

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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MASSACRE IN PERU SHOWS SHINING PATH PERSISTS IN APURIMAC VALLEY

Jacob Zenn

For nearly a decade, Peru's Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) Marxist militants have been in decline, with the group's political wing becoming more active than the militant wing (*Terrorism Monitor*, May 15, 2014). However, on May 24, the group took Peru by surprise when it carried out an attack in Satipo Province, Junín region in the Apurímac jungle valley, which for years has been the group's main area of operations. Unlike the group's original aim to create a Marxist state, now Shining Path focuses on drug trafficking. The 18 victims of the May 24 attack accordingly were in a brothel area run by drug traffickers, although as a reminder of the group's ideology, the fighters sprayed Marxist graffiti at the attack site (*mercopress.com*, May 26). Further, the fighters left Marxist pamphlets at the crime scene signed in the group's now official name, the Militarized Communist Party of Peru (*Twitter.com/@Pedro_vrae*, May 24).

The Shining Path attack comes amid a growing number of counter-drug trafficking operations by the Peruvian

police (peru21.pe, April 29). This is putting a stranglehold on the group's revenue, which is forcing it into conflict with rival drug traffickers to control key routes. The group is also strongly opposed to Peruvian presidential candidate, Keiko Fujimori, whom it labeled a "traitor" in its pamphlets. Ironically, the latest attack has actually boosted Fujimori's prospects, with her labeling her left-leaning opponent, Pedro Castillo, as ideologically similar, and even sympathetic, to the Shining Path (laprensalatina.com, May 27). At a pro-Keiko Fujimori demonstration in Lima after the attack, her supporters also held banners stating "No to Communism" and "No to Terrorism" (elperiodicodearagon.com, May 30).

The attack is also unlikely to win Shining Path any public support. The Peruvian archbishop in Trujillo issued a condemnation of the "cruel assassins" and called for respect for the "sanctity of life" (infovaticana.com, May 26). Given that the attack will seemingly work against the group's interests—which is likely to result in greater policy monitoring of the drug trafficking routes and helping Fujimori's election campaign—one potential explanation for the decision to carry out this latest violence in Apurímac Valley is that the group is suffering

from leadership losses. The group's deputy leader, Jorge Quispe Palomino (a.k.a. "Raúl"), was killed by Peruvian police in March (elperuano.pe, March 31). Other long-time leaders from the 1980s, including Comrade Artemio, have also been arrested in the past decade ([Hot Issue](#), April 11, 2012).

Therefore, with an ideology whose legitimacy has been weakened as a result of global Communism's downfall and whose history of massacres has lost it public support, Shining Path is now primarily a drug trafficking group. However, its continued killings, including the latest May 24 attack, will do little to revive the group. Moreover, Keiko Fujimori's father, Alberto, who is in prison on corruption charges, is known for having dealt severe blows to Shining Path during his tenure in office from 1990 to 2000. If his daughter wins the next election, she will likely deliver the final knock out punch to the group's very existence.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

PHILIPPINES SUPPRESSES COMEBACK ATTEMPT BY MAUTE MILITANT GROUP

Jacob Zenn

Four years since the Armed Forces of the Philippines engaged in a multi-month battle against Islamic State (IS)-allied militants in Marawi, led by Omar and Abdullah Maute and Abu Sayyaf commander Isnilon Hapilon, the army is still working to prevent the resurrection of Maute's followers. While both Maute brothers and Hapilon were killed in October 2017 during the battle in Marawi, recent killings and arrests indicate their movement, though struggling, is still not defeated (abc.net.au, October 22, 2017). The first incident was on May 6, when Philippine soldiers located a militant named Sarip in the Maute's hometown of Butig, killed him, and arrested three other militants. Assistance from local villagers in making the arrests indicated that the army was winning support from the local population (philstar.com, May 6).

On May 28, five members of the Maute Group also surrendered to the army. They claimed they had served the group as couriers to scout on army movements and buy food supplies, and were indoctrinated into the group's jihadist ideology. Nevertheless, as a result of sustained pressure by special forces, they finally decided to give up the fight and called on other members to do the same (sunstar.com.ph, May 28).

