

A Review of Jihadist Groups Active on the African Continent

The following surveys the main jihadist groups currently active on the African continent. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is the most significant of these groups, and is active primarily in North Africa and specifically Algeria, where it originated. AQIM has been active for a number of years, and has recently expanded its influence into West African nations such as Niger, Mali and Nigeria. The bulk of its activity is terrorist attacks against regime forces and the kidnapping of foreign citizens in exchange for ransom.

In 2012, the stability of Mali, a Muslim-majority nation in West Africa, was upset when a group of Malian Army officers staged a coup, assisted by the Tuareg, nomadic tribes of Berber provenance who reside in a vast territory that spans five modern African countries. When the rebels seized power, they dispersed parliament. In April, the Tuareg declared the Azawad region of northern Mali to be an independent territory. Mali's central government has refused to recognize this.

Unlike Mali, neighboring Nigeria is torn between Muslims, who inhabit the north of the country, and Christians, who inhabit its south. In recent years, a violent Muslim group calling itself "Boko Haram" ["Western education is forbidden"] has come to prominence, especially since 2011, when it perpetrated multiple terrorist attacks against state institutions and Christian citizens.

Description of the Main Jihadist Groups in Africa

A study published on the research Web site of the Al-Jazeera network revealed that, since taking root in the Sahel, and especially since the Muslim takeover of the Azawad Region, AQIM has come to include the groups described below.¹

¹<http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2012/6/27/2012627103614635734salafia.pdf>; <http://studies.aljazeera.net/reports/2012/04/201241712346233617.htm>; <http://www.alakhbar.info/24983-0--FB-F5F-C-FBC0-FC--F-0-F--FB2.html> (all in Arabic).

The Sahel and North Africa

Katibat Al-Mulathamini [Masked Battalion], headed by Khaled Abou Al-Abbas (aka Mokhtar Belmokhtar, aka Belaouer). Belaouer, born in 1972, is of Algerian origin. Katibat Al-Mulathamini is the longest-standing jihadist group in this area, and comprises many Azawadis; it began to take shape when Belaouer settled in the Azawad desert at the end of 2004 and, in effect, has become the military core on which Belaouer has centered himself. From the outset, it has been Belaouer's policy to spread Salafi-jihadist ideology among the Tuareq and Arab tribes. Initially, Belaouer avoided attacking the Malian Army, limiting his battalion to reprisals only. Eventually, however, the group began to initiate violence: Katibat Al-Mulathamini was the first to conduct a terrorist attack in Mauritania, in June 2007. Katibat Al-Mulathamini has also been responsible for the abduction of many Westerners.

All along, Belaouer was exploiting the rampant corruption in the Malian administration to weave ties with senior policymakers and military officers, and using marriage – his and the marriages of his deputies – to infiltrate Azawadi society. In this way, he laid the foundations for the Emirate of the Sahara, which is affiliated with AQIM. Tens of residents of Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria, Morocco, Algeria and other African countries have gravitated to the Emirate, which has become a rearguard base for AQIM (which originated and is still based in Algeria). This has ensured both a steady flow of armaments into Algeria from the black market in Africa, especially the Sahara, and the recruitment and training of mujahideen. With the establishment of AQIM in late 2006, the Emirate of the Sahara expanded its activities to the countries of the region. Nevertheless, and despite his protracted efforts in Katibat Al-Mulathamini, Belaouer's contacts with AQIM's Emir Abdul-Malik Droukdel were cold and even tense, in part because Droukdel believed that Belaouer was working for himself more than he was for AQIM. Droukdel's suspicions led him to favor his friend Abdel-Hamid Abu Zayd, whom he charged with leading a new brigade in the Sahara: Katibat Tariq ibn Ziyad. Conflict grew between Belaouer and Abu Zayd, leading Droukdel to depose Belaouer in 2007 and appoint a new emir of the Emirate of the Sahara: Yahya Djouadi (aka Abu Ammar). Belaouer was thus "demoted" to (only) commanding Katibat Al-Mulathamini. Although Abu Ammar succeeded in organizing the emirate, he was later removed from his post

as emir because of his tendency to side with Abu Zayd. The next new emir of the Emirate of the Sahara was an Algerian, Nabil Abu Alqamah.

