

The Islamic State

Why Africa should be worried

Simon Allison

Key points

- 1** The Islamic State may exacerbate current tensions by partnering with existing radical Islamist groups within Africa.
- 2** The thousands of Africans fighting under the Islamic State banner in Iraq and Syria could destabilise their home countries significantly if they return home with training, battle experience and access to the Islamic State's vast wealth.
- 3** The declaration of the Caliphate creates a trans-national identity that is a grave threat to national sovereignty and could encourage Islamist groups to occupy more territory.
- 4** Many of the drivers of terrorism remain local. Combating the spread of the Islamic State requires long-term domestic solutions that address the underlying causes of discontent.
- 5** Fears over the Islamic State's influence should not justify draconian counter-terrorism strategies such as brutal military crackdowns and the abuse of human rights and due process.

Summary

The emergence of the Islamic State is the most significant development in Islamist extremism since the 9/11 attacks. It now controls significant portions of Iraq and Syria and has divided the global jihadist movement into two, offering a credible – and divisive – alternative to al-Qaeda. With its plethora of radical Islamist groups, Africa must consider the potential impact of this on the continent. There are genuine concerns that the Islamic State's thousands of African fighters, with access to the group's considerable war chest, will return home to inflame existing conflict. Reports indicate this has already happened in Libya. Africa should be worried, but it's important not to overstate the threat. African governments must be careful not to use the spectre of the Islamic State to justify populist counter-terrorism measures that have failed in the past.

THE ISLAMIC STATE began life after the United States (US) invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a predominantly Sunni jihadist group opposed to the US occupation. Known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and led by firebrand cleric Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, it was the driving force behind an insurgency that left tens of thousands dead. Its influence was eventually curtailed by the Awakening movement in 2008, when other Sunni militias allied with the government and American forces in Iraq against AQI. However, AQI regained momentum after the withdrawal of US troops in 2011.

The relationship between AQI and al-Qaeda proper was always tense. Osama bin Laden and Zarqawi didn't like each other personally,¹ and al-Qaeda's leadership team was uncomfortable with AQI's indiscriminate attacks on fellow Muslims, fearing that it would erode public support for al-Qaeda.² In 2006, Zarqawi was killed in a US airstrike and, under new leadership, the group changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

Rise of the Islamic State

It was only in 2010 that current leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took over the organisation. Baghdadi grew up near

Baghdad and claims to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. He has been crucial in rebuilding the organisation and prioritising its *Dawa* (missionary) activities, which seek to complement the group's harsh exterior with effective social services, such as providing food, education and healthcare. His tenure has also ushered in an era of unprecedented financial prosperity for the group, which is now the richest terrorist organisation in the world thanks largely to its control

as Caliph. Not only is this an existential threat to the sovereignty of the Iraqi and Syrian governments, but it is also a challenge to al-Qaeda for leadership of the global jihadist movement. Al-Qaeda has long sought to establish a global Caliphate, but so far the Islamic State has come closest to making this a reality, both by unilaterally declaring the existence of the Caliphate – a move strongly opposed by al-Qaeda – and by occupying significant swathes of territory.

Reports suggest that some residents in Islamic State areas welcome the stability imposed by the group

over oil fields, banks and tax collection in areas under its control.³

Baghdadi also spearheaded the group's expansion into neighbouring Syria, first under the banner of the al-Nusra Front, led by one of Baghdadi's top lieutenants. But when the Nusra Front began to assert its independence in 2013, Baghdadi took a more direct approach. He expanded ISI itself into Syria, creating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Shams/the Levant (ISIS, or ISIL). ISIS and Nusra battled for leadership of the Islamist rebel movement in Syria, and for the official endorsement as al-Qaeda's representative in Syria.

By February 2014, al-Qaeda had formally disavowed⁴ any links with ISIS, partly because of its proclivity for extreme violence and its brutal rule over areas under its control. ISIS, however, had won the territory battle. Energised by the arrival of thousands of foreign fighters, ISIS controls large sections of Syria and, in June 2014, extended its control to parts of northern Iraq in daring raids on key cities including Mosul and Tikrit.

It was also in June 2014 that ISIS changed its name yet again, this time to the Islamic State, and declared the return of the Caliphate, with Baghdadi

Life in territories under Islamic State control is characterised by a fundamentalist application of Islamic law which forbids activities such as drinking, smoking, gambling, board games, non-Islamic music and movies, and prohibits women from wearing revealing clothing. Punishments for transgression include lashings, amputation and crucifixion.⁵ This is accompanied, however, by the creation of a reliable judicial authority, attempts to lower the price of essentials such as bread, and the provision of basic services such as refuse collection and electricity. Reports suggest that some residents in Islamic State areas welcome the stability imposed by the group.⁶

