

**Africa Programme
Workshop Summary**

Natural Resources and the Political Economy of Jihadism in the Wider Sahel

**Supported by Chatham House and the West African Security Strategic
Project in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the
University of Portsmouth**

Event date: Wednesday 29 July 2020

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Introduction

This summary collates a set of papers prepared by speakers at a private workshop held on ‘Natural Resources and the Political Economy of Jihadism in the Wider Sahel’ on 29 July 2020. At this workshop, expert speakers discussed the links between natural resources and armed groups across the Sahel region and assessed how these insights can inform future policy priorities for addressing conflict.

This online workshop was jointly hosted by Chatham House and the University of Portsmouth.

Dr Ed Stoddard, University of Portsmouth, UK and Dr Luca Raineri, Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna, Pisa, Italy

Despite over a decade of major activities by a range of ‘jihadist’ groups in West Africa, the politico-economic activities of these groups have received far less attention than their military actions, their ideologies or the state responses towards them. The contributions here, from a number of specialists on the region with a deep, on-the-ground understanding of these conflicts, explain the important role these groups play as politico-economic actors, demonstrate the benefits that they derive from this activity and highlight the risk for states in the region and their international partners.

As the contributions here show, grievances over natural resources lie at the root of many Sahelian conflicts and, in this context, these groups have established themselves as important economic actors. While they may at times provide capital (in the form of small loans), labour and expertise, they benefit principally by acting, much like states, as providers of protection and regulation, who strive to extract the benefits of economic activity through various forms of ‘taxation’. While some groups like the Shekau-led Boko Haram faction in the Lake Chad are highly predatory, it would be incorrect to see most of these groups’ activities as mere predation, or a simple protection racket. Indeed, they are important market players in that they provide enabling conditions for economic activity in unstable conditions (protection at mining sites and for pastoralists, physical access to markets, basic economic rules governing exchange of natural resources and agricultural products, the enforcement of contracts etc). While rudimentary, these functions are, quite deliberately, not so different from the governments they seek to replace. Government supply of these functions is either non-existent, or relies on controversial patronage networks, especially in the most rural areas where the economy is centred on natural resources and agriculture.

At a more fundamental level, as the contributors here note, groups use their politico-economic activities as a means of bolstering their legitimacy and as part of their wider strategies to challenge or replace states in the areas they operate. See, for example, Sandor’s description of Ansar Dine’s cautious approach to artisanal mining, Sangaré’s analysis of Katiba Macina’s governance of rural

areas in central Mali and Abdullahi's description of the Islamic State West Africa Province's 'microstate'. The messaging and actions of militants are calibrated to respond to the grievances of local communities (see Lounnas's description of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), or segments thereof, while at the same time presenting themselves as a viable and credible alternative to state structures and the functions these should provide, but often do not, such as economic redistribution and dispute resolution. As Raineri (and others) highlight, while groups engage in some highly profitable criminal activities (such as kidnapping) a good deal of their politico-economic activity of Sahelian jihadist groups focuses on activities that are often provided by governments. Given the precarious economic and security situation in the region, the value and attractiveness of this 'offer' should not be underestimated.

Beyond the misappropriation of natural resources, counterinsurgency mistakes and heavy handedness by both local states, their proxies, and powers outside of the region have also played into jihadist hands. As several the contributors here have highlighted, harsh military responses and support for countervailing local militias both delegitimize governments further and compound the grievances of local communities. Furthermore, it reinforces the narratives of jihadist groups and boosts the attractiveness of their counter governance offer. State absence is also an issue, however. As Abdullahi notes, the Nigerian Government's 2019 move to reinforced 'Super Camps' opened up space for the Islamic State West Africa Province to establish itself as an economic actor. There is a danger, with the misapplied responses, that militants benefit both from either state presence or its absence. In many cases, jihadists take root in grey areas where states are neither entirely absent nor fully present but deploy problematic forms of mediated or hybrid governance that the militants exploit.

As the contributions here show, at the heart of all this are the civilian communities caught in the middle. Forced to choose between ineffective state protection (and at times state abuse), or militant protection and economic structures, local communities face a double bind. Acquiescence to jihadists means potentially being labelled as sympathisers. Challenging the militants on the other hand is likely to draw a violent reprisal (see Savodogo's contribution here for a clear example of this 'double bind' dynamic). As the contributions here show, any response that fails to put civilians at its core is likely to be ineffective in dampening the capacity of jihadist militants across the wider Sahel. Looking forward, this lesson may be most pertinent in the context of Northwest Nigeria. As our final contributor Nagarajan notes, jihadist activity is lower here than the other cases discussed, and we should refrain from exaggerating the level of jihadist involvement. At the same time, the underlying economic grievances in Northwest Nigeria present parallels with other contexts that have seen the growth of extremist groups and thus provide a context where further jihadist infiltration is a serious risk.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Natural Resources

Dr Djallil Lounnas, Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco

Starting from the mid-2000's the Salafist Group for Predication and Combat (GSPC) which became Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007, started to deploy itself in the Sahel, with the purpose of providing weapons and money for their counterparts in Algeria itself fighting the Algerian authorities. To that extent and in order to get the support of the local population in Northern Mali, AQIM presented itself as their protector against governmental abuses. Moreover, AQIM argued that it was protecting them as well against western companies' exploitation of their resources as well as pollution incurred by these companies on the environment¹. However, while AQIM did use natural resources 'card', it was essentially in the context of mobilizing the populations of northern Mali rather than incurring revenues from those very resources. However, several kidnappings of western hostages conducted by AQIM did target mining activities operated by Western companies such as AREVA in Niger.

