



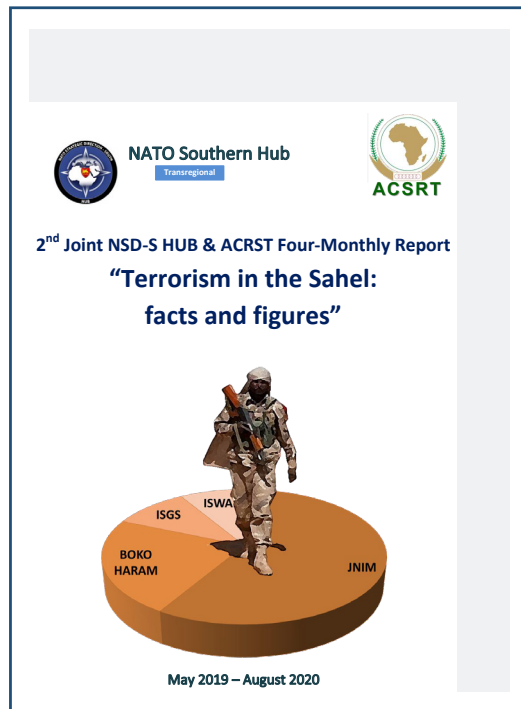
الائتلاف العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION



INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

TERRORISM IN THE SAHEL

FACTS AND FIGURES



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TERRORISM IN THE SAHEL

FACTS AND FIGURES

Sub-Saharan Africa, the Sahel region in particular, has become one of the most attractive regions for terrorist organizations. In the period of 2018-2019, the number of victims of terrorism in that region has increased, breaking the records of the Middle East and North Africa. The Sahel region, along with South Asia, have recorded more than 80% of deaths resulting from terrorism in 2019. After the defeat of DAESH in Syria and Iraq, and the liberation of most of the lands, this terrorist organization started transforming gradually to become an ideological movement that carries out terrorist acts in various regions of the world where its branches exist, especially the Sahel region in Africa.

Towards Africa

Deaths rates caused by DAESH terrorism have significantly fallen in the Middle East and North Africa by 86%. It decreased from 4,993 deaths in 2017 to 718 in 2019, with a decrease of 60% compared to 2018. In 2019, DAESH branches carried out attacks in 27 countries other than Syria and Iraq, killing 1,748 people. In the same year, two of the its branches in Africa ranked the eleventh and twelfth among the deadliest and bloodiest terrorist groups. DAESH carried out most of its terrorist operations in Africa, killing 982 people in sub-Saharan Africa alone, as revealed by the Global Terrorism Index in its latest edition GTI 2020.

DAESH has transferred its powerhouse from the Middle East to Africa. In 2019, the Sahel region witnessed an increase in killings by 67% compared to the previous year. The growth of DAESH-linked groups in the Sahel region has led to an escalation of terrorist acts. Three of the five countries in the region (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) are among the ten countries that witnessed an escalation in terrorist acts, according to the index report.

As for Al-Qaeda, it has its second strongest branch in the region, which is Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin "JNIM" "Support for Islam and Muslims" after its first one "Al-Shabaab Movement" in Somalia. JNIM was established in 2017 by merging a number of affiliated organizations. With the decline of Al-Qaeda's central organization and its branches in the Arab region and Asia, the influence of its two branches in Africa: the "Al-Shabaab Movement" in Somalia, and JNIM in the Sahel has increased. The leader of the latter, Iyad Ghali, is nominated by some observers to succeed Al-Zawahiri.

The great influence of Al Qaeda, DAESH, and Boko Haram in the Sahel region has complicated the matter, making the region one of the most turbulent regions in Africa, with the wide variety of terrorist organizations that unify, gather, battle, ally, fight and coalesce, leaving behind thousands of victims, and destroying everything in the region, which is suffering from record levels of food shortage, and in 2020 claimed the lives of nearly 6,500 people in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. In the same year, the number of people in

need of urgent humanitarian aid due to widespread violence and insecurity reached about 13.4 million people or 20% of the region's population.