Not all residents are welcome, however, with minority groups such as Shia Muslims and Christians particularly threatened.⁷ Many have already fled, while those who remain are subject to discrimination and persecution. A telling example is the ultimatum delivered to Mosul's Christians shortly after the city fell to the Islamic State, which threatened them with death unless they converted to Islam or paid *jizya* (a special tax on non-Muslims).⁸ Another is the siege of Sinjar Mountain, where Islamic State fighters trapped tens of thousands of

JUNE
2014

ISIS CHANGES ITS NAME
YET AGAIN, THIS TIME TO
THE ISLAMIC STATE

the minority Yazidi community (prompting US airstrikes against Islamic State positions).⁹

Global ambitions

The ambition of the Islamic State is by no means limited to Iraq and Syria and its latest name change reflects this. By dropping the reference to specific countries, the organisation embraced internationalism. 'The legality of all emirates, groups, states and organisations becomes null by the expansion of the Caliph's authority and the arrival of its troops to their areas,' said spokesman Abu Mohamed al-Adhani.¹⁰ The establishment of the Caliphate is similarly a statement of intent to expand even further, demanding (in theory, at least) allegiance from all Muslims no matter where they are, and promising to assert the Caliph's leadership over the entire *Ummah* (community of Muslims).¹¹ It is also a serious threat to al-Qaeda's leadership of the global jihadist movement, and could prove to be a potent recruiting tool.

Several weeks after Mosul was seized, a map emerged on social media purporting

More realistically, the Islamic State is actively seeking to co-opt or ally with Islamist groups across the world, and has been successful in obtaining *bayah* (a formal pledge of allegiance) from jihadists as far afield as Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan, as well as several expressions of support from various African groups. It must be noted that *bayah* cannot be pledged from or to an organisation – it is a bond of subservience linking individuals. Therefore it is possible that certain individuals within a group can pledge *bayah* without binding the group as a whole.¹³ Usually, however, it indicates a political alliance between groups.

The Islamic State has also allegedly been successful in obtaining support from various states in the region, in the context of its opposition to the Syrian government. In particular, Turkey initially allowed ISIS militants to use Turkish towns near the Syrian border to regroup and resupply, in a bid to weaken the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.¹⁴ Other reports suggest that Saudi Arabia may have funded ISIS in a bid to counter the influence of Shia Muslims in the region.¹⁵

The ambition of the Islamic State is by no means limited to Iraq and Syria and its latest name change reflects this

to show the Islamic State's five-year expansion plan.¹² Although its origin remains uncertain, the map was shared enthusiastically by Islamic State members and supporters on social media, and shows the whole Middle East as well as significant parts of Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa under the Islamic State banner. It appears to be more of a wish-list than a realistic projection, but its scale is immense. In Africa, the entire top half of the continent is shown to be part of the Islamic State.

Africa's vulnerability

The prevalence of radical Islamist groups within Africa makes the continent particularly vulnerable to new threats driven by the rise of the Islamic State. There are plenty of existing fault lines on the continent for the Islamic State to exploit, and plenty of radical Islamist groups that know how to exploit them. If the Islamic State does spread into Africa, it will be by cooperating with or co-opting these groups. This vulnerability is not just about the possibility of more and more



THE PREVALENCE OF RADICAL ISLAMIST GROUPS WITHIN AFRICA MAKE THE CONTINENT PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO NEW THREATS DRIVEN BY THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

serious terrorist attacks, but extends to fears that the Islamic State might recreate its model of occupying territory and providing government-like services to under-privileged citizens. In addition, the influence of the Islamic State's global jihadist narrative, the success of its operations in Iraq and Syria and its sharing of experiences and tactics online may inspire African groups to copy its approach.

In West Africa, Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad – popularly known as Boko Haram – has destabilised much

sustained military offensive from the African Union Mission in Somalia, which comprises 22 126 troops drawn from six African countries. Although al-Shabaab has been forced out of key strongholds such as Mogadishu and Kismayo, the group continues to occupy much of south and central Somalia, where it has established rudimentary governance systems (and is often able to provide more services than government). Al-Shabaab also seeks to impose Sharia law on Somalia, and has formally partnered with al-Qaeda. Its influence is

The success of its operations in Iraq and Syria and its sharing of experiences and tactics online may inspire African groups to copy its approach

of north-east Nigeria and is spreading its operations into Cameroon. In the first half of 2014 alone, the group had killed at least 2 053 civilians, in hundreds of separate attacks.¹⁶ It seeks to impose Islamic law on Nigeria and to counter the perceived moral degradation caused by Western culture, which is deemed to have a corrupting influence on Islam.