In order to generate revenues for itself, AQIM in the Sahel was initially involved in various forms of trafficking, including food and gas as well as drug trafficking. In this very specific case, AQIM brigades would offer protection for drug traffickers in exchange of a certain amount of money and under the strict condition that the drug would not be distributed to locals. The extent to which AQIM was involved in this drug trafficking remains uncertain; some sources mention that it was the highest levels of the AQIM leadership that authorized such financial sources of revenue, especially Belmokhtar, while others assert that it was mid-level men and less extensive than officially claimed². It did however create a major debate within the religious leaders and fighting men on the religious legality of such operations. However, the most important source of revenue for AQIM were by far western hostage takings which generated around 200 million euros between 2003 and 2013. This made of AQIM one of the richest jihadi organizations in the world at time and allowed it to buy weapons, pay salaries to its fighters and gain loyalties from the local populations in the area.

The French intervention in 2013 and the decision of the western countries to cease ransom payments led however to a gradual decrease of this financial resource. Thus, according to various sources, while AQIM did continue to rely on the leftovers of the hostage taking money, it was gradually more dependent on money from trafficking and the 'zakat' (Islamic tax). In this context, declining hostage revenues and the context of the restart of the exploitation of natural resources (diamonds, rare earth etc..) including of gold³, by major international companies in the Sahel led JNIM⁴ (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin -

¹Interview with Mohamed Fall Ould Oumeir, journalist and specialist of AQIM, Nouakchott; Mauritania, 2011.

²Interviews conducted by the author between 2011 and 2017 in Mali and Mauritania.

³See Jean-Claude Félix-Tchicaya , « Or, diamants, terres rares : la ruée prédatrice vers l'Afrique » Le Point (August 14, 2019).

⁴In 2017, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, Al-Mourabitoun and Katiba Macina merged to create the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) or Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).

‘Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims’) - the successor of AQIM - to gradually focus on this activity as a source of revenue in addition to remaining involved in other forms of trafficking⁵.

Indeed, mining extraction is currently taking place in the context of war and state weakness. Furthermore, these activities usually attract the attention of all kinds of criminals and local militias. Thus, for example the CMA in Northern Mali offers protection to those sites in exchange of a tax⁶. For their part, the Jihadists of the JNIM also got involved in those activities which offer for them a double advantage: a new source of revenue without being the subject of the debate on whether it is halal (licit) or not as it faces with the question of drug trafficking⁷. From there, and in a similar way to the early 2000’s, they offer protection of sites and transit routes in Burkina Faso. In Northern Mali they continue to raise the Zakat in addition to protection of the sites, although not as extensively⁸ (see, for example, contributions from Sandor and Savodogo). This behaviour is not necessarily negatively perceived by the people working in those facilities as the jihadists maintain the peace and security needed for such activities and thus fill in a power vacuum which the State does not provide⁹. In some cases, jihadists can participate in the infighting between the exploiters of the mines and support one at the expense of the other¹⁰. However, they do not get generally operationally involved in the extraction of those resources (although some fighters might) nor their exploitation and management of those mining facilities. Rather they capture money indirectly from these.

In turn, the activity of exploitation of these natural resources offers a double advantage for the population. It provides a source of revenue for those who work in those activities and around them, in the context of extreme poverty and poor state economic governance. Furthermore, the jihadi groups themselves can remain imbricated with the population and remain an economic actors/source of revenue. To that extent, this might be seen as a predatory activity in one sense, but the money extracted benefits the locals in another way. It also maintains the impression that jihadi groups are fighting for the protection of the local against the exploitation of their resources by foreign western companies. All this is not without consequences however as it also provoked intra-jihadist conflict such as between the JNIM and ISGS over the control of the lands in central Mali (See contribution from Raineri).

In the end, this reflects the enduring problem in the Sahel: that is to say the weakness of the State which creates a vacuum filled by these groups.

⁵Interview with Lemine Ould Salem, May 2020.

⁶See International Crisis Group Report, ‘Reprendre en main la ruée vers l’or au Sahel centra » (November 13th, 2019). Online: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/282-reprendre-en-main-la-ruée-vers-lor-au-sahel-central>

⁷See Djallil Lounnas, « Al Qaida au Maghreb Islamique et le trafic de drogue au Sahel », Maghreb Machreck 2013 (2).

⁸See International Crisis Group Report, ‘Reprendre en main la ruée vers l’or au Sahel centra » (November 13th, 2019). Online: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/282-reprendre-en-main-la-ruée-vers-lor-au-sahel-central>

⁹Interview with Lemine Ould Salem.