According to Stephen Harmon's book "Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara", the terrorist groups in that region benefit from the local and regional conflicts. For example, the Mali government has repeatedly complained about members of terrorist groups who hide in areas controlled by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad. Furthermore, the terrorists benefited of the conflict between the pastoral north and the agricultural south of Mali.

NATO's Strategic Direction South Hub (NSD-S HUB) and the African Centre for the Study & Research on Terrorism (ACRST) of the African Union issued the first international report of its kind entitled "Terrorism in the Sahel: facts and figures." The report aims to provide a more comprehensive vision of trends in terrorism across the region that includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger; in order to create a broader and more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of terrorism, by analyzing statistical information drawn from terrorist attacks which occurred in the area of analysis during two consecutive periods: 1 Sep-31 Dec 2019 (Period A) and 1 Jan-30 Apr 2020 (Period B).

Between al-Qaeda and DAESH

Two groups of violent extremist and terrorist organizations can be identified in the Sahel countries. One of which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and the other with DAESH.

In March 2017, the major AQ-affiliated groups merged to form Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) which has increased its legitimacy with many of the local communities in the sub-region. The groups constituting the JNIM include AQIM, Ansar Dine, the Makana Liberation Front/MLF and Al Murabitoun.

The Burkina Faso-based Ansarul Islam (AI), although not a formal part of JNIM, is in close contact with the new alliance which has progressively advanced south towards Burkina Faso and Niger.

Daesh presence in the Sahel is represented by the Mali-based Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS) which is also active in Niger and Burkina Faso, and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) which

is active in the Lake Chad region and the Abubakar Shekau’s faction of the original Boko Haram in the Central Sahel area, which is an unofficial affiliate of the Islamic State.

Due to the spread of terrorist organizations in the Sahel region, two principal clusters have emerged:

- Central Sahel, comprising Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, with the epicenter of violence in the three-border area of Liptako Gourma.
- The Lake Chad basin, with the epicenter of extremist activity in Borno State (Nigeria), but with ramifications in neighboring Adamawa and Yobe States (Nigeria), as well as the territories of the riparian States (Niger, Chad and Cameroon).

Quantitative analysis

Comparing periods A and B, the study report revealed an overall increase of 48 attacks (19%) with an average of more than 69 attacks per month. The increase is due to the large number of attacks in January (24 attacks more than the average).

Breaking the number of attacks down on the basis of countries affected by the attacks, Burkina Faso comes first with an average of 34 attacks per month, followed by Mali, Niger and Chad. There have been no attacks in Mauritania.

Mali is the only country which has had an overall increase in the number of attacks over the two periods.