Shortly after their surrender, nine other Maute Group members were arrested and two others escaped during a special forces operation near Marawi on May 29. Various weapons and types of ammunition were also captured, indicating the group still poses a lethal threat, even though they have carried out increasingly few attacks since 2017. The arrested members had attempted to flee by shooting at the soldiers, but were ultimately subdued (sunstar.com.ph, May 29).

While the Maute Group threat may be subsiding, another related threat, however, persists. As these operations against Maute Group were underway, in early May, approximately 200 Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) invaded the town of Datu Paglas in Maguindanao, Mindanao and occupied the market in the town center. Unlike the multi-month counter-terrorism campaign in

Marawi in 2017, this time the army was able to remove the militants in six hours of fighting (inquirer.net, May 9). That the invasion occurred exactly four years after the battle of Marawi appears to be a coincidence, as no indications emerged that BIFF was attempting to symbolically time their attack. Rather, it was the fifth time this year that BIFF had attempted to take the town, suggesting that their growing confidence in attacking Datu Paglas.

Just as civilians aided the army's capture of Maute Group militants elsewhere, it was the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who captured the BIFF members in Datu Paglas as they were retreating from the fighting (pna.gov.ph, May 11). BIFF, like its allied Maute Group, is loyal to IS, and broke away from MILF when that organization entered into a peace agreement with the Philippines government in return for regional autonomy. Since then, MILF has assisted the army in cracking down on BIFF fighters. This has proven to be a force enhancer for the army, but as the series of recent BIFF invasions of Data Paglas demonstrate, neither that organization, nor the Maute Group, are defeated. BIFF, however, appears more powerful than the Maute Group, which is no longer launching invasions of towns. Instead, the Maute Group is increasingly seeing its members killed or arrested by the army.

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Burkan al-Ghadab Militants' Display of Force Highlights Deepening Turkish Influence in Libya

Jacob Lees Weiss

On May 7, armed militiamen stormed the Corinthia Hotel compound that was being used as one of the headquarters for the interim government in the Libyan capital of Tripoli ([al-Hadath](http://al-hadath.com), May 8). Social media videos showed militants searching cars and asking for the location of Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush ([al-Marsad](http://al-marsad.com), May 7). The militants eventually departed and were later promised a meeting with the President of the Presidential Council, Muhammad Menfi ([RT Arabic](http://RTArabic.com), May 8).

The militants were aligned with Burkan al-Ghadab (Volcano of Rage), a coalition of militias tasked by the previous Tripoli-based government, the Government of National Accord (GNA), to defend Tripoli from the assault launched by the eastern Libyan-based Libya National Army (LNA) in April 2019. [1] Earlier in the day on May 7, the militia had met to discuss recent statements by Mangoush and the appointment of Hussein al-Ayeb as the replacement for Imad Trabelsi as head of intelligence within the new unified Libyan government ([Al-Ain](http://Al-Ain.com), May 8).

In a statement posted by Burkan al-Ghadab's media office, the militia insisted that Mangoush should be dismissed for calling for the complete departure of all foreign forces and mercenaries from the country, without making an exception for the Turkish military ([Burkan al-Ghadab](http://BurkanalGhadab.com), May 7). The statement, praising "brotherly" Turkey for being the only country to answer the GNA's call to intervene and protect civilians during the LNA assault, made clear Burkan al-Ghadab's proximity to Ankara. Burkan al-Ghadab also denounced both al-Ayeb and Mangoush's alleged previous alignment with General Khalifa Haftar of the LNA.

Libya's Continued Security Fragmentation

Libya made significant progress toward political unity after a ceasefire between the LNA and the GNA was brokered by the UN in October 2020, leading to a unity government headed by interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh ([DW](#), March 10). The government's agenda was to reunify state institutions before nationwide general elections in December 2021.