¹⁰See International Crisis Group Report, ‘Reprendre en main la ruée vers l’or au Sahel centra » (November 13th, 2019). Online: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/282-reprendre-en-main-la-ruée-vers-lor-au-sahel-central>

Ansar Dine and the Political Economy of Natural Resources in northern Mali

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Ansar Dine is a northern Malian armed Islamist group established in the Kidal Region in late 2011 by Iyad Ag Ghali. Iyad exercises an important level of symbolic capital garnered since his involvement in the 1990s rebellion, which he uses to mobilize a considerable number of fighters from the Ifoghas and other allied Tuareg tribes, and other associates from previous rebellions. Iyad has consolidated Ansar Dine's track record of political leadership, organizational fluidity and resilience, and operational capabilities. This is arguably the chief reason why Iyad Ag Ghali was made the leader of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) in early 2017, and why many observers view him as the lynchpin to resolving the jihadist insurgency in Mali.

Ansar Dine is structured into geographical and operational branches. The two most famous are the Kidal branch, led by Ag Ghali, and the Katibat Macina, led by Fulani preacher Hamadoun Kouffa. While these two receive the most attention, Ansar Dine also has smaller brigades in several locations across Mali. The majority of Katibat Macina's individual brigades are composed of Fulani fighters. The Kidal branch, however, is nearly exclusively ranked with Tuaregs. Given that the vast majority of Ansar Dine's leaders and fighters are Malian, and that the group dominates other armed Islamist groups in terms of resources and fighters, it can be argued that Mali's insurgency is predominantly endogenous, with Ansar Dine representing the country's most powerful armed Islamist group.

Northern Mali is one of the poorest places on the globe with limited readily accessible mineral resources. Ansar Dine has had to thus rely extensively on human resources and on goods transiting northern Mali for its finances (in this sense it is different from the Katibat Macina – see Sangare's contribution in this report). The most important of these is the kidnapping for ransom economy, from which Ansar Dine's leadership is reported to have gained millions of US dollars, split with other armed Islamist groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The second most significant fund of financing is derived from taxing the transnational illicit drug trade. These illicit economies are primarily based on human resources and constitute sizeable, but often irregular, 'one-off' payouts.

Ansar Dine has had a more moderate, and nuanced position regarding natural resources. While it maintains alliances with other jihadist groups whose leaders and fighters hail from the wider Sahelian/Saharan region, Ansar Dine's

members are from northern and central Mali. As a locally based politico-military organization, Ansar Dine's strategy concerning natural resources has had to dovetail with the understandings of community and religion espoused by extended families and neighbours. Unlike the strategy espoused by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) which forcefully extracts the majority of local communities' natural resources as a payment of 'zakat', Ansar Dine's strategy has focused on negotiation, accommodation, and possibly even persuasion from local communities regarding natural resource production and taxation.

Two natural resources (broadly defined) in northern Mali constitute the focus of Ansar Dine's management: animals (sheep, goats, and camels); and gold. In terms of animals, Ansar Dine brigade leaders can rely on local understanding of hospitality to acquire animals used either for nourishment or to be given as gifts. Practices of hospitality require that animals be given to visitors when the latter request them (within reason). Regularly participating in the kidnapping for ransom economy, Ansar Dine's highest echelons do not require the payment of tithes for their everyday operations such as animals for meat or milk. Nevertheless, individual lieutenants may at times ask for a payment of zakat from herders in the form of a prescribed number of animals if the owner of a herd is estimated to reach a certain level of wealth (the threshold is understood to be 30 head of animals). Ansar Dine brigades that operate in areas far from the position of the central leadership (itself most likely in the Mali-Algeria borderlands) also ask for the payment of Zakat on animals. Interestingly, in areas previously controlled by ISGS, the payment of Zakat to Ansar Dine has not been immediately required (for example in N'Tillit). While the decentralized nature of collections can seem arbitrary at times, given the local nature of Ansar Dine brigades, payment of zakat is often viewed locally as a more or less acceptable obligation that is not often abused.

Recent artisanal gold mine discoveries in the Kidal and Gao regions have reportedly drawn informal miners from across Mali and the wider Sahel. In the commune of Tessalit, local reports indicate that Ansar Dine fighters not only control the territory around mines, but they and their supporters also work at the mines. At other mining sites in the Kidal region (for example in Aguelhok), control is officially provided and secured by the Haut Conseil de l'Unité de l'Azawad or the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) who demand taxes from miners. Ansar Dine, by contrast, has not demanded the payment of taxes on gold production. This does not mean that Ansar Dine lieutenants (or those that officially claim membership in the HCUA or MNLA but are nevertheless known locally to be with Ansar Dine), do not demand an individual cut. In return for protection, Ansar Dine is able to explain its political ideology to miners and provide a governance framework for mutual-aid and cooperation at the mining sites. While the armed group does not radically enrich itself, its members participating in the mining are paid in gold (thus reducing the stresses of patronage distribution) and have won the approval of the local population. When the French military seeks information on jihadists in these areas, locals are disinclined to report on Ansar Dine. Thus, while it exercises an important degree of territorial control over natural resources sites, they allow communities significant latitude to organize their livelihoods.

Ansar Dine's management of natural resources is inherently shaped by its endogeneity. It is a local armed group that relies on local, indigenous communities to survive. This does not mean that Ansar Dine does not practise violence towards its challengers and individuals they assume collaborate with Malian, French or other international forces. Given its material power and its growing legitimacy through service provision around natural resource management, however, the group is rarely challenged outright. It instead continues to skilfully build a hegemony that is hinged on local understandings of Islamic practice, Saharan forms of sharing and sociability, and developing 'acceptable' conditions for the use of violent coercion in areas under their sway. In this regard, the management of natural resources often matters as much as the groups' military capabilities.