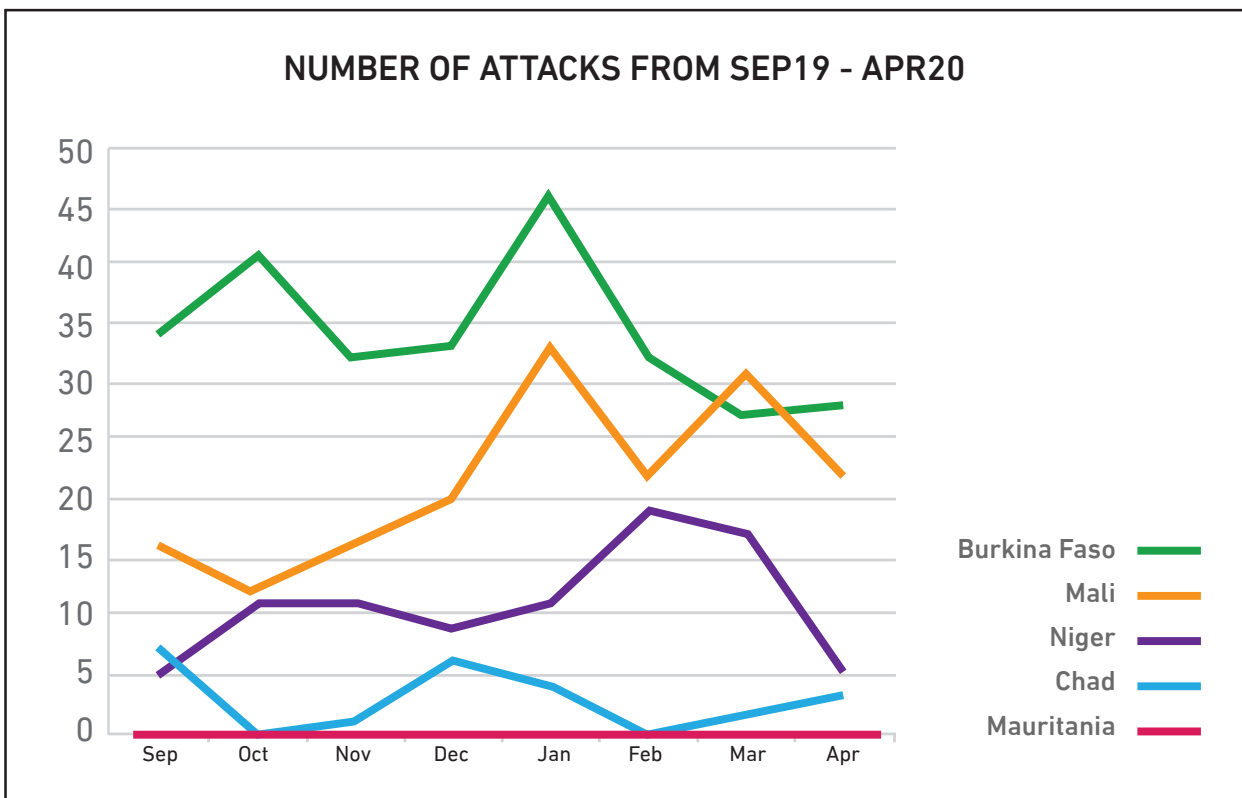
With regards to the distribution of attacks by terrorist groups, JNIM is the most active with an average of 40 attacks per month, ISGS activity, with an average of 22.8 attacks, has doubled (+108%) in Period B. Finally, the activity of ISWAP and Boko Haram (3.7 and 3 attacks per month respectively) is low in the G5-Sahel countries as they are more active in Nigeria.

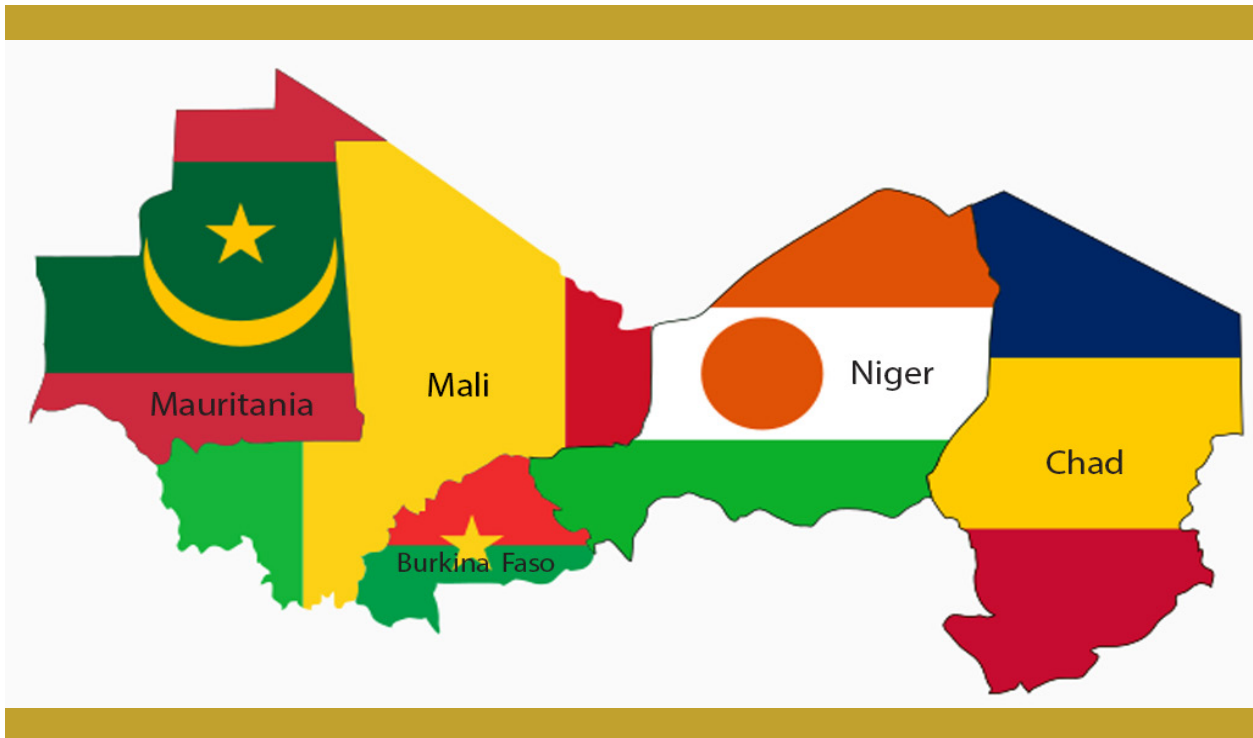
The analysis of the attacks shows that there is terrorist group operates across the entire G5 area, but all terrorist groups operate in Niger. JNIM and the ISGS are active in three countries: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