Despite the progress in the political realm, the Libyan security environment remains fragmented among a multiplicity of various non-state actors. While in Tripoli the GNA has now been disbanded, the domestic militia groups that were aligned with and sponsored by the GNA remain. The GNA had used militia groups to provide law and order in Tripoli and they made up the bulk of the fighting force that repelled the LNA assault on the capital. In exchange, militias burrowed themselves into the Tripoli-based state infrastructure, accruing significant influence. [2] The Hotel Corinthia incident showcases the continued intent of these militias to exert similar influence on the new interim government.

Likewise, the foreign militia presence has remained largely unchanged since the October 2020 ceasefire. The expiration of the 90-day deadline for the complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Libya, which was contracted within October 2020's ceasefire agreement, passed without any reduction in foreign troop presence ([al Jazeera](#), May 15). While the UN has since agreed to deploy a small ceasefire monitoring team, none of the international powers involved in the Libyan conflict, including Turkey, Russia, and the UAE, have shown any commitment to reducing military activity in the country ([UN](#), April 16).

The Burkan al-Ghadab-Turkey Connection

Burkan al-Ghadab's attempted storming of the Corinthia Hotel represents Turkey's success in turning the militia group into a *de facto* Turkish proxy.

The Turkish government is keen to safeguard its economic interests in Libya, including almost \$35 billion in Libyan contracts and a 2019 maritime border delineation agreement. Turkey's strengthened links to the GNA militias in the face of the LNA assault resulted in the GNA benefiting from increased Turkish financial support, arms supplies, and coordination with Turkish

military advisors. Ankara also attached itself ideologically to the more Islamist-leaning militias by housing in Turkey influential Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani. Turkey has used Ghariani to legitimize and praise the Turkish role in Libya. [3] Now with the GNA replaced by the interim unity government, Turkey has become the main patron of several once nominally GNA-aligned militias.

The interim government, which remains based in Tripoli, has a fading interest in appeasing the militias based in the city, such as Burkan al-Ghadab, as the ceasefire continues to hold and the frontline has solidified around Sirte, which is 400 kilometers east of the capital. This has significantly increased militia motivation to counter its waning influence by further aligning with Turkey.

Burkan al-Ghadab's strong reaction to Mangoush's call for the absolute departure of foreign military troops from Libya is likely to have been directed by Turkey. Burkan al-Ghadab's statement in condemnation of Mangoush mimics Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu's defense of the Turkish military presence in Libya almost word for word. [4] A day before the incident at the Corinthia Hotel, Turkey-based Ghariani launched a verbal assault on Mangoush, describing her as insolent and an agent of the enemy before calling on Burkan al-Ghadab to equally denounce her ([al-Arabiya](#), May 7). Media linked to the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood movement, which has itself been strongly backed by Turkey since 2012, also published edited clips of Mangoush criticizing previous GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj at a 2019 seminar. Mangoush in the same seminar equally criticized Haftar ([al-Marsad](#), May 8).

Mangoush's statements regarding the departure of foreign forces cannot be seen as particularly controversial to anyone, except for Turkey. The withdrawal of foreign forces is contracted within the October 2020 ceasefire agreement and has been backed by two unanimous UN Security Council resolutions.

Unintended Consequences Ahead

For Turkey, influence over Tripoli's militia groups is seen as vital to maintaining its economic and military interests in the country in the longer term. Turkey's military presence and the maritime border delineation agreement, both agreed upon by the former GNA administration in 2019, have received both tacit and explicit support by

interim Prime Minister Dbeibeh ([Andalou Agency](#), March 9). However, Turkey knows that Dbeibeh is likely to remain an interim leader and December's elections could lead to a very different Libyan position on both fronts. Turkey knows even if a new Libyan executive power or mounting international pressure forces it to withdraw either its own troop presence or the portion of the roughly 13,000 Syrian militants that it sent to fight in Libya, it could still wield leverage in the country through its domestic militia groups.

However, increasing alignment with Turkey is likely to have unintended consequences for Burkan al-Ghadab. Many Tripoli militias attained their local legitimacy by defending the city from the LNA assault of 2019 and from participation in the 2011 revolution. If the militia's fighters continue to act as a tool used by a foreign country, Turkey, to exert pressure against decisions or statements considered unfavorable, then they risk losing any remaining domestic credibility. This could lead to renewed inter-militia conflict in Tripoli, particularly if the ceasefire continues to hold.