The Political Economy of Natural Resources in Central Mali: Regulation or Exploitation by Katiba Macina?

Boukary Sangaré, Leiden University, Netherlands

In March 2017, Katiba Macina merged with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine and Al-Mourabitoun to create Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM). Through this merger, they aimed to position themselves as the main terrorist/jihadist coalition in the Sahel and counter the influence of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). However, this merger has not diminished Katiba Macina's desire to maintain and affirm its identity as a jihadist group rooted in local realities. It is run by a Fulani preacher, Hamadoun Kouffa, who is known as a follower of a rigorous Islam, Katiba Macina maintains autonomous fighting units (Sous-Katiba or Markaz) in several towns, including Katiba Serma (Douentza), the Markaz of Dialloubé (Mopti), Dôgô and Toguéré-Koumbé (Ténenkou).

Katiba Macina is now well established in the central region, where it exploits gaps in state governance, handles the day-to-day affairs of communities and denounces predatory behaviours by state actors. It has in recent years increasingly sought to position itself as a competitor of the Malian state by intervening in the management of social affairs, the regulation and exploitation of production systems, natural resources, and the resolution of Sharia disputes. Unlike the northern regions of Mali and Burkina Faso, central Mali does not have mining sites, although some of its communities migrate seasonally to these regions to practise artisanal and small-scale gold mining. The exploitation of natural resources in the Mopti region is based on the coexistence of three production systems (agriculture, livestock and fisheries). Population growth in the region has led to overexploitation of natural resources and contributed to local conflicts.

Katiba Macina bases its legitimacy on the equitable distribution of resources: Fisheries and agriculture

The traditional conflicts around bourgou fields¹¹ are a significant issue during the periods of pasture exploitation. Disputes between neighbouring villages over the ownership of pastures are not new in the central Niger Delta (in the areas of Ténenkou, Youwarou and Mopti). To win popular support, Katiba Macina initially banned the collection of taxes on bourgou, claiming that pastures are a natural resource that belongs only to God. This decision was appreciated by many herdsmen and non-native Fulani to the Macina region. For these long-established non-natives, the traditional management of resources (and therefore of power), is a source of marginalization, which has been used by armed groups/jihadists, to mobilize them to join their ranks. However, nowadays, the collection of taxes has lost its function of social regulation and has become a mere source of income for the Jowros (masters of pastures). The latter, fearing a political and economic loss of power, had to prove their loyalty to the Katiba Macina to be able to continue collecting taxes on the pastures. Those who did not accept were forced to leave the region or were simply murdered.

In terms of fisheries management, Katiba Macina has prohibited fishermen from digging artificial canals on the banks of the Niger River to attract fish to these so-called drainage systems. This illegal practice, formerly tolerated with the complicity of the local authorities, depletes the river fish stocks.¹² Katiba Macina has banned the practice and has also banned fishing for small fish and punishes those who violate this decision. Katiba Macina is involved in the demarcation and allocation of agricultural fields and it intervenes to settle disputes. It imposes a tax (Zakat) on harvests and livestock farmers, which represent one of its main sources of income.

Katiba Macina fighters have also become involved in lucrative smuggling activities, including of weapons. The arms come from confrontations with the army and the Mauritanian black market and the customers largely include local self-defence militias. The group is also active in fuel trafficking, by facilitating the passage of traffickers, especially when national authorities impose restrictions on the circulation of two-wheeled vehicles or a cap on the sale of fuel. Finally, resources from the sale of stolen cattle constitute an important source of finance for the group.

To conclude, while the early legitimacy of Katiba Macina's power was rooted in the promotion of equity, justice and equitable sharing of resources between communities, this has been lost over time. This has led to the defection of a number of its fighters to join ISGS (also known as Daoula [State] Al-Islamiya [Islamic]). These new ISGS fighters in central Mali challenge the position of Katiba Macina and may well succeed where it has failed.

¹¹ Bourgou fields are flood plains where bourgou, a forage plant, grows. These are areas highly sought-after by breeders, farmers and fishermen.

¹² The fish in rivers are a common good, while those in the canals belong to the person who dug the canals.

How Extremist Groups Exploit the Political Economy of Natural Resources in Eastern Burkina Faso

Mahamoudou Savadogo, Researcher on Violent Extremism in the Sahel, Burkina Faso/Senegal

The eastern region of Burkina Faso borders in the south with Togo and Ghana and in the north, its Oudalan province borders with the Tillabéry region of Niger. It is in this region that the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS)¹³ and the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) are the most active, assisted by local groups, primarily poachers, traffickers of all kinds, and cross-border criminals.

These groups benefit from a context of tension between the central State and the rural periphery. These tensions are linked to frustrations, feelings of injustice deriving from the plundering of people's land, the lack of public services, and especially weak security provision. Capitalising on rural populations' problems, extremist groups have provided a source of identity and social dignity to people who are in absolute deprivation¹⁴. Indeed, the authoritarian and non-inclusive management of lands and natural resources that have led to resounding failures and to the discontent of communities in these areas, has pushed populations towards these extremist groups who have become objective allies, receptive to their quest for justice and survival.