Repeated military crackdowns (involving serious human rights abuses and significant civilian casualties) have failed to contain the group. In fact, the opposite is true – over the last five years, Boko Haram has gone from strength to strength and is on the verge of turning its insurgency into an occupation force.¹⁷ At the end of August 2014, Boko Haram occupied several key towns in northern Nigeria and had declared that the occupied territory was part of an 'Islamic Caliphate'.¹⁸

In East Africa, Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin (popularly known as al-Shabaab) remains in charge of significant portions of Somalia. This is despite a

not limited to Somalia, however. A series of attacks against Kenya (most notably the siege of Nairobi's Westgate Mall) have forced Kenya to adopt a sweeping new counter-terrorism policy that primarily targets ethnic Somalis living in Kenya.¹⁹

The situation is even more dangerous in North Africa. Here, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – the best-known Islamist group in the region, which has its roots in opposition to the Algerian government – has seen its influence eroded by a series of like-minded organisations, most notably Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in Egypt; Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia; Ansar al-Sharia Libya; Ansar al-Din in Mali; the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), with its roots in Mali; and Algerian-born Mokhtar Belmokhtar's Masked Battalion.

AQIM, Ansar al-Din and MUJAO together controlled much of northern Mali in 2012 before being forced out by the French intervention. The French remain active in this region: to combat the general threat from Islamist groups, France recently authorised Operation Barkhane, a counter-terrorism force of 3 000 soldiers

AUGUST
2014

ANSAR AL-SHARIA LIBYA ANNOUNCES THE OCCUPATION OF BENGHAZI, AND DECLARES THE CREATION OF AN 'ISLAMIC EMIRATE' THERE

spread across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.²⁰

Both Central and Southern Africa are currently considerably less vulnerable. Southern Africa's relatively small Muslim population, coupled with the region's generally more stable governments, mean there is little space in which they can prosper. And, to date, Islamist groups have struggled to find a foothold in Central Africa (with the possible exception of Cameroon and Chad). Although there is an ongoing conflict in the Central African Republic that is often characterised as being Muslim versus Christian, the motivations of the mostly Muslim Séléka rebels appear to be more political than religious. Certainly, Séléka did not seek to align itself with the global jihadist movement. However, it's important to note that there are some jihadist organisations operating in Chad, and there's always the possibility that Boko Haram's Cameroonian recruits could splinter from the group to form a Central African jihadist organisation.

Pledge of allegiance

The rise of the Islamic State as an alternative to al-Qaeda for leadership of the global jihadist movement presents jihadist groups all over the world with a dilemma, to which they have responded in different ways. Some have re-affirmed

as Ansar Jerusalem). ABM, founded in the wake of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, is active in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, and has long expressed admiration for Baghdadi's ideology.²¹

Although the group has yet to officially pledge *bayah* (allegiance) to Baghdadi, in early July 2014 it apparently rebranded its social media presence, changing the names of its Twitter and Facebook pages to 'The Islamic State'. There is some debate, however, over the veracity of these accounts. The lack of a more official confirmation means that its position is likely still undecided (admittedly, the group may have been distracted by a major offensive against it by the Egyptian military, which is thought to have weakened its capacity).

A more official endorsement came from Sheikh Abdullah Othman al-Assimi, a senior leader of AQIM. In a video, he unequivocally expressed support for the Islamic State, telling fellow Muslims that 'we have seen justice in the ISIS approach and they are among the most obedient of God's people and the most dedicated to the prophet'.²² Assimi was speaking for himself, however, or at most for his faction with AQIM, because shortly afterwards the group released an official statement re-affirming support for

There is always the possibility that Boko Haram's Cameroonian recruits could splinter from the group to form a Central African jihadist organisation

their commitment to al-Qaeda proper; some have opted to express support for the Islamic State; and still others have carefully refrained from making a decision either way.

This is equally true within Africa.

Allegedly in the Islamic State's camp is Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis (ABM, also known

Ayman al-Zawahiri and al-Qaeda.²³ These mixed messages have fuelled rumours of a split within the organisation – or perhaps reflect AQIM's non-centralised organisational structure: it is a coalition of semi-autonomous battalions.

A similarly fractured response came from Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia. Spokesperson



THE ISLAMIC STATE IS ESTIMATED TO BE THE RICHEST TERRORIST ORGANISATION

Seifeddine Rais told supporters to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State's Baghdadi in a sermon in early July 2014. By mid-July 2014, however, group leader Abu Iyad al-Tunisi appeared to contradict this, appealing instead for reconciliation between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.²⁴

One group that appears to have close ties to the Islamic State is Ansar al-Sharia Libya. This has, however, not yet been formalised, as evidenced by the social media campaign orchestrated by Islamic State members to pressure Ansar al-Sharia to join the Caliphate.²⁵ Nonetheless, Ansar al-Sharia is already employing Islamic State rhetoric and strategy in its operations.

In early August 2014, the group announced the occupation of Benghazi, and declared the creation of an 'Islamic Emirate' there – a move which has unmistakable echoes of the Islamic State declared in Iraq and Syria. In fact, the links are more direct: research indicates that the Islamic State ordered home its fighters of Libyan origin to assist Ansar al-Sharia Libya, and it was shortly after they returned that the group was able to take Benghazi.

al-Shabaab, initially maintained a public silence on the issue, although Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau did make a point of praising *both* al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Islamic State leader Baghdadi in a recent video.²⁶ However, al-Shabaab has since made its position clear, reaffirming its commitment to al-Qaeda after the assassination of its leader Ahmed Abdi Godane. Boko Haram, meanwhile, seems to be leaning in the other direction. Its leader, Abubakar Shekau, declared in August 2014 that territory under Boko Haram's control formed part of 'an Islamic Caliphate' and no longer constituted part of Nigeria. It's not certain, however, whether this was intended to indicate an alliance with or support for the Islamic State.²⁷

Practical concerns

For African governments, most notably Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, the most immediate concern is the potential impact of thousands of well-trained, battle-hardened fighters choosing to return, or being ordered home after stints with the Islamic State or other jihadist groups in Syria.