Turkey simply does not have the soft power to attract support from all of Tripoli's militias, several of which have contrasting ideological orientations and loyalties. [5] Without the existential threat posed by the LNA's assault, militias jealous of Burkan al-Ghadab's clout could use Turkish influence over it as a pretext to commence hostilities. In sum, despite the political progress made in Libya since October 2020, without significant security sector reform leading to the monopoly of state control over armed force, long-term stability in the country remains unlikely.

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Notes

[1] See Jason Pack, "Kingdom of Militias: Libya's Second War of Post-Qadhafi Succession" (Italian Institute for International Political Studies, May 2019)

[2] See Wolfram Lacher, "Tripoli's Militia Cartel" (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, April 2018)

[3] Ghariani publicly supported the GNA-Turkey Maritime Memorandum ([Andalou Agency](#), December 12 2019), called upon Libyans to stage demonstrations in support of Turkey's cooperation with the Libyan government ([Andalou Agency](#), July 9 2020), and claimed that anyone who denies Turkey's benevolence does not deserve respect ([Arab Weekly](#), May 12)

[4] Both claimed that the Turkish presence in Libya cannot be compared to foreign mercenary groups fighting in the country ([Associated Press](#), May 3)

[5] See Karim Mezran, "Libya 2021: Islamists, Salafis and Jihadis" (Wilson Center, March 2021)

Islamic State's Pakistan Province Launches New Jihadist Magazine

Abdul Sayed

The first Urdu-language magazine of Islamic State's Pakistan Province (IS-P) called *Yalghar* (Invasion) was published at the end of April 2021 on social media accounts that regularly disseminate IS-P propaganda materials. The magazine is IS-P's first indigenous propaganda product. IS-P propaganda materials have otherwise not been nearly as attractive and original as the materials of its parent group, IS Khorasan (IS-K) Province. Rather, IS-P has mainly translated Islamic State's (IS) central propaganda materials from Arabic and English into Urdu.

IS central established IS-P in May 2019 by dividing IS-K into branches for India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. [1] Since then, IS-P has struggled to establish footholds in Pakistan and has not capitalized on local dynamics to receive support in the country ([BBC Urdu](#), January 15). [2]

Jihadist Magazines' Utility for IS-P

The history of jihadist groups' propaganda efforts in Pakistan shows that magazines have always been an effective part of their recruitment of potential support bases in the country. Although IS-P has not shown any significant presence in the urban centers of Pakistan, its propaganda efforts could provide it solid support in those areas in the long run. [3] For example, al-Qaeda unofficially released its first Urdu-language monthly magazine for Pakistan, *Nawai Afghan Jihad (NAJ)* (Voice of Afghan Jihad), in August 2008. Since then, NAJ has been published as an 'independent' jihadist magazine for Afghanistan and Pakistan. [4] [5]

The magazine quality improved with time and its propaganda content became highly sophisticated. Finally, in August 2019, al-Qaeda's regional franchise, al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS), which includes the South Asian region from Pakistan to India, Kashmir, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, formally declared NAJ as its official mouthpiece. [6] However, later evidence reveals

that al-Qaeda's senior Pakistani figures started NAJ and remained its founding figures in Pakistan after 9/11. Al-Qaeda strategically did not officially label NAJ as its own formal magazine despite that it promoted only al-Qaeda's narratives in Pakistan. [7]

Like *Yalghar*, NAJ's first issue had only 16 pages of low-quality content. NAJ nevertheless helped al-Qaeda to channel highly educated Pakistani youth into its training camps in Waziristan. [8] Some of them later played central roles in turning NAJ into a sophisticated propaganda arm of the group in Pakistan, and NAJ remains al-Qaeda's main trademark for Pakistan-related propaganda. [9]

A Look Inside *Yalghar's* Contents

The 30-page *Yalghar* magazine has ten articles and an editorial and two infographics, which cover topics about IS in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Syria. One infographic is about IS' recent attacks in Pakistan and India, and the other is promoting a propaganda video series of IS. The magazine encourages readers to send in their suggestions and articles through an e-mail given on its back page.