Belaouer did not remain idle, however. In the meantime, he also built the core of a group active in Mauritania, which goes by the name Ansar Allah Al-Murabitun fi Bilad Al-Shinqit. It is this group that attacked the Israeli Embassy in Mauritania in February 2008. During October 2012, reports appeared that Belaouer had been deposed from the leadership of Katibat Al-Mulathamin. Belaouer has denied this, as well as new that Ktaibat Al-Mulathamin had seceded from AQIM.²

Katibat Tariq ibn Ziyad [Tariq ibn Ziyad Battalion], headed by Abdul Hamid Abu Zayd, whose real name is Abdul Hamid Al-Sufi. Abu Zayd is considered one of AQIM's "hawks"; unsurprisingly, Katibat Tariq ibn Ziyad is considered the most radical of its component groups. The battalion has committed multiple assassinations and abductions; most of its "income" is from kidnapping hostages. Many of its members are from the Sahel and North Africa.

Sariya Al-Furqan [Al-Furqan Squadron], headed by the Algerian Jamal Akasha, aka Yahya Abu Al-Hamam. Composed mainly of mujahideen from Mauritania and Mali, Sariya Al-Furqan is active in the northwestern area of Azawad – more precisely, in the northern reaches of Timbuktu. Sariya Al-Furqan is said to have perpetrated multiple abductions and engaged in countless skirmishes with the Mauritanian Army. One of its operatives committed a suicide attack against the French Embassy in Mauritania in August 2009.

All three of the above-named groups – Katibat Al-Mulathamin, Katibat Tariq ibn Ziyad, and Sariya Al-Furqan – are subsumed under the Emirate of the Sahara, which covers the southern portion of the area where AQIM is active. As noted, the Emirate of the Sahara is currently headed by Nabil Abu Alqamah. In November 2012, reports emerged that a new emir had been appointed for Sariya Al-Furqan, in place of Yahya Abu Al-Hamam, who had been appointed emir of the Sahara Emirate. The new emir of Sariya Al-Furqan is reputedly Muhammad Al-Amin Walad Al-Hassan Walad Al-Hadhrami, aka Abdallah Al-Shanqiti. It should be noted that it was

² <http://www.ani.mr/?menuLink=9bf31c7ff062936a96d3c8bd1f8f2ff3&idNews=19655>;
<http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/politique/312237.html> (both in Arabic).

necessary to appoint a new emir for the Emirate of the Sahara, because Nabil Abu Alqama died in a car accident several months ago in Mali.³

Additional groups are active in the Sahel. Two of the ones most active in northern Mali – The Tawhid and Jihad Group in West Africa and Ansar Al-Din – have adopted the military tactics of Al-Qaeda.

The Tawhid and Jihad Group in West Africa, which is headed by Hamada Ould Muhammad Kheirou (aka Abu Ali, aka Sultan Ould Baddy), who was also the group's expert on Islamic law and a member of its Shura Council, and Hamada Ould Al-Khair (aka Abu Qaqaa). The group burst on the scene in October 2011 with the abduction of three Western hostages from a refugee camp in southern Algeria. Kheirou is an Arab; he seceded from AQIM after the latter refused to establish an organization composed solely of Arabs from Azawad, as he had demanded (apparently under the influence of the group Sariya Al-Ansar, which is composed primarily of Tuareg tribesmen). Abu Qaqaa also seceded from AQIM. Together, the two lured tens of young Arabs from the ranks of Al-Qaeda. Nevertheless, the Tawhid and Jihad Group in West Africa coordinates its efforts with Al-Qaeda. For example, the group fought with AQIM to overtake the larger cities in Azawad, and was charged with capturing Gao, where most of its members are from.

Ansar Al-Din was established in November 2011 and is headed by a native Tuareg, Iyad Agh Ghali (aka Abou El-Fadl). Although Ansar Al-Din has ostensibly distanced itself from Al-Qaeda, those who are wise to the mysterious ways of the Sahel surmise that it is (still) affiliated with it.⁴ Both Abou El-Fadl and his deputy, Sheikh Osa, have a history of having fought the Israel Defense Forces in southern Lebanon in the 1980s, as part of a force sent there at that time by Muammar

³http://www.sahamedias.net/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%86%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B7%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9_a17091.html (Arabic).

⁴ For example, just as the Taliban in Afghanistan coordinate their activities with Al-Qaeda there, so, too does Ansar Al-Din in Mali coordinate its activities with AQIM.