The former carried out attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, while the latter increased attacks in all regions especially in Burkina Faso. In the Lake Chad region, Boko Haram moved from Niger to Chad to carry out operations, while ISWAP did the opposite.

Although the number of attacks increased by 19%, the number of fatalities surged by 16.8% (from 924 to 1,079) which implies a reduction in the lethality of the attacks. Mali and Chad have witnessed a surge in fatalities.

Most of the terrorists’ targets were civilian (in both periods in concern). Of particular significance is the





250% increase in attacks on International Organizations (IO) (from 6 to 20). This clearly indicates a change in the strategy of the terrorist organizations in the region.

All terrorist groups prioritized civilian targets, except for JNIM which targeted both civilians and state institutions. The report showed the similarity of the methods "tactics" used by terrorist organizations in the region. Their main TTP is SALW and IEDs. As for complex attacks (combination of small weapons, light weapons, improvised explosive devices and mortars) they are the least used because they require good experience. JNIM and ISGS carried out complex attacks that were the most destructive (26 victims in one attack).

Qualitative analysis

The previously identified 19% increase in terrorist attacks between the two periods was linked to a surge in activity in the month of January. The increase in the number of attacks during January was due to greater ISGS and JNIM activity in Burkina Faso and Mali respectively.

This could be interpreted as a reaction to the Joint Summit of Heads of States of France and the G5 Sahel countries which took place on 13 January in France. On that occasion, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to fight against terrorism in the Sahel, introducing a new concept of The Coalition for the Sahel

(a joint venture between Op. Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force). In addition, the lack of State presence in many areas of Burkina Faso and Mali has contributed to the two groups having larger freedom of action.

The trend of decreasing terrorist activity in period B, culminating in the minimum number of attacks in April 2020 (58 attacks), could be the result of diminished operational capacity due to consistent pressure from the security forces starting in February 2020 and results in 476 terrorist fatalities in 21 selected events from February to early April 2020.

Among the most relevant counterterrorism operations are:

- On 6 February, in Mali, JNIM militants attacked the military camp in Dinangourou. Air strikes caused 34 militant fatalities.
- From 16-17 February, French Operation Barkhane air forces killed around 30 presumed JNIM militants south of Mopti, Mali.
- On 10 March, a special unit of the Gendarmerie, supported by volunteer fighters, destroyed a militant base in Tassamakot, Burkina Faso, killing 70 JNIM militants.
- On 16 March, in Niger, soldiers repelled an ISWAP attack on an army base in Toumour, Diffa and reportedly killed at least 50 militants.



- On 2 April, 63 militants were reportedly killed in a counterattack following an ISGS militant attack on an army position in Tillabery, Niger. Clashes between JNIM and ISGS in April left 152 terrorists dead.
- On 5 April, the JNIM attack on ISGS militants in the area of Mopti killed over 100, the majority of whom were ISGS.
- On 13 April, ISGS attacked a JNIM gathering in the area of Mopti and Timbuktu resulting in the deaths of 12 JNIM and 10 ISGS fighters.
- On 18 April, JNIM militants reportedly attacked ISGS positions in the area of Liptako-Gourma. 30 ISWAP and 4 JNIM militants were killed.