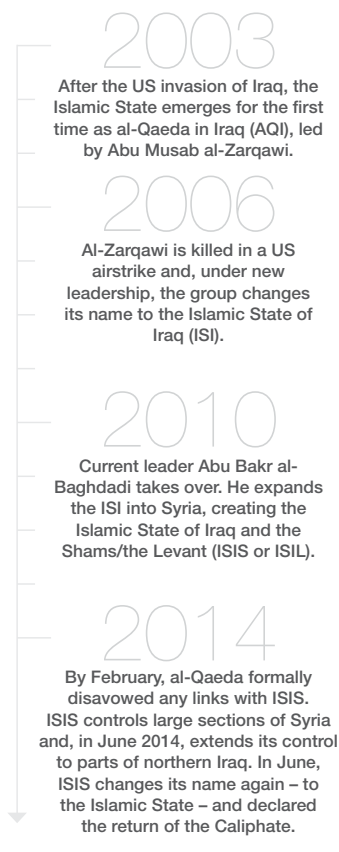
Should Ansar al-Sharia Libya opt to join the Caliphate, this will greatly expand the footprint of the Islamic State to three countries over two continents

Should Ansar al-Sharia Libya opt to join the Caliphate, this will greatly expand the footprint of the Islamic State to three countries over two continents. This could provide a foundation from which to launch a concerted assault on other parts of the Sahel region – with the rest of Libya and Mali being particularly vulnerable – or from which to facilitate alliances with the likes of AQIM and MUJAO.

Africa's two most active jihadist groups, Nigeria's Boko Haram and Somalia's

Although it is difficult to determine precise numbers, it is estimated that there are 200 to 800 Algerian fighters,²⁸ 600 to 1 000 Libyans,²⁹ 1 000 to 3 000 Moroccans³⁰ and 1 000 to 3 000 Tunisians who went to fight in Syria.³¹ As the largest, best-armed and best-funded opposition group, the Islamic State has attracted the largest percentage of the African fighters. It's also important to recognise the role of the Islamic State in expanding the jihadist

KEY DATES IN THE EVOLUTION OF ISIS



presence in Syria, creating the space for many of these foreigners and offering combat training and experience.

Morocco has already warned of a 'serious terror threat' to the country itself emerging from 'the increasing numbers of Moroccans belonging to organisations in Syria and Iraq'. Adding fuel to this particular fire are videos circulating on social media of Moroccan

home and assist Ansar al-Sharia Libya in its battle for Benghazi. Although it is unclear how the fighters returned to eastern Libya, it was shortly after this decision was reached that Ansar al-Sharia Libya gained the upper hand, eventually declaring an Islamic Emirate in Benghazi.³⁵

Another practical concern is that the Islamic State could become a source

Pledges of allegiances or expressions of support for al-Qaeda or the Islamic State do not necessarily make the subsidiary organisations subservient

Islamic State fighters showing off their weapons and promising to overthrow King Mohamed VI.³²

Morocco is right to be concerned. The potential of returning jihadists to incite or inflame local situations is well established. One illustrative example is the role played by Tuareg fighters returning to Mali from Libya in late 2011. The influx of arms, weapons and training they brought with them contributed to the success of the Tuareg-led rebellion, which precipitated the multiple political crises from which Mali is yet to recover.³³

Another example is the influence that returning jihadists have had (from fighting with al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan) in spreading Islamist extremism around the continent. Somalia's al-Shabaab, in particular, benefited from scores of experienced, well-trained men returning from Afghanistan to its ranks.³⁴

Already, there has been one concrete example of Islamic State fighters returning to Africa and having a dramatic impact. On 22 July 2014, the Islamic State decided that all the Libyans fighting under its banner should return

of funding for Islamist groups in Africa. Estimates suggest that the Islamic State is the richest terrorist organisation in the world,³⁶ with assets in excess of US\$2 billion. A substantial portion of this includes cash looted from banks in occupied territories and the value of captured high-tech military supplies, but the Islamic State also produces plenty of revenue of its own. A feature of its occupations in Iraq and Syria is the protection of revenue-generating infrastructure such as power stations and oil fields. Oil is particularly lucrative. Sold on the black market, it can bring in as much as US\$3 million a day.³⁷

It is important to note, however, that these figures may be misleading. The group's running costs are considerable and would have risen greatly since it started attempting to actually govern. It is also unclear how much of its wealth is liquid and able to be easily funnelled into other organisations. Moreover, there seems to be no shortage of cash within major African terrorist organisations, which often fund their activities through involvement in organised crime (such as drug-smuggling, people-smuggling, piracy and kidnappings).