Qadhafi. During the early 1990s, Abou El-Fadl headed a faction that initially rebelled against Mali's government. However, in 1992, it reached an agreement with the government and helped it to quell the rebellion; Abou El-Fadl was even appointed a consul to Saudi Arabia. During the first decade of the 21st century, Abou El-Fadl joined Jama'at Al-Da'wa wa Al-Tabligh, a group that concentrates on dawa [missionary work]. He subsequently adopted Salafi-jihadist ideology. After the demise of Qadhafi's regime in Libya – which in essence had impeded Tuareg efforts to rebel against the Malian government – Abou El-Fadl returned to Azawad and positioned himself in the Oghergar Mountain Range, gathering around him hundreds of Tuareg fighters. He declared the establishment of Ansar Al-Din, and set as its goal the implementation of Islamic law [shari'a] and restoration of Islam's dignity in Azawad and throughout Mali. Ansar Al-Din's first armed activity was a strike against an army base in Mali in January 2012. Most of the mujahideen of Ansar Al-Din are from the Afoghas Tribes, and are based in Kidal, which is in those tribes' territory. Led by AQIM's Sariya Al-Furqan, Ansar Al-Din has also infiltrated Timbuktu. Yahya Abu Al-Hamam, the emir of Sariya Al-Furqan, was rewarded for capturing Timbuktu with its governorship.

Sariya Al-Ansar [Al-Ansar Squadron], which is headed by Malek Abu Abd Al-Karim Al-Tariqi. Most of the mujahideen of this squadron are Tuareg from Nigeria or Mali. Sariya Al-Ansar has carried out multiple actions in Niger and northern Mali, including attacks on Mali's army.

The following is a brief review of the important jihadist leaders active in Northern and West Africa.

1. **Abd Al-Malik Droukdal, aka Abu Musab Abdul Wadud**, b. 1971, Algeria. Filled a command post in the Algerian Salafist group for dawa and struggle, Al-Jama'ah Al-Salafiyah lil-Da'wah wal-Qital. Also headed a council of respected elders when this group was incorporated into AQIM. In 2004, he was appointed leader of AQIM.

2. **Musa Abu Dawud**, a former senior member of the Algerian Salafist group Al-Jama'ah Al-Salafiyah lil-Da'wah wal-Qital; he participated in multiple attacks on the Algerian regime. In early 2012, AQIM Emir Abdul Wadud appointed him to replace Yahya Abu Ammar as the head of

the southern area of AQIM's sphere of influence. However, he has yet to officially fill this post because the security situation in Algeria has prevented him from reaching the area.

3. **Nabil Abu Alqamah**, whose real name is Nabil Al-Makhloufi. Also a senior member of the Algerian Salafist group Al-Jama'ah Al-Salafiyah lil-Da'wah wal-Qital, and of Katibat Al-Mulathamin. In early 2012, he was chosen to be the deputy commander of AQIM's southern region. It is thought that he is currently the acting emir in this arena, because of Musa Abu Dawud's inability to get there.

4. **Yahya Djouadi Abu Ammar**, b. early 1970s. A former senior member of the Algerian Salafist group Al-Jama'ah Al-Salafiyah lil-Da'wah wal-Qital, Abu Ammar once headed the Emirate of the Sahara (instead of Belaouer); he was deposed in 2011, when security made it impossible for him to be involved in developments in the region.

5. **Abdel-Hamid Abu Zayd**, b. 1957, Algeria. A senior member of Al-Jama'ah Al-Salafiyah lil-Da'wah wal-Qital and currently the commander of Katibat Tariq ibn Ziyad. His real name is Ghadie Mouhammad.

6. **Yahya Abu Al-Hamam**, b. 1978, Algeria. Formerly a member of Al-Jama'ah Al-Salafiyah lil-Da'wah wal-Qital, he now heads Sariya Al-Furqan.

7. **Mokhtar Belmokhtar (aka Belaouer)**, b. 1972, Algeria. His real name is Khaled Abou Al-Abbas. In 1991, Belaouer fought in Afghanistan. When he returned to Algeria, his experience in Afghanistan landed him command posts in the armed Islamist group GIA and later in Al-Jama'ah Al-Salafiyah lil-Da'wah wal-Qital (GSPC).

8. **Malek Abu Ad Al-Karim Al-Tariqi**, b. 1982, a Tuareg from northern Mali whose real name is Ahmad Agh Amameh. Al-Tariqi heads Sariya Al-Ansar, which was initially composed primarily of Tuareg tribesmen. However, during the past year, civilians of varying origin have been allowed to join its ranks.