Terrorist activity by groups

ISGS and JNIM are the most active groups in the region. They carry out the majority of their attacks in Burkina Faso and Mali, where they have the control of vast areas of the territory and can act with relative impunity. From there they cross the border to carry out attacks in Niger. On the other hand, ISWAP and Boko Haram attack Niger and Chad from Nigeria, where they have their safe-haven. While JNIM activity has decreased during Period B,

ISGS's has doubled. This could be attributed to the previous partial dissolution of Ansarul Islam (AI) at the beginning of 2019 which led to many of its members joining either ISGS or the MLF (which had already become part of JNIM). Subsequently, in December 2019 many members of the MLF (the deadliest part of JNIM, accounting for a significant part of JNIM activity in Central Sahel) defected to ISGS.

For JNIM, which has a diverse ethnic base and expanded its support base due to the merger, violence represents a way to dislodge the State from territories so it can implement its means of informal governance in order to exercise control. For it to succeed, it tends to ingratiate itself with local communities in an attempt to win their hearts and minds.

On the other hand, since ISGS lacks the large support enjoyed by its rival JNIM, it focuses on territorial expansion by primarily exploiting and even fueling pre-existing ethnic conflicts and is less concerned with the administration of territories. This distinction between the two divergent strategies is far from clear-cut in practice however, as the groups can change strategy to suit a particular situation.



The increase of JNIM terrorist attacks in Mali may be related to the proposed peace talks announced by the Malian government in February 2020. JNIM indicated its willingness to participate in negotiations, so it tried to gain the upper hand before the negotiations started. It increased the number of attacks against security forces. This explains the JNIM emphasis on Mali more recently vis-à-vis Burkina Faso.

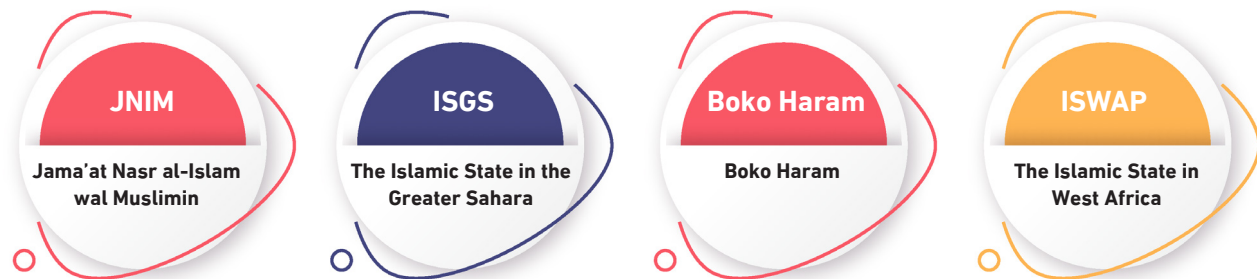
Future Goals

The study calls counterterrorism activists in the region to take the following variables into their account in their future plans and strategies:

- Address the issue of the deterioration of security in the Sahel region where the activity of ISGS increases and the activity of JNIM decreases
- Differences in targets among different terrorist groups, and the use of more sophisticated attacks.
- The rivalry between JNIM and ISGS may force them in the future to allocate their resources to the struggle between them. This weakens them both and may at the same time transfer the struggle to be targeting the forces of one another. Each of them implements attacks on communities that appear to support or sympathize with the other side, and then increase the cycle of reprisals and the number of civilian casualties.

- Conflict and disagreement among terrorist groups is not the only mode of interaction between them. Rather, there are cooperation and agreements between them, which must be monitored and countered. It is expected that cooperation between ISWAP and ISGS will increase, which will lead to the creation of a unified front for Daesh in the Sahel region. This will be a real and very dangerous security challenge for Niger.
- Development of security initiatives and rebuilding the security structure to counter terrorism in the Sahel, such as specifying 600 soldiers for Operation Barkhane, establishing a joint command for the Alliance for the Coast, and deploying an African Union force of three thousand soldiers.
- Despite a significant progress by the multi-tasking force in the Lake Chad Basin, it has not been able to counter the terrorist threat in the region, so its future appears uncertain.