Five of the articles relate to the IS groups in Khorasan, Pakistan, and Syria, and the remaining articles are about IS ideology and Islamic history. Most of these contents were previously published by IS official media outlets in English or Arabic. This first issue, however, lacks any engaging content about IS activities in Pakistan. The two articles related to IS-P are duplicates of old propaganda materials. The first of the two articles include the IS-K founding emir Hafiz Saeed Khan Orakzai's interview with the official IS English magazine, *Dabiq*, which was published in its thirteenth issue in January 2016. [10] The extract contains Orakzai's general advice to IS members and supporters in Khorasan.

The second of the two articles is a transcript of an IS-P commander's Urdu-language statement from a documentary released by the group's *Nida-i-Haq Urdu* (Voice of the Truth) media center in January 2021 ([Archives](#), January 12). The video was about Hazara Shia coal miners who were brutally killed by the group on January 2 in Mach town of Pakistan's southern Baluchistan province ([Dawn](#), January 5). The only important information con-

cerning IS-P was its recent assassination of senior Afghan Taliban commander, Naik Muhammad Rehbar, in the provincial capital of the Pakistan Khyber Pukhtoonkhawa Province ([Militant Leadership Monitor](#), May 3). Rehbar played a central role in rooting out IS Khorasan from Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, which remain IS' traditional stronghold ([Arab News](#), April 20).

Discrediting the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda

Like other IS-K and IS-P propaganda materials, this magazine also on several occasions included criticism of IS' major regional jihadist rival, the Afghan Taliban, accusing its members of being stooges of the Pakistani spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Other than the Afghan Taliban, the magazine also criticizes IS' global jihadist rival, al-Qaeda, for its silence over the arrests and suffering of IS female members in Syria after the group's territorial caliphate collapsed in 2019. The magazine taunted those protesting Afia Siddiqui's captivity in a U.S. prison, arguing that such people care only for one Muslim lady's sufferings in the hands of "infidels" but have neglected thousands of others faced with more inhumane situations in Syria. This propaganda could be particularly targeted against AQIS, which often protests Afia Siddiqui's imprisonment and employs it as a regular theme in its propaganda materials for recruitment purposes.

A final article admits to IS' losses in Afghanistan, claiming that the group lost its dominance and all its territories there, which it claims to have controlled for multiple years. However, the author of the article boasts that a day will come when IS rises again in the country and will exact revenge on behalf of all of its slain and oppressed members.

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Notes

[1] Abdul Sayed and Tore Hamming, "The Revival of the Pakistani Taliban," *CTC Sentinel*, 14:4 (2021).

[2] Mikail Shaikh, "Islamic State or Daesh in Pakistan in 2020," *Conflict and Peace Studies*, Vol. 13, Issue. 1, pp. 105-124.

[3] With the announcement of IS' so-called Islamic caliphate in June 2014, many Pakistani jihadists and Islamist youths joined IS-K. They shifted to its strongholds in Afghanistan's Kunar and Nangarhar provinces. IS-K's founding Pakistani leadership was shortly afterwards killed in U.S. and Afghan forces' counter-terrorism operations that resulted in IS-K's leadership transformation from Pakistanis to Afghans. IS-K's brutal wars with the Afghan Taliban and intense counter-terrorism operations against the group in Afghanistan led to a decline in its recruitment from Pakistani urban centers. In an interview with the author in January 2021, a leading expert on IS-K, Professor Amira Jadoon, also said that the establishment of a separate Pakistani IS chapter could be to capitalize on local opportunities in Pakistan, which IS-K failed to achieve due to the various challenges faced by the group in Afghanistan. In this context, IS-P, since its establishment in May 2019, has, however, failed to establish its footprint in Pakistani urban centers, which had provided a significant number of recruits to IS-K in its early years.