Terrorist groups have not presented themselves to populations as predators, but as actors seeking to provide a form of governance that takes into account their aspirations and that offers them a fair distribution of natural resources, their main source of wealth. To achieve their goals, extremist groups have allied themselves with criminals, traffickers, and poachers. All these actors share the common aim of attacking forms of state presence. This simultaneously serves a number of constituencies: 1) those who wish state withdrawal to meet their direct material and criminal interests - groups of poachers, traffickers of all kinds, and cross-border criminals; 2) those who are frustrated and seek the restoration of their rights, which they consider to be violated – the local populations; and 3) finally those who aspire to replace the state model with an alternative mode of governance - terrorist groups, as they are already doing in central Mali and elsewhere.

Faced with the central power's total abandonment of the people in the Eastern region, terrorist groups were able to benefit from populations' sympathy and even support, eliminating or at least eroding state presence in the region and driving away state agents accused, at times, of violence, corruption and

¹³The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) was born from the merger in 2013 of two components of Al-Murabitoun, to then form the Movement for the Oneness of Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), then ISGS. This group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in 2015 but was officially recognized on 30 October 2016 by the Supreme Emir of IS. Liptako – Gourma influence zone (Mali – Niger – Burkina border).

¹⁴Bayard, J. F. 2018. 'Terrorisme – Jean-François Bayart: « Les jihadistes sont souvent mieux perçus que l'État »' in *Jeune Afrique*, March 19. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/543396/politique/terrorisme-jean-francois-bayart-les-jihadistes-sont-souvent-mieux-percus-que-letat/>

plundering¹⁵. This collaboration or agreement between populations and terrorist groups frustrated the administrative authorities and the military during Operation Otapuanu¹⁶, which led the Governor of the region to issue the following communiqué to the population:

‘As part of Operation Otapuanu, we were told that despite calls for compliance with prescribed instructions, individuals are organizing in certain communities in the eastern region to prevent the freedom of action of the troops on the ground. The Governor would like to remind all the people of the East that this defiant attitude characterized by hostile acts against the troops cannot be tolerated. Therefore, any person who would henceforth hinder the freedom of action of the troops will be treated according to the rules of engagement of the said operation’.

This communiqué reinforces the idea that the Eastern region has been affected not only by sporadic acts of terrorism perpetrated by secretive cells, but also by broader armed insurrections. As a result, the state announces its intention to fight against violent extremism, terrorist groups, and also face its own increasingly hostile population, because the political economy of land, the environment and natural resources have become part and parcel of the struggle against terrorism in Eastern Burkina Faso.

The Political Economy of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara

Dr Luca Raineri, Scuola Superiore Sant’ Anna, Pisa

The rise of ISGS (Islamic State in the Greater Sahara) is linked to the struggles for access to natural resources and pasturelands. Animal farming is the most important economic activity in the stronghold of ISGS, the borderlands of Mali and Niger in the regions of Ménaka and Tillabéry. Recently, two parallel dynamics have constrained the pasturelands accessible to local Fulanis: demographic pressure has pushed northward agriculturalist settlers from Niger’s dominant groups, while access to weapons and limited state oversight has increased the assertiveness of the Tuaregs and Daoussahaks from Mali, fuelling livestock thefts and impunity. ISGS has proved skilled at meeting local demands for protection. Following his eviction from Gao in 2013, former MUJAO deputy leader Abu Walid Saharawi and his followers have sought refuge in the Mali-Niger borderlands. Here they gained local acceptance by offering protection to local Fulanis against cattle theft and Tuaregs’ razzias. Since 2017, ISGS legitimacy was further enhanced by France’s enrolment of Malian Tuaregs’ and Daoussahaks’ armed groups in the counterterrorism dispositif. ISGS leaders could then boast that Sahelian ‘puppet’ governments

¹⁵ In April 2015, more than 7,000 inhabitants of the village of Kounkoufouanou were driven out without any support by the authorities, their village belonging to the pastoral zone of Kaboanga.

¹⁶ Operation OTAPUANU was launched on 7th of March 2019 under the instruction of the Supreme Chief of the National Armed Forces. OTAPUANU, which means in Gulmanchema language ‘Rain of fire or Lightning’, was led by the General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. To this end, the National Armed Forces in coordination with the Internal Security Forces deployed in the central-east and eastern Regions. The main objective of this operation was to restore the authority of the State in this part of the country where the populations were under the daily threat and abuses of armed terrorist groups and criminal groups of all kinds.

under the influence of the infidels had allied with some local communities to the detriment of others, thereby making the demand of protection only more cogent.

Protection fees, Zakat and governance

In exchange for protection, ISGS collects a fee from local communities, referred to as 'Zakat' by ISGS militants (as in other areas covered in this report). It reportedly amounts to 5-10% of one's cattle value, usually collected in kind. This doesn't mean that local communities can freely choose to opt out of the 'services' offered by ISGS: the power rise of the latter and the violent enforcement of Zakat collection seem strongly correlated, with exemplary punishments increasingly targeting those who refuse to pay. Nevertheless, the Zakat collection is reportedly perceived by local Fulanis as less burdensome than the perpetual exposure to the risk of raids.