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE

200 TO 800

ALGERIAN FIGHTERS,

600 TO 1 000

LIBYANS,

1 000 TO 3 000

MOROCCANS AND

1 000 TO 3 000

TUNISIANS

WHO WENT TO FIGHT IN SYRIA

Ideological leanings

One important caveat in all this is that pledges of allegiances or expressions of support for al-Qaeda or the Islamic State do not necessarily make the subsidiary organisations subservient. A good example of this is AQIM. Despite using the al-Qaeda name, it is an independent organisation that is autonomous from al-Qaeda proper. Like other al-Qaeda cells, it accepts general directives and guidelines from al-Qaeda's central command, but retains high levels of independence.

However, groups that do choose to support the Islamic State are demonstrating, at the very least, a tacit acceptance of the Islamic State's ideology. While similar in many ways to that of al-Qaeda, it also differs in several key respects.

The group's propensity for extreme violence was one of the main reasons why al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri disowned the Islamic State earlier this year

Most significant is the Islamic State's demonstrated propensity for extreme violence against perceived enemies – extreme even in the already violent context of radical Islamist groups. This was one of the main reasons why al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri eventually disowned the Islamic State earlier this year.³⁸

Zawahiri was concerned, and with good reason, that the Islamic State's tactics might alienate potential supporters. Particularly contentious is the Islamic State's hard-line approach to *takfir* (when one Muslim declares another Muslim to be an infidel or heretic). The Islamic State has used this doctrine to justify killing other Sunni Muslims in territories under its control. Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, advocates for more restraint in the application of *takfir*.³⁹

Of course, many radical Islamist groups in Africa are no strangers to extreme violence themselves. But as al-Qaeda's (relatively) moderating influence declines and the Islamic State's more extreme influence gains in popularity, Africa might expect to see more frequent and more sensational terrorist attacks, as well as harsher penalties against perceived transgressors in areas under the control of African Islamist groups. African groups will also have taken note of the worldwide publicity generated recently by the taped beheading by the Islamic State of two American journalists.

Another significant ideological factor is the pull of the Caliphate, a term loaded with deep religious connotations and used to describe historical Islamic empires. This was a propaganda masterstroke, which taps into a rich

vein of Islamic history and has already paid off in the form of a sharp increase in the number of foreign fighters joining Islamic State ranks since the Caliphate was declared in June 2014.⁴⁰ Other organisations cannot ignore this development and may see support for the Islamic State and its Caliphate as a useful recruiting and fund-raising tool.

In this context, Boko Haram's declaration of an Islamic Caliphate is interesting. As yet it's unclear whether this is intended to form part of the Islamic State's Caliphate or whether it is meant as a separate (and therefore rival) institution. Either way, it seems clear that Boko Haram was inspired by what the Islamic State has achieved with its Caliphate already.

The idea of a Caliphate also creates, in theory at least, a transnational

community that transcends national borders and supersedes secular governments. This could well have implications for how groups seek to control and protect territory, encouraging the acquisition of smaller territories that may fall under the global Islamic State (Benghazi is potentially an example of this in action), using religious affiliation rather than territorial contiguity to bind citizens together. It might also encourage groups to evolve from employing guerrilla warfare tactics alone to a more traditional occupation of territory. This represents a grave threat to the sovereignty of nation states in Africa.

Containing the threat

Previously, some African governments have used the threat of terrorism to justify heavy-handed crackdowns, increased military spending and gross violations of human rights. This approach repeatedly backfires – as witnessed by the resilience of Boko Haram, which is stronger than ever despite a series of Nigerian military offensives. In this context, it is vital for states to remain focussed on effective counter-terrorism strategies rather than draconian or populist measures, and to ensure that the spectre of Islamic State brutality is not used to legitimise a similarly brutal state response.

It's not just about resorting to military tactics. Counter-terrorism responses that curtail basic human rights by denying freedom of religion, ignoring due process and rule of law and engaging in ethnic profiling may occasionally enjoy limited initial success, but these measures usually exacerbate the problem in the long term. The same applies to counter-terrorism responses that further narrow political interests through limiting political debate and circumscribing freedom of association and expression.⁴¹ The Open Society Justice Initiative notes:

Too often, in the name of counterterrorism, security forces forget

that human rights violations such as detainee abuse, denial of fair trial guarantees, extrajudicial killings and unlawful renditions, create instability by undermining the rule of law and alienating affected populations. In short, unlawful tactics ... do little to reduce terrorist violence. To the contrary, they may well make the situation worse.⁴²

Research conducted by the ISS supports this. In a survey of Islamist militants in Kenya, 65% claimed that they joined radical Islamist groups because of injustices at the hands of Kenyan security forces, specifically referring to 'collective punishment'. In other words, heavy-handed counter-terrorism tactics became a powerful recruiting tool for Islamist groups in the country.⁴³

Instead, governments seeking to contain the Islamist State threat should pursue a criminal justice-based approach within their own legal framework. Not only does respect for rule of law distinguish legitimate actors from terrorists, but it's simply good strategy – preventing further radicalisation and exposing the criminal, rather than political, nature of terrorist groups.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The rise of the Islamic State is changing the internal structure of the international jihadist movement. In providing a viable alternative to al-Qaeda, the Islamic State has split the movement and is forcing radical Islamist groups to take sides.