[4] AQIS formerly announced renaming *Nawai Afghan Jihad* to *Nawai Ghazwai Hind* (Voice of the Battle against India) directly when the Afghan Taliban signed a peace deal with the U.S. in Doha, Qatar on February 29, 2020. This name change was followed by the AQIS announcement that as the U.S. and allied 'invaders' are withdrawing from Afghanistan, now the group had to change its focus to the jihad against India. For details, see, *Nawai Afghan Jihad*, Issue 3, Vol 13, March 2020.

[5] *Nawai Afghan Jihad*, Issue 1, Vol 1, Aug 2008.

[6] AQIS press release, PR_104_AQS, August 25, 2019, "Recirculation of the Nawai Afghan Jihad through a new editorial board," *Nawai Afghan Jihad*, Vol.12, Issue.8, p.6.

[7] "Editorials published in *Nawai Afghan Jihad* Part-1," (*Nawai Afghan Jihad* publications: July 2019).

[8] An unpublished data set prepared by the author includes 180 biographical details of post-9/11 al-Qaeda Pakistani cadres. These biographies were published/released by al-Qaeda official media outlets in text and audio-video formats from 2008-2020.

[9] A good example here is an current senior media official of AQIS, Moeenuddin Shami, who joined al-Qaeda in Waziristan in 2009 and was appointed to al-Qaeda's Pakistani media and propaganda branch and was later assigned *Nawai Afghan Jihad* responsibilities. For details, see Moeenuddin Shami, "With Ustad Farooq," *Nawai Afghan Jihad*, Vol.10, Issue.10, pp-26-27.

[10] "Interview with Wali of Khurasan," *Dabiq*, Issue 13, pp. 48-54.

ISWAP Launches Hearts and Minds Strategy to Counter Nigerian Army Offensive

Jacob Zenn

Since Boko Haram's launched its jihad in 2009, the group has undergone three major phases of territory-capturing military offensives. The Nigerian army turned the tide against Boko Haram after the first two phases with a 'Plan A' and 'Plan B.' However, Boko Haram's ongoing military campaign is more serious than previous ones. Following the recent statement by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, is there no clear 'Plan C' for the Nigerian army except a possible U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) intervention? This article discusses such a prospect in the context of longtime Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau's death in May.

Boko Haram's First Two Territorial Military Offensives

Boko Haram's first territorial military offensive occurred in mid-2013 when the group retreated from Borno State's capital, Maiduguri, to Sambisa Forest in southern Borno. Boko Haram caught the Nigerian army by surprise when it raided military barracks and towns throughout Borno and neighboring Yobe State. This campaign included a raid on Chibok, where the militant group conducted its infamous kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls, as claimed by Shekau (vanguardngr.com, May 15, 2014). Several reports and videos suggest that Nigerians who trained with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) provided tactical support to Boko Haram before this offensive, which explains why the Nigerian army underestimated the group's ability to raid military barracks like AQIM's allies had done in the Sahel. [1] Nevertheless, Nigeria was able to recover most of the territory Boko Haram captured in 2015 with assistance from neighboring countries' armies, including Niger, Cameroon, and especially Chad, which intervened on Nigerian territory to oust Boko Haram from towns its fighters occupied near their shared borders (france24.com, March 21, 2015). This was Nigeria's 'Plan A' for denying Boko Haram territory when the Nigerian army itself struggled to do so.

In March 2015, Abubakar Shekau pledged loyalty to Islamic State (IS) 'caliph' Abubakar al-Baghdhadi and the group adopted the name, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Although Shekau was removed by IS in August 2016 in favor of the comparatively more moderate Abu Musab al-Barnawi, ISWAP in mid-2019 again began conquering territory in Borno and parts of Yobe. This time, ISWAP did not so much catch the Nigerian army off-guard like in 2013-2014, but rather targeted rural, poorly constructed military outposts where ISWAP maintained an asymmetric advantage (thisdaylive.com, June 4, 2019). By this time, some ISWAP commanders had also trained with IS in Libya and the group became more professional in terms of tactics, media, and even uniforms. This was largely a result of integration into IS' global network ([Twitter.com/@FulanNasrullah](https://twitter.com/@FulanNasrullah), July 14, 2019). Nevertheless, in late 2019 and early 2020, Nigeria's 'Plan B' came into being. The plan attempted to deny ISWAP territory by establishing 'super camps,' which are large, highly fortified, and theoretically impenetrable military bases surrounding Borno's largest towns, camps for internally displaced people, and aid facilities (guardian.ng, October 7, 2019).