ISGS engagement in local governance is shallow. Beyond Zakat collection, ISGS limits itself to prohibiting ostentatious behaviour, lavish celebrations, and 'unchaste' clothing. ISGS fighters reportedly do not earn fixed wages, but their militancy may provide access to resources such as weapons, motorbikes or women, whose value is less material than statutory. ISGS combatants however appear to hold the right to keep war spoils for themselves. This diverges from Katiba Macina's approach and may suggest one of the possible drivers of the defections from the latter to the former group. At the same time, one should not forget that alternative options of lucrative engagement with non-state armed groups are not in short supply across the region, and non-jihadist armed factions allegedly provide more profitable and less dangerous opportunities of predation.

Land disputes and social struggles

An additional driver of tensions with the Katiba Macina may have to do with social positioning. At the beginning, the Katiba Macina boasted an egalitarian approach to the management of natural resources and land tenure. This early rhetoric has been subsequently toned down, and the group has displayed a more compromising attitude vis-à-vis local landowners and aristocratic elites (as noted also by Sangaré). ISGS has been quick at filling the political void left by the Katiba Macina: it has appropriated the rhetoric of egalitarianism and unconstrained access to natural resources in order to attract marginalised groups. This may help explain the inroads that ISGS has made since late 2019 in the historical stronghold of the Katiba Macina in central Mali.

Access to land has also become a powerful claim for ISGS to gain acceptance in the East of Burkina Faso. Here, as noted also by Savodogo, the state is accused of having dispossessed local dwellers through enclosures and reallocations of land for recreational use (natural parks etc.) to the exclusive advantage of urban elites and international tourists. Jihadists are therefore seeking local acceptance by promoting the free exploitation of natural resources, prompting a scale-up of poaching and smuggling of protected species.

Gold mining

Gold mining is one of the most prominent economic activities in the three-borders area straddling Niger, Mali and especially Burkina Faso. When a popular upheaval toppled the regime of Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso, ISGS

and JNIM have stepped in, claiming to help local communities regain access to the resources that the ancien régime had illegitimately allocated to urban elites tied to power networks. Overall, the jihadist ‘governance’ of goldmining sites consists in the more or less forcible replacement of government functions, first and foremost the protection of transactions and the reduction of banditry. Reportedly, the revenues from the protection fees on artisanal gold mining sites are substantially high and contributed substantially to ISGS rise. As of 2021, however, ISGS appears to be evicted from most gold mining sites.

Overall, ISGS has gained acceptance by posturing as a provider of protection for marginalised communities involved in asymmetric conflicts: the Fulanis against the raids by the Tuaregs in the Mali-Niger border region; the landless shepherds against the privileges of the landowners in the Malian Macina; and the rural populations against the dispossessions by urban elites in Eastern Burkina Faso. Natural resources are the core of ISGS rhetoric and action because this is what local livelihoods depend on. Since 2020, however, predatory behaviours and brutality against local communities who refuse ISGS protection have been on the rise. Profit-maximisation doesn’t emerge clearly as an end in itself for ISGS. The group’s marginality in more profitable economic sectors such as drug trafficking and kidnapping-for-ransom is indicative of the difference between the jihadist formation and a criminal organisation.

Natural Resources in Jihadism: The Case of JAS-Bakura (‘Boko Haram’)

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Following fighting between JAS and the Islamic State West Africa Province, and the subsequent death of JAS leader Abubakar Shekau, the current status of JAS as an independent organisation remains in flux. While ISWAP claims to have taken over JAS, the leader of the Bakura group of JAS (see below) claims to have stepped into Shekau’s shoes and insists that JAS is still alive and separate. In any case, JAS presents an interesting picture in terms of natural resources, especially considering divergences with local rival ISWAP and Sahelian jihadist groups. Unlike some other examples here, natural resources mismanagement did not play a major role in Boko Haram’s growth (true also for ISWAP of course). That is partly because there is no industrial extraction of natural resources and attendant problems such as environmental pollution. Furthermore, the Kanuris, from which most Boko Haram members come, are the major ethnic group in the Lake Chad area and control most politico-economic resources there.

However, natural resources on the islands of Lake Chad are a key factor in the mobilisation of Buduma fighters into Boko Haram. The Buduma, who prefer being called Yedina, are the major ethnic group on the islands consisting mainly of farming and herding communities and have traditionally controlled the land and water resources mainly on the Chadian side of the lake area. Due to their

resistance to the influence of the Kamem-Borno Empire, a powerful Islamic State that lasted for a millennium until around 1900, the Buduma only began to convert to Islam around the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁷ Thus, Boko Haram's idealised version of the empire and its exploitation of Islamic teachings did not appeal to most Buduma. When Boko Haram expanded to the islands around 2013, the Buduma saw this as threat to their control of the resources and they resisted. But some Buduma subsequently joined JAS mainly to maintain control of resources and smuggling activities.¹⁸ Today, JAS remains active on the islands through a semi-autonomous (mostly Buduma) faction called the Bakura group.

Natural Resources and JAS

JAS is essentially a predatory group in its approach to natural resources. The group has treated all non-members within its area of operation as enemies worthy of death. It however conveniently uses non-members and pays bribes to access markets. JAS has mostly used violent means to replace producer groups like fishers and robs cattle from their owners. The group used its commissioned middlemen and unsuspecting or opportunistic cattle and fish traders and consumers. It transports fish and rustled cattle from the hinterlands to the various cattle markets through members and sympathisers as well as unscrupulous paid agents.¹⁹

Natural resource-related revenues have been critical to JAS. In fact, without land and water resources, the group would not have been able to come back from the defeat it suffered at the hands of Nigeria security forces in July 2009. JAS supply routes have been significantly constricted by security forces over time, but it has been able feed its fighters and fund its insurgency mainly because of the rich resources in the region. Kidnapping for ransom only became a source of revenue from around 2017 when the group was paid to release the Chibok girls; thenceforth, it abducted mainly government-linked officials and NGOs workers for ransom.