Eastern and Central Africa

Two jihadist groups are dominant in East and Central Africa, as detailed below.

Jama'at Ansar Al-Muslimeen fi Bilad Al-Sudan [Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa], aka "Ansaru".⁵ The emir of this group is Abu Yusuf Al-Ansari. Established because of the increasing injustice and violence perpetrated against Muslims in Nigeria by Christians and their supporters, the group's aim is to help Muslims, especially in Black Africa; its motto is "Jihad for Allah". Following specious reports of a falling-out with Boku Haram, the spokesman for Ansaru clarified that its goal was complementary to that of Boku Haram: that is, to ensure the establishment of an Islamic state [in Nigeria] and destroy the enemies of Islam – in this instance, Nigeria's security forces and Christian population. The following relevant news item was published in English, in February 2012, on <http://allafrica.com/stories/201202010138.html>.

⁵ <http://aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=19907> ;<http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?486012-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%8F%D9%83%D9%85%D9%90%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A3%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9> (both in Arabic).

Nigeria: Boko Haram - Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges

1 Februar 2012. Indications have emerged that an ideological feud within the rank and file of the Boko Haram sect may have led to a breakaway faction. The new outfit calls itself 'Ansaru.'

In a statement circulated in Kano, Ansaru gave its full name as "Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan," meaning Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa.

Its motto is "Jihad Fi Sabilillah," meaning it is fighting and sacrificing for Allah's cause. The statement was signed by one Abu Usamata Al'Ansari, who claimed to be its leader.

Ansaru expressed displeasure with Boko Haram's style of operations, which it described as inhuman to the Muslim Ummah. It vowed to restore dignity and sanity to "the lost dignity of Muslims in black Africa" and to bring back the dignity of Islam in Nigeria and the Sokoto Caliphate, founded by Othman Dan Fodio in 1804, which spread across Niger Republic, Cameroon and some other West African countries.

Ansaru's logo shows the Qur'an, with a gun on both sides. Attached to the guns are black flags with the inscription, "There is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger".

The statement said: "For the first time, we are glad to announce to the public the formation of this group that has genuine basis. We will have dispassionate look into everything, to encourage what is good and see to its spread and to discourage evil and try to eliminate it."

Boko Haram:⁶ An armed Nigerian Islamist group that is working to implement Islamic law [shari'a] throughout Nigeria. The meaning of the group's name in Hausa is "Western culture/education – is forbidden". Its full and official name is Jamatul Ahlis Sunnah lid Dawa wal Jihad. Most of its members were students who abandoned their studies and gathered in northeastern Nigeria, near the border with Niger. Apparently, the group was established as early as 1995 at one of Nigeria's universities; it became more established in 2002 when Mohammed Yusuf became its leader. Initially, the group did not support violence, but in late 2003 began armed activity against government institutions. Between 2003 and July 2009, when it declared comprehensive rebellion against the Nigerian regime, Boko Haram all but confined its attacks to police stations. In July 2009, however, led by Muhammad Yusuf, Boko Haram waged a bloody five-day battle against Nigerian security forces in retaliation for the latter's

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http://www.marefa.org/index.php/%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%83%D9%88_%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85 ;<http://studies.aljazeera.net/reports/2012/02/2012220115428600424.htm> (both in Arabic).

ruinous campaign to prevent Boku Haram from amassing any further weapons or power. Muhammad Yusuf himself, and hundreds of his followers, were killed in this battle. Since 2009, Boku Haram has increased and refined its attacks. Instead of one-off attacks, it has begun to systematically attack government institutions, security forces, and the Christian community, using explosive devices, guerilla warfare, assassinations, and suicide attacks. Boku Haram's stated aim is to overthrow the secular regime in Nigeria. Beginning in July 2009 and up to January 2012, the group had committed some 160 terrorist attacks, killing more than 1,000 people. Although its attacks have to date been centered in northern Nigeria, many fear that it will also infiltrate southern Nigeria, where the majority of the population is Christian. Boku Haram maintains an 18-member Shura Council, currently led by the group's Emir Abu Bakr Shekau. Shekau has two deputies. In addition, in any province in which the group has a presence, it has appointed an emir for the province. Many of Boku Haram's rank and file are poor Nigerian youths who have received a religious education [only], and young people from the neighboring countries of Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Boku Haram is funded by wealthy businessmen – and by bank robbery.