Radical Islamist groups in Africa are not immune to this development and are carefully weighing up their options. Already, however, the influence of the Islamic State is making itself felt on the continent. The major concern is the effect that returning Islamic State fighters could have on their home countries. Thousands of Africans have joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and could return home

with training, battle experience as well as a commitment to the concept of the Caliphate and its expansion.

The potential impact of this should not be underestimated.

It is no coincidence that Benghazi was declared an Islamic Emirate shortly after the Islamic State's Libyan fighters were told to go home and help Ansar al-Sharia Libya. Generally, if returning fighters are able to bring some of the Islamic State's enormous wealth and resources with them, they could completely change the dynamics of local conflicts.

The spectre of the Islamic State exporting its particularly extreme ideology to Africa is also concerning. In this, however, both the Islamic State and the African groups that choose to support it must be careful, as each society will likely have a different threshold of what it considers to be acceptable political violence – too much violence could alienate local populations. A more attractive element of the Islamic State's ideology may be its declaration of the Caliphate, which could prove to be a potent propaganda tool.

Ultimately, however, it should be remembered that the rise of the Islamic State does not represent a completely new threat to Africa – rather, its potential impact will be in exacerbating existing tensions and conflicts. There is no suggestion that the Islamic State will expand alone into Africa. Instead, it will seek to ally with or co-opt similarly-minded organisations in Africa.

This distinction has important ramifications for any discussions on how to pre-empt or combat the Islamic State threat. Authorities must be careful to remember that many of the main drivers of terrorism in Africa remain local. The Islamic State may be transnational in nature, but combating its spread will also require long-term domestic solutions. In this context, authorities

must be careful not to let fears over the Islamic State derail effective counter-terrorism responses.

Notes

- 1 MA Weaver, The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, *The Atlantic*, 1 July 2006, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/.
- 2 Council on Foreign Relations, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, 18 August 2014, www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state-iraq-greater-syria/p14811.
- 3 T McCoy, ISIS just stole \$425 million, Iraqi governor says, and became the 'world's richest terrorist group', *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/06/12/isis-just-stole-425-million-and-became-the-worlds-richest-terrorist-group/.
- 4 L Sly, Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq, *The Washington Post*, 3 February 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1_story.html.
- 5 C Cooper, The ISIS Caliphate's Frightening First Month, *The Daily Beast*, 29 July 2014, www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/29/putting-the-isis-caliphate-in-focus.html.
- 6 C Lister, ISIS a fanatical force -- with a weakness, CNN, 17 July 2014 edition.cnn.com/2014/06/16/opinion/lister-isis-iraq/.
- 7 J Berlinger, Who are the religious and ethnic groups under threat from ISIS?, CNN, 9 August 2014, edition.cnn.com/2014/08/08/world/meast/iraq-ethnic-groups-under-threat-isis/.
- 8 I Khan, Iraq Christians get Islamic State's warning, Al Jazeera, 19 July 2014, www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/iraq-christians-told-convert-face-death-2014718111040982432.html.
- 9 AY Zilin, The War between ISIS and al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2014.
- 10 Sunni rebels declare new 'Islamic caliphate', Al Jazeera, www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/isl-declares-new-islamic-caliphate-201462917326669749.html.
- 11 This is the Promise of Allah, Al Hayat Media Centre, June 2014, https://ia902505.us.archive.org/28/items/poa_25984/EN.pdf.
- 12 J Hall, The ISIS map of the world, *The Daily Mail*, 30 June 2014, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2674736/ISIS-militants-declare-formation-caliphate-Syria-Iraq-demand-Muslims-world-swear-allegiance.html.