With fewer outposts to attack and super camps too strong to overrun, ISWAP's pace slowed down in 2020. However, the Nigerian army was now largely confined to super camps with intermittent incursions into rural areas to target ISWAP hideouts. These incursions, however, often led to ambushes on rural roadways, and ISWAP began to hold territory in rural areas, where it recruited, preached, and rebuilt its forces (HumAngle.com, November 22, 2020). Since early 2021, ISWAP has been able to thwart Nigerian army incursions into rural areas and has even attacked the outer defenses of super camps and the towns they surround. They have raided other mid-size military barracks throughout Borno. ISWAP's photosets and claims of attacks since March, for example, have shown military post attacks in:

- Damasak, Borno on March 17;
- Katarko, Borno on March 19;
- Ngagam, Diffa, Niger, on April 5;
- Kamuya, Borno on April 17;
- Dikwa, Borno on April 20;

- Mainok, Borno on April 27;
- Kanama, Yobe on May 5;
- Geidam, Yobe on May 6; and
- Bulabulin, Borno on May 8. [2]

Besides this, ISWAP's photo releases at the end of Ramadan showed its fighters providing money to children and charitable goods to civilians and preaching to elders and youths. [3] This approach revealed several things; first, that ISWAP has a population-centric insurgency strategy to countering the Nigerian army; second, that the group enjoyed significant freedom of movement through Borno's rural areas in an effort to win local hearts and minds (icirigeria.org, August 24). The restoration of Abu Musab al-Barnawi—who had a reputation for leniency toward civilians during his first ISWAP leadership reign from August 2016 to March 2019—to ISWAP leadership around April 2021 suggests ISWAP will seek to win further civilian support in its main operational areas in Borno, Yobe, and northern Adamawa State's rural areas, as well as parts of Diffa, Niger and the Chadian and Cameroonian borderlands with Nigeria ([Twitter.com/@VincentFoucher](https://twitter.com/@VincentFoucher), May 11).

Moreover, Shekau self-detonating a suicide vest rather than being captured by rival ISWAP fighters in May means the Islamic State branch will now take over the Shekau faction's bases in Sambisa, southeastern Borno (HumAngle.ng, May 21). This will allow ISWAP another access point to threaten Maiduguri, and provide logistics routes into Cameroon and attack routes into northern Adamawa. Not only will Shekau's death under al-Barnawi's leadership boost his credibility, but it will also reinforce IS' commitment to ISWAP. This commitment was likely deepened following al-Barnawi's reported purging of ISWAP ultra-hardliners only days after Shekau's death (globalupfront.com, May 28). IS, for example, recognized that al-Barnawi replaced Shekau in August 2016, and never recognized the fact that al-Barnawi was subsequently overthrown in March 2019 by the same ISWAP hardliners who he had just purged. IS seemingly re-designated al-Barnawi as leader specifically to launch the now successful campaign against Shekau in Sambisa ([Raid Media](http://RaidMedia), May 2021). ISWAP's civilian-oriented approach under al-Barnawi and new hideouts in Sambisa will only enable it to further recruit

and launch insurgent attacks in the coming months as the new leader consolidates his position and tries to reincorporate Shekau's commanders into ISWAP.

Future Trendlines: President Buhari's AFRICOM Gambit

Given these trends, three possible futures for the Nigerian army's counter-insurgency campaign against ISWAP can be foreseen. First, the Nigerian army may reduce ISWAP's freedom of movement and the number of towns it controls in rural areas, such as Guzumala, which has had no government presence for more than a year (vanguardngr.com, February 1). However, no current information indicates that this will occur, given ISWAP's momentum, especially after Shekau's elimination. Further, no reports indicate that the Nigerian army is decisively improving its situation—including weaponry, resources and capabilities, soldiers' morale—to turn the tide against ISWAP.