JAS Predation: Fishing, Farming and Livestock

Three of JAS's main natural resource-related activities are fishing, farming and livestock rustling. JAS exploits fishing in two ways. Firstly, group members are directly engaged in fishing. It uses canoes, fishing nets and other equipment confiscated from fleeing fishermen. They sell their products at cheap prices in nearby markets to merchants who ship them in large quantities to other parts of Nigeria. Secondly, like ISWAP, JAS has levied taxes on fishermen as a condition for access to the lake. Fishermen pay with items such as corn, millet, rice, salt, seasoning cubes, and drugs (medicine) in exchange for permission to go fishing. Governments around the Lake have banned fishing making fishermen desperate to earn a livelihood.²⁰ They thus enter secret agreements with Bakura. Those

¹⁷ Catherine Baroin, 'What do we know about the Buduma? A brief survey' Man and the Lake, Proceedings of the 12th Mega-Chad Symposium Organised Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies, Maiduguri 2-9 December 2003, Maiduguri (Nigeria).

¹⁸ Conversation with Saibou Issa, Professor of History, University of Maroua (Cameroon) working on Central Africa and Lake Chad Basin organized crime and regional Security. He is also the coordinator of Cameroon's DDRR programme for former Boko Haram fighters.

¹⁹ Abdulkareem Haruna, 'To stifle Boko Haram, Nigerian Army burns down four fish vehicles' (24 August 2019, Premium Times), <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/348302-to-stifle-boko-haram-nigerian-army-burns-down-four-fish-vehicles.html> accessed 29/07/2020.

²⁰ Telephonic chat with three farmers from Bol and Dagdala in Lac region of Chad, 26 July 2020.

that access the lake without permission or violate agreements are executed as seen in an attack that killed 50 fishers in January 2020.²¹

JAS has used the vast arable land abandoned by the millions of people they displaced to grow food crops such as millet, maize and sorghum for their use and purchase weapons. In August 2017, the faction released a video showcasing life in its territory. One of the different endeavours featured was farming. The clip showed several farmlands with cassava, pumpkin, watermelon, ground nuts, millets and maize. An elderly member reiterated JAS's ideology on screen and then said 'behold this vast farmland - everyone knows that it is a treasure. We are self-sufficient. By God's grace, we use it to feed ourselves, purchase weapons and to fight you'. JAS also consistently raids communities around Sambisa to steal food crops. The group exploits Islamic law to frame their loot as divinely permitted war booty (ghanimah).

Another important source of JAS's funding is cattle rustling. The group's fighters have attacked herding communities at night, burning homes and shooting in the air to cause people to flee and move to effectively manoeuvre cattle out of the community. It uses several trading techniques to profit from this activity including (a) creating its own markets in the territory they control to sell stolen cattle (b) scattering and selling the cattle in smaller numbers (maximum five) at distant markets to avoid detection by authorities (c) using middlemen to hide the cattle in neighbouring countries to be sold later. JAS's stolen cattle sell quickly because they are sold at about a quarter of their price.²² Apart from accounting for its basic funding, cattle rustling has also been a critical source of milk and meat, as well as trade in animal skin. It has helped to sustain JAS's activities by ensuring that it meets its logistical and essential supplies needs.

The geographical spread of JAS activities has been shaped by its need for control of natural resources. In Cameroon, for example, JAS focussed attacks in the Kolofata/Mora region and Nigeria-Cameroon border through which it smuggled out fish and cattle and got supplies. To stop the group's natural resources exploitation, governments have at different times banned transportation of fish and cattle and shutdown major cattle markets, but the group has successfully evolved each time. Control of resources has also been one of the reasons for intra-group fighting between armed groups around the Lake with JAS (or its Bakura group) and ISWAP fighting for control over economic activities. JAS and ISWAP have also locked horns over farming and herding communities in their overlapping areas of operation. ISWAP fights to protect communities that have paid 'taxes' against JAS raids.

²¹ 'Lake Chad attack: 'Dozens of fishermen' killed near Cameroon border' (3 January 2020, BBC), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-50987123> accessed 29/07/2020.

²² The Financial Action Task Force, 'Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa', <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Terrorist-Financing-West-Central-Africa.pdf> accessed 29/07/2020.

Exploitation of Natural Resources and the Local Economy in the Lake Chad Region by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

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The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), one of the most potent terrorist groups in the Lake Chad and West African region, exploits weak local governance and security vacuums to control natural resources and the local economy of the region which centres around fishing, farming, pastoralism and trade of agricultural by-products.

The terror group relies on established historic relationships and structures it has built over time within local communities in order to run a parallel economy. The group is known to collect levies, provide interest-free loans, transport goods and carry out business transactions in communities in which it wields influence. Farmers, for example, cultivate the land for red pepper and other farm products which are sold for profit in open markets and sold to members of the group and their families at a subsidized amount. Zakat (a payment made by Muslims annually on certain kinds of property and used for charitable purposes), is enforced among farmers and traders. Fishermen, for example, pay N15,000 (roughly \$39) for two weeks fishing rights in Lake Chad and for six cartons of processed, smoked fish. A local dealer gives one cartoon to the group, while the buyer pays N1,000 (\$2.50) commission to ISWAP for each cartoon of smoked fish purchased.

ISWAP jihadists also collect taxes every six months from livestock farmers and herders that are domiciled in the Lake Chad basin in the form of one well-fed cow for 30 cows.²³ The group also generates income through its involvement in rice farming, the dried locust trade, and extortion of commercial transporters. Although the group does not provide details of revenue generation, a study in 2019 estimated ISWAP earned between \$2m to \$3m per month from various economic activities during the group's military and territorial expansion in the Lake Chad region in 2018. Its annual income ranges between \$24m to \$36m with taxes generating 45%, fish trade 30%, while dried pepper and rice provided 10% and 11.39% respectively.²⁴ In return for the levies paid, the group guarantees security for communities, traders, and markets. Intermediaries, traders, and customers end up in this complex revenue generation system without knowing the origin or transit history of cash or agricultural produce. Similarly, the fishing sector in northern Borno is so lucrative that security

²³ <https://humangle.ng/how-boko-haram-sustains-operations-through-international-trade-in-smoked-fish>

²⁴ <https://conflictstudies.gics.live/2019/04/23/gics-report-survival-and-expansion-the-islamic-states-west-african-province>

officials are involved. The product supply chain also ends up in markets outside the conflict zone.²⁵

The military and government have tried to restrict or ban the movement of commodities, livestock and dried or smoked fish to prevent the group from using trade as a means of generating cash and essential supplies to sustain its activities. The military and government have tried to restrict or ban the movement and sales of livestock²⁶ and dried meat²⁷ to prevent extremist organizations from using local livestock trade as a means of generating cash or essential supplies. The military targets smoked fish trading to deny the group revenue to sustain attacks or govern territory. They regularly confiscate vehicles and fish products and set them ablaze to serve as a deterrent to traders²⁸. In April 2020, the Chadian military targeted camps and fish processing facilities in the Lake Chad area, in response to a Boko Haram (ISWAP's progenitor and later competitor) (Bakura) attack on Chadian military base in Bohoma.

Fortified garrison towns and 'Super Camp' policies (that consolidated the military into larger, reinforced bases) introduced in recent years have, to some extent, protected major towns hosting displaced people and reduced ISWAP access to military bases. However, they have created a blind spot in the government and security forces' capacity to disrupt or prevent ISWAP access to the local population and economy. ISWAP controlled grain markets, for example, are trading openly in villages without oversight from the military and government because they are inaccessible and outside these garrison towns²⁹. In June 2020, Faduma Kolomdi, a dry arid pastoral settlement about 40 kilometres from Gubio town headquarters, in northern Borno was suddenly stormed by jihadists. They gathered villagers and seized their self-defence weapons, subsequently killed eighty-one of the residents and rustled hundreds of livestock. The attack showed the severity of rustling and livestock resource control in communities outside the garrison towns, despite the group's central policies that encourage winning hearts and minds of the local population in areas of influence.³⁰

Apart from revenue from trade and taxes, local insurgent groups also make money from kidnapping for ransom and ISWAP is no different. This is evident in recent ransom demands for kidnapped humanitarian workers³¹ and abduction of oil exploration workers and Borno state officials. The payment of an estimated three million euros to Boko Haram for the release of some of the Chibok schoolgirls also reflects the ransom trend in the region.³² Furthermore, insurgents' profit from the trade-in firewood and charcoal³³, an essential source of energy and livelihood for rural communities in areas governed by ISWAP.

²⁵ Discussion with Government and private sources familiar with fish and farm produce movements and business activities within/outside garrison towns, conversation with community members on the arrested store owner.

²⁶ <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/why-borno-butchers-reject-army-s-ban-on-cattle-transportation-266036.html>

²⁷ <https://guardian.ng/news/boko-haram-borno-bans-sale-of-dried-meat-in-maiduguri/>

²⁸ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/348302-to-stifle-boko-haram-nigerian-army-burns-down-four-fish-vehicles.html>

²⁹ Discussion with government, military and private sources

³⁰ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-security/militants-kill-20-soldiers-40-civilians-in-northeast-nigeria-attacks-idUKKBN23KoVY>

³¹ <https://humangle.ng/iswap-kills-humanitarian-workers-after-failed-negotiations/>

³² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/two-bags-of-cash-for-boko-haram-the-untold-story-of-how-nigeria-freed-its-kidnapped-girls-1513957354>

³³ <https://theeagleonline.com.ng/army-uncovers-boko-haram-logistics-suppliers-in-borno/>

The firewood trade contributes to desertification, loss of pastureland and accelerates the effects of climate change.

ISWAP insurgents have managed to run a micro-state that allows them to oversee a pre-existing informal economy and provisions of services to local populations neglected by the governments for decades. The group has exploited the isolation of these communities to establish income streams for itself. This trend will continue to provide the human and material resources to prolong the over a decade old war unless the Government and military are able to stabilize the region, provide social services and reintegrate the local economy.

This online workshop was hosted in partnership with the University of Portsmouth.