- 13 AY Zilin p3, The War between ISIS and al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2014.
- 14 A Faiola and S Mekhennet, In Turkey, a late crackdown on Islamist fighters, *The Washington Post*, 12 August 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/world/how-turkey-became-the-shopping-mall-for-the-islamic-state/2014/08/12/5eff70bf-a38a-4334-9aa9-ae3fc1714c4b_story.html.
- 15 P Cockburn, Iraq crisis: How Saudi Arabia helped Isis take over the north of the country, *The Independent*, 13 July 2014, www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/iraq-crisis-how-saudi-arabia-helped-isis-take-over-the-north-of-the-country-9602312.html.
- 16 Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Boko Haram Kills 2,053 Civilians in 6 Months, 15 July 2014, www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/15/nigeria-boko-haram-kills-2053-civilians-6-months.
- 17 S Allison, In Nigeria, Boko Haram follows in the footsteps of the Islamic State, *The Daily Maverick*, 14 August 2014, www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-08-14-analysis-in-nigeria-boko-haram-follows-in-the-footsteps-of-iraqs-islamic-state/#_U_ovq_m1bHY.
- 18 A Abubakar, Nigerian town seized by Boko Haram 'part of Islamic caliphate': leader, AFP, 24 August 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/boko-haram-leader-proclaims-islamic-caliphate-nigeria-town-133230029.html>.
- 19 S Allison, Kenyan blasts prove that collective punishment is still not counterterrorism, *The Daily Maverick*, 5 May 2014, www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-05-05-analysis-kenyan-blasts-prove-that-collective-punishment-is-still-not-counter-terrorism/.
- 20 S Allison, New French force rides the winds of change in the Sahel, *The Daily Maverick*, 16 July 2014, www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-07-16-analysis-new-french-force-rides-the-winds-of-change-in-the-sahel/.
- 21 B Daragahi, Sinai jihadi group emerges at forefront of Egypt violence, *The Financial Times*, 31 January 2014, www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/b5ad40d0-8a7b-11e3-9c29-00144feab7de.html#axzz399yW7hJ.
- 22 H Yess, Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb backs ISIS, *Al-Monitor*, 2 July 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/07/aiqm-declaration-support-isis-syria-maghreb.html.
- 23 W Ramzi, ISIS caliphate splits AQIM, *Magharebia*, 18 July 2014, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/07/18/feature-01.
- 24 T Joscelyn, Ansar al Sharia Tunisia leader says gains in Iraq should be cause for jihadist reconciliation, *Long War Journal*, 14 June 2014, www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/06/ansar_al_sharia_tuni_8.php.
- 25 M Lahcen, ISIS woos Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, *Magharebia*, 31 June 2014 http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/07/31/feature-01.
- 26 Boko Haram claims Nigeria attacks and supports Iraqi militants, France24, 13 June 2014, www.france24.com/en/20140713-boko-haram-nigeria-shekau-isis-qaeda-malala/.
- 27 J Thomas, Shabaab names new emir, reaffirms allegiance to al Qaeda, *The Long War Journal*, 6 September 2014, www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/shabaab_names_new_em.php#ixzz3CzRd4Fac. S Allison, 'We don't believe in Nigeria': Boko Haram declares an Islamic Caliphate, *The Daily Maverick*, 25 August 2014, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-08-25-we-dont-believe-in-nigeria-boko-haram-declares-an-islamic-caliphate/#.VAHfm_ldXwg.
- 28 R Barrett, Foreign Fighters in Syria, TSG Report, June 2014, <http://soufangroup.com/foreign-fighters-in-syria>. See also W Ramzi, Algeria cracks down on Syria recruiting networks, *Magharebia*, 24 March 2013, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/04/24/feature-01.
- 29 C Evers, Going to fight and die: African fighters in the Syrian Civil War, Consultancy Africa Intelligence, 28 May 2014, www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1686:going-to-fight-and-die-african-fighters-in-the-syrian-civil-war&catid=60:conflict-terrorism-discussion-papers&Itemid=265.
- 30 M Hashim, Iraq and Syria: who are the foreign fighters?, BBC, 3 September 2014, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29043331.
- 31 A Maher, Syria conflict: Why did my Tunisian son join the rebels?, BBC, 15 May 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22529019?print=true. See also Report: Tunisia sends most jihadists to Syria, *Magharebia*, 2 September 2014, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/newsbriefs/general/2014/09/02/newsbrief-03.
- 32 A El Yaakoubi, Morocco goes on high alert over terror threats, Reuters, 11 July 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/07/11/uk-morocco-security-idUKKBN0FG1AQ20140711>.
- 33 A Nossiter, Qaddafi's Weapons, Taken by Old Allies, Reinvent an Insurgent Army in Mali, *The New York Times*, 5 February 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/world/africa/tuaregs-use-qaddafis-arms-for-rebellion-in-mali.html?pagewanted=all&r=0.
- 34 S Raghavan, Foreign fighters gain influence in Somalia's Islamist al-Shabab militia, *The Washington Post*, 8 June 2010, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/07/AR2010060704667.html.
- 35 S Allison, Hello Libya and welcome to the Islamic Emirate of Benghazi, *ISS Today*, www.issafrica.org/iss-today/think-again-goodbye-libya-and-welcome-to-the-islamic-emirate-of-benghazi.
- 36 M Chulov, How an arrest in Iraq revealed Isis's \$2bn jihadist network, *The Guardian*, 15 June 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/15/iraq-isis-arrest-jihadists-wealth-power.
- 37 K Johnson, The Islamic State is the Newest Petrostate, *Foreign Policy*, 28 June 2014, www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/07/28/baghdadis_hillbillies_isis_iraq_syria_oil_terrorism_islamic_state.
- 38 M Tran, Who are Isis? A terror group too extreme even for al-Qaeda, *The Guardian*, 11 June 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/11/isis-too-extreme-al-qaeda-terror-jihad.
- 39 AY Zelin, Al-Qaeda Disaffiliates with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4 February 2014, www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-disaffiliates-with-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham.
- 40 AS Ali, Foreign fighters flock to ISIS, Al-Monitor, 14 July 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/07/syrian-caliphate-attracts-fighters.html.
- 41 International Commission of Jurists, Assessing Damage, Urging Action: Report of the Eminent Jurists Panel on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights, 2009 p15.
- 42 J Horowitz, Counterterrorism and Human Rights Abuses in Kenya and Uganda, Open Society Justice Initiative, 2013.
- 43 A Botha, Radicalisation to commit terrorism from a political socialisation perspective in Kenya and Uganda, PhD thesis, University of the Free State, 2014. A Botha, *Radicalisation in Kenya: Recruitment to al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council*, Paper 265, Institute for Security Studies, September 2014.
- 44 J Ford, African counter-terrorism legal frameworks a decade after 2001, Monograph 177, Institute for Security Studies, 2011.

