opposite groups, where one fights the other until absolute subjugation is achieved. This practice is geared towards unifying Muslims in North and West Africa, abolishing secular governments in the region, and establishing Islamic governments in their stead (Bukarti, 2018). The JNIM's formation was in line with the new operationalization focus of Al-Qaeda, i.e., emphasis on "peace" as an ideal way of enforcing Shariah law thoroughly and efficiently in places where the jihadists did not have full power hitherto. In an audiovisual declaration, the new leaders of JNIM stated their intention to stay unified against the Crusader enemy. According to Ghali, the militant approach adopted by JNIM is to expand its territories and train militants to battle JNIM's adversaries while maintaining good relations with local communities (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2018).

Membership

IS-GS was estimated to have about 40 fighters in May 2015. According to one report, its size increased to 300 fighters in April 2018 and to 425 fighters in late July 2018. The overwhelming majority of IS-GS warriors are Fulani. In addition to its core members, IS-GS forces include Peul, Tuareg,

and Arab fighters, continuing a trend in which the group attracts sympathetic local villagers by leveraging their ethnic and other grievances with Islamist messages. JNIM, on the other hand, has a membership of 1,000 to 2,000 fighters (CSIS) (Constellis, 2018). JNIM also brings together members from a variety of traditional groups, such as Bambaras, Tuaregs, Sahelian, Fulanis and North African Arabs, and Muhjirn, giving the organization an unrivaled social and territorial reach within the Sahel. JNIM's strong message of unification and diversity has helped it enlarge its social networks and financial resource base. By this, the level of regional and global recruitment appeals has also heightened.

In contrast to AQIM, which largely consists of North Africans where most relevant roles are particularly dominated and occupied by Algerians, JNIM, on the other hand, aims to differentiate itself from extant ethnic contexts in its areas of operation and functioning. Inferentially, JNIM meant to emphasize and override the homogeneity of its rivals and adversaries, such as the Islamic State (IS). As a result, JNIM and its affiliates will function with somewhat ubiquity and autonomy while still retaining their organizational support systems and operating in accordance with a common philosophy (Constellis,2018).

Conclusion

The Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), two of Africa's deadliest terrorist organizations, have grown in recent years, and their operations in Africa's Sahel region are moving towards Sub-Saharan Africa's coastal regions. The volatile and precarious security situation in Sahel Africa has attracted both jihadist and organized crime factions. Distinct from the Levant, the rivalry between Al-Qaeda affiliate JNIM and Islamic State affiliate ISGS has proved way more perilous for local governments than any other jihadist group. The future of the area would well be determined by how this dynamic develops over time. In fact, both terrorist groups have wrecked the economies and communities of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Algeria, and Chad, prompting the government to respond with armed raids and form an observatory body. Notably, social and economic inequity are driving forces behind the uprising. These factors provide insight into how to combat terrorism in the Sahel region, as suggested below.

Recommendations

This paper proposes three basic containment measures based on the root causes of armed activities in the Sahel, such as the ISG and JNIM. The comprehensive strategy, regional partnership (Group of Five Forces for the Sahel), and political dimensions are all discussed in these recommendations. According to the International Crisis Group (2017), a comprehensive strategy involving multiple actors must be further established and implemented primarily to deal with the crucial problems plaguing the Sahara-Sahel region so that Jihadist-Salafist terrorism is curtailed and stability restored in the region. In order to establish tailored containment strategies, systems of differentiation amongst militants, criminals, nomads, and jihadists at the military level should be established by the principal authorities of Sahelian states. Second, Sahelian states should strengthen their national security and law enforcement apparatus to ensure they are reliable, competent, and capable of carrying out their duties (Ghanem-Yazbeck, 2017c). Finally, increased security coordination, cooperation, and intelligence sharing should be promoted. For example, Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger make up the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (also known as G5 Sahel joint force, FC-G5S). This regional cooperation, which began in February 2017 and involved five thousand troops from the G5 Sahel states, had received approval from the Peace and Security Council of the African Union by April 2017. It was further consolidated and strengthened upon ratifying and accepting UNSC Resolution 2359. By increasing collaboration amongst state armies and rural area surveillance, the joint force of the Sahel (G5) proposes to combat smuggling, terrorism, and other planned orchestrations of crime.

Consequently, during the December 2017 G5 Sahel summit in Celle-Saint-Cloud, France and other European nations (particularly Italy, UK, and Germany) swore more extensive assistance for security and stability in the Sahel. Operating from national and regional power echelons remains essential in the political spheres. Regarding the former, central governments of the various Sahel states must introduce broad reforms covering the state's social, educational, political, and economic aspects to ensure universal and equitable access to services and resources. The institutionalization and practice of good governance, strengthening civil-military relations, and decentralization would help anchor democracy at the regional and national levels (Tull, 2017). The various governments in the Sahel should establish unrestricted and available mediums to allow for consultation and communication with socio-political and native actors, including those of low regard, even in rural areas, to reassure the social contract between the authorities and the local people.

In a variety of areas (politics, economy, justice, and security), the EU [an anti-terrorism advocate], for example, could provide technical and strategic support to Sahelian governments to foster the course of good governance and answerability (Lebovich, 2017). Also, Sahelian countries should harness good cooperative relations on a regional level to reduce their dependence on foreign assistance. Finally, regional and sub-regional bodies of which Sahelian leaders are part must prove viability in crisis management and mediation whenever conflicts on the Sahel and, by extension, the African region keep recurring (Institute for Security Studies, 2017).

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ABSTRACT

The Sahel area of West Africa has become the latest battleground for Al-Qaeda affiliated Jama`at Nusrat Al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State affiliated Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS). This piece, as far as possible, identifies the heightened atrocities perpetuated by both groups in the Sahel region. With little or no doubt, the strategies and ascendancy in atrocities orchestrated by the JNIM and the ISGS could be largely hypothesized to have negative implications for Africa's Sahel region (Chad, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania). As a matter of concern, the paper confirms the said hypothesis and finds that the activities of the two Jihad-descent groups pose adverse security, social and political ramifications for the Sahel region and beyond. With the theory of deprivation as the undergirding framework, the work explores how the lack of basic needs and legitimate entitlements of citizens have catalyzed the dominance of JNIM and ISGS in the Sahel. Aside from discussing the formation, events trends, atrocities, and strategies of JNIM and ISGS, the paper advances for swift, action-oriented, collective efforts of governments within the Sahel region. In order to restore Sahel's stability, increased security collaboration and strengthening the tenets of good governance are some worthwhile recommendations postulated.