Second, a stalemate between the Nigerian army and ISWAP may occur where the militant group can no longer attack, let alone raid, Nigerian military posts or super camp perimeters. At the same time, however, the army would not be able to dislodge ISWAP from all of its territories. While this seems possible, recent trends still indicate that ISWAP is on the upswing. This is, therefore, a realistic, but still optimistic, possibility for the Nigerian army.

Third, ISWAP may continue to attack super camps and, at times, raid military posts in Borno and Yobe. Whereas Nigeria's 'Plan A' and 'Plan B' have already been tried (neighboring country support and establishing super camps), Nigeria may have to turn to a 'Plan C.' With Nigeria's neighbors reluctant to enter Nigerian territory to oust an ISWAP organization that is stronger now than it was in 2015 and thus risk retaliatory attacks, it is unlikely 'Plan A' can be tried again. Moreover, Chad was the most effective external counter-insurgency force in Borno in 2015, but is now preoccupied with its own domestic rebellion.

This third scenario is coming to fruition with ISWAP increasingly controlling territory in Borno, including now also Sambisa, and in Borno's borderlands, setting the stage for President Buhari's announcement in late April after a virtual meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State,

Anthony Blinken, that he wants United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) to move its headquarters to Africa (premiumtimes.ng.com, April 27). Buhari has not since expounded upon this announcement in any detail. However, it raises the question as to whether, if current trends continue or even become worse, will Nigeria request foreign, and specifically U.S., aid to combat ISWAP under the rubric of the global 'counter-ISIS campaign'? This would be somewhat unprecedented for Nigeria, which has historically rejected foreign military intervention on its territory. Nigeria even showed some reluctance when neighboring countries' militaries intervened in 2015.

At the same time, the situation could become desperate enough that Nigeria has few other options but to seek external support to combat ISWAP, especially if military support does not come from its neighbors. Buhari's 'closed door' meeting with the new Chadian transitional military leader, Mahamat Idriss Deby, reportedly involved counter-terrorism discussions (guardian.ng, May 14). However, it would be premature to suggest Chad will divert military resources from combatting its own domestic rebels to ISWAP in Borno. This is especially likely as ISWAP's attacks have been fairly limited in the country since Chad's post-March 2020 offensive against ISWAP and Shekau's faction, primarily on the Chadian side of Lake Chad (Terrorism Monitor, May 1, 2020).

Foreign military intervention has not stifled jihadists in Mali since France and other regional and Western powers stepped up their military presence there in 2013. Thus, even if AFRICOM were to relocate to Africa and focus on Nigeria, while generating controversy among Africans concerned about 'neo-imperialism,' it would not necessarily lead to ISWAP's downfall. It could even become a magnet for jihadists to come to Africa to 'fight the Americans.' In the short-term, however, little news has emerged supporting the possibility that AFRICOM might relocate to Africa, let alone take part in an intervention to combat ISWAP in Nigeria. All of this makes Buhari's proposal to AFRICOM appear out of touch with reality. The Nigerian army, therefore, has no immediate 'Plan C' to combat ISWAP and must find other means to fight the group, but what those means will be are not immediately clear. Abubakar Shekau, however, will no longer be able to indirectly 'assist' Nigeria by being a thorn in ISWAP's side.

Notes

[1] For full discussion, see Chapter 8 of Jacob Zenn, *Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO (2020).

[2] See relevant photostreams on tabs through the author's personal website: <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/08/06/iswap-photostreams-2015-onwards/>

[3] See tab titled "iswapmay92021ramadanzakatnigeria" on the author's personal website: <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/08/06/iswap-photostreams-2015-onwards/>. See also Aymenn J. al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State's Imposition of Zakat in West Africa," [aymenn-jawad.org](http://www.aymenn-jawad.org), May 28, 2021: <http://www.aymenn-jawad.org/2021/05/the-islamic-state-imposition-of-zakat-in-west>.