If you would like to subscribe to ISS publications, complete the form below and return it to the ISS with a cheque, or a postal/money order for the correct amount, made payable to the Institute for Security Studies (marked not transferable). You may also deposit your payment into the following bank account, quoting the reference: PUBSPAY + your surname. If you would like to subscribe to the SA Crime Quarterly only, please quote the reference SACQ + your surname.

ISS bank details:

FNB, Brooklyn, Branch Code: 251345

Account number: 62447764201

Swift code: FIRNZAJJXXX

Kindly fax, email or mail the subscription form and proof of payment to:

ISS Publication Subscriptions, PO Box 1787, Brooklyn Square, 0075, Pretoria, South Africa

ISS contact details: (Tel) +27 12 346 9500, (Fax) +27 12 460 0998, Email: pubs@issafrica.org

Website: www.issafrica.org

PERSONAL DETAILS

Title Surname Initials

Organisation

Position

Postal Address

..... Postal Code Country

Tel Fax Email

Please note that the African Security Review (ASR) is now published by Taylor & Francis. Kindly refer to the Taylor & Francis website www.informaworld.com/rasr, subscription inquiries can be forwarded to Helen White (Helen.White@tandf.co.uk). For orders in sub-Saharan Africa, contact Unisa Press, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003, South Africa. (Tel) +27 12 429 3449; Email: journalsubs@unisa.ac.za

PUBLICATIONS	SOUTH AFRICA	AFRICAN COUNTRIES*	INTERNATIONAL
ISS Monographs (Approx. 4 per year)	R130	US\$ 40	US\$ 50
ISS Papers (Approx. 10 per year)	R150	US\$ 45	US\$ 55
SA Crime Quarterly (4 issues per year)	R115	US\$ 30	US\$ 40
Comprehensive subscription (Monographs, Papers and SA Crime Quarterly)	R550	US\$ 130	US\$ 150

SUBSCRIPTIONS	INDICATE COST
ISS Monographs only	
ISS Papers only	
SA Crime Quarterly only	
Comprehensive subscription	
TOTAL	

The ISS is an African organisation that aims to enhance human security by providing independent and authoritative research, expert policy analysis, training and technical assistance.

* Angola; Botswana; Burundi; Congo-Brazzaville; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Gabon; Kenya; Lesotho; Madagascar; Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Reunion; Rwanda; Seychelles; Swaziland; Tanzania; Uganda; Zambia; Zimbabwe (formerly African Postal Union countries).

About the author

Simon Allison is a senior reporter for the *Daily Maverick*, a South Africa-based digital publication, and a consultant with the Institute for Security Studies. He specialises in African news and analysis with emphasis on conflict, security and counter-terrorism. He holds degrees from Rhodes University and the School of Oriental and African Studies, and has lived and worked across Africa and the Middle East.

About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies is an African organisation that aims to enhance human security on the continent. It does independent and authoritative research, provides expert policy analysis and advice, and delivers practical training and technical assistance.

Acknowledgements

The ISS is grateful for support from the following members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

ISS Pretoria

Block C, Brooklyn Court
361 Veale Street
New Muckleneuk
Pretoria, South Africa
Tel: +27 12 346 9500
Fax: +27 12 460 0998
pretoria@issafrica.org

ISS Addis Ababa

5th Floor, Get House
Building, Africa Avenue
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251 11 515 6320
Fax: +251 11 515 6449
addisababa@issafrica.org

ISS Dakar

4th Floor, Immeuble Atryum
Route de Ouakam
Dakar, Senegal
Tel: +221 33 860 3304/42
Fax: +221 33 860 3343
dakar@issafrica.org

ISS Nairobi

Braeside Gardens
off Muthangari Road
Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 266 7208
Fax: +254 20 386 1639
nairobi@issafrica.org

www.issafrica.org