A related report of the United Nations University, entitled "Conflict Prevention in the Sahel", called for the need to turn this regional analysis and approaches into action plans, with special attention to transforming broad regional goals into interconnected national goals which have clear and practical standards. The report called on



TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SAHEL. INFOGRAPH

the United Nations and the countries of the region to use an adaptive approach instead of multi-year plans, to be able to quell the conflicts fueled by terrorist, separatist and criminal organizations in the region. Because of the very flexible situation in the Sahel where there are shifts of the parties of conflict, there should be adjustments in the context without depending on plans that do not respond to changes in reality.

There are many studies that confirm the importance of fighting terrorism in the region in a comprehensive approach. This approach is not limited to military and security operations; rather, it strengthens the vulnerable areas in which terrorist groups are active by building schools, hospitals, roads and shopping centers in order to rebuild relationships with the local population. Will this approach be implemented, since the lessons of combating terrorism in past years confirm the need for it?

TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SAHEL

JAMA'A NUSRAT UL-ISLAM WA AL-MUSLIMIN

- JNIM is an alliance of groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda, which was first announced through a video snippet, showing the key leaders: Ansar Dine, Al-Qaeda in The Islamic Maghreb, Al-Mourabitoun and The Macina Liberation Front, filmed by its Zallaqah media foundation and sent on March 2, 2017 to the Nouakchott news agency.
- JNIM carried out its first attack on March 5, 2017, 3 days into its establishment against the Bulikisi military base in central Mali, near the Burkina Faso border, claiming 11 Malian soldiers.

- JNIM is led by Iyad Ag Ghali, the former leader of Ansar Dine, and a longtime leader of the Tuareg uprising in Mali. Other prominent leaders in the said group include Jamal Okasha, the former emir of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the former emir of the Al-Murabitoun, and Mohammed Koufa, the former emir of Ansar Dine.
- Although the members within the group operate relatively independently, they still consistently affirm their membership in the group, which formalizes cooperation between the associate groups by establishing a hierarchical relationship in which Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb supervises the rest of the allied groups, providing directions and resources.
- As of September 2018, the group had about 1,000 to 2,000 fighters, the majority of whom were from the Fulani tribes. They are mostly active in Mali, but they also carry out operations in Niger and Burkina Faso.
- Despite heavy losses brought about by the French and local forces, the group continues to operate throughout Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, carrying out complex attacks, assassinations and IED attacks on UN forces, Mali and French forces.
- The group focuses its terrorist attacks on security forces and iconic foreign institutions. It launched a major attack on the French embassy in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on March 3, 2018, on a French military base and a United Nations mission in Timbuktu, Mali, in April 2018, and on French and

UN forces in Agiloc in the Kidal region of eastern Mali in July 2018

THE ISLAMIC STATE IN THE GREATER SAHARA

- It was established on May 15, 2015, following divisions in the Al-Mourabitoun led by Adnan Abu Walid Al-Sahrawi.
- Al-Sahrawi was the spokesman for the Movement for the Wahdah and Jihad group in West Africa (MUJAO). On August 22, 2013, the movement and the Al Multhameen Brigade, led by the Algerian, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, announced their merger in a new organization called Al-Mourabitoun, led by Al-Sahrawi. In 2015, Al-Sahrawi unilaterally pledged allegiance to the leader of ISIS Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, but Belmokhtar refused this step, and confirmed the loyalty of Al-Mourabitoun to Al-Qaeda Sahara Desert (ISGS). Al-Sahrawi split from Al-Mourabitoun and formed the ISIS branch in the Greater Sahara Desert (ISGS).
- The organization's activities extend to about eight hundred kilometers along the eastern and western borders of Mali and Niger, in addition to nearly six hundred kilometers along the eastern borders of Burkina Faso and Niger. Nearly 90% of its attacks occurred within a 100-km radius of those borders.
- The organization is considered one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the region; it carried out 26% of the total terrorist operations: 30% of all attacks in Burkina Faso. It claimed responsibility for 42% of the total deaths associated with terrorist organizations in the Sahel region in 2018.
- 2020 was the bloodiest year in the Sahel region, where an estimated 4,250 people were killed in terrorist operations, making up an increase of 60% over 2019; the ISIS branch in the Sahara Desert caused more than half of these deaths.
- 42 administrative regions and districts in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger reported terrorist activities attributed to ISIS in 2020
- Unlike other terrorist groups active in the Sahel region, this organization does not develop a coherent ideological framework, and does not seek to influence the minds and hearts of people, and

obtain their moral support. Rather, it protracted the battlefield with constant action, which explains why it was able to become the bloodiest terrorist group although it had a small number of active fighters.

- The organization often targets government officials. As of 2018, it also targeted schools repeatedly, and caused the closure of more than 1,100 schools in Burkina Faso after threats, attacks, and the killing of teachers and administrators.

BOKO HARAM

- It was founded in January 2002, by Muhammad Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital of the northeastern state of Borno; it attracted unemployed youth and practiced its activities fairly peacefully during the first seven years of its existence.
- In July 2009, the Nigerian police began investigating the group, as reports revealed that it was making preparations for combat, and a number of its leaders were arrested, including its leader, Muhammad Yusuf, who was killed while trying to escape from prison in 2011.
- On June 16, 2011, the group under the leadership of its new leader, Abu Bakr Shekau, launched the first IED attack that killed six at Abuja Police Station. On August 26 of 2011, it bombed the United Nations headquarters in Abuja, which was the first time that it hit an international target.
- On March 8 of 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS in an audio statement broadcast on the movement's website on Twitter by its leader, Shekau.
- Shortly before it pledged allegiance to ISIS, Boko Haram lost most of the territory it controlled due to government attacks. So, it retreated to the Sambisa forest and started guerrilla tactics.
- Some analysts stressed the economic reasons as a factor in the emergence and continuation of Boko Haram. Although Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa, 60% of its population lives on less than one dollar a day. The terrorist organization also managed to recruit large numbers due to poverty and violence resulting from climate change that struck the Lake Chad Basin.

- Since 2009, Boko Haram has killed dozens of thousands of people and displaced 2.3 million from their homes, and was among the deadliest terrorist groups in the world according to the Global Terrorism Index.
- The group focused on kidnappings to obtain ransom; in 2013, it kidnapped a family of seven French tourists in Cameroon, and after two months it released them with 16 others in exchange for a ransom of \$ 3.15 million. Similarly, on April 14 and 15 of 2014, it kidnapped 276 students from a government high school in Chibok, Borno state, was accused of kidnapping 317 students from Gangibi District High School on February 26, 2020.

ISIS BRANCH IN WEST AFRICA

- Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS and was accepted as a branch of the organization in March 2015 and was renamed ISIS State in West Africa (ISWAP)
- In August 2016, Al-Baghdadi appointed the leader of ISIS, Abu Musab Al-Barnawi, son of the former Boko Haram leader Muhammad Yusuf, as head of the organization, instead of Abu Bakr Shekau, who responded by breaking away from ISIS, and returned to the old name of Boko Haram group.
- The US Department of Defense estimated members of the organization at about 3,500 people in April 2018, while other parties reported it to be 5,000 people, mainly from northeast Nigeria and neighboring regions.
- As of July 2018, the group has become the largest ISIS cell in Africa, with its members increasingly growing.
- Although the group's methods are often violent and terrorist, it has established a largely symbiotic relationship with the people of the Lake Chad region, and has dealt with local civilians better than its parent group, Boko Haram, as it digs wells, controls cattle and provides minimal healthcare for people.
- This approach achieved gains for the organization in terms of recruitment and support, according to the International Crisis Group's estimate.
- The group's deep roots in the civil population confirm that purely military means are not sufficient to defeat it; rather, the group's ties with the locals should be weakened.



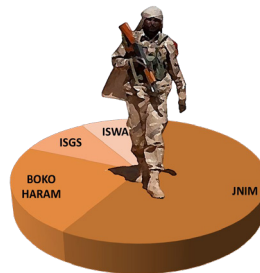


NATO Southern Hub
Transregional



2nd Joint NSD-S HUB & ACSRT Four-Monthly Report

“Terrorism in the Sahel: facts and figures”



May 2019 – August 2020

TERRORISM IN THE SAHEL FACTS AND FIGURES

By NATO-S HUB & ACSRT







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ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION