THE Search for a Caliphate
EXPANSIONIST AGENDA OF RADICAL ISLAM FROM THE SAHEL TO THE HORN OF AFRICA
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INTRODUCTION

This report traces the clear expansionist agenda of radical Islam, covering the entire Sahel from Senegal to the horn of Africa. We also cover the growing terror activities in Southern Africa, particularly Mozambique. Since Nigeria is hit hardest by insurgency, more attention would be given to the activities of terrorist groups in the country.

Within the last two decades, there has been an upsurge in terror activities linked to radical Islamic expansionist groups on the African continent, particularly those led by groups subscribing to the Salafi Jihadi doctrine.

Often referred to as jihadist-Salafism, the Salafi Jihadi is a blend of religious and political ideologies based on the Islamist call for a global caliphate¹, endorsement of jihad (holy war against infidels) and a return to puritanical or true Islam². Historically, the ideological framework for Salafism was laid by the Egyptian Islamic scholar, Sayyid Qutb, in the 1960s.

Just recently, Nigeria’s Communications and Digital Economy Minister, Dr Isa Pantami, was in the crosshair of public criticism over his Salafist leaning views, with incendiary sermons of him praising Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Unfortunately, these expansionist views enjoy some sympathy across parts of Africa. In the Sahel, jihadist insurgent groups using Salafism as the basis for their expansionist agenda have grown in number and popularity among locals in the region. They appeal to the people of the region by providing pseudo-governments, security, an accessible justice system and providing certain amenities. These become attractive to locals, who see themselves far removed from the governments at the centre or in urban cities.

With its growing popularity, the Salafi Jihadi movement has found a foothold on the continent with at least 27 extremist groups historically subscribing to its radical jihadist ideologies and 16 currently active. Below is a list curated by SB Morgen Intelligence outlining active Salafist-jihadist groups in Africa, their operation bases and their years of activities.

List of Salafist-jihadist Groups in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>COUNTRIES OF OPERATION</th>
<th>YEARS ACTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM, formerly the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, GSPC)</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>1998-Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/N</td>
<td>GROUP</td>
<td>COUNTRIES OF OPERATION</td>
<td>YEARS ACTIVE</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Al Takfir wal al-Hijrah</td>
<td>Egypt (Sinai Peninsula)</td>
<td>2011–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Al-Shabaab</td>
<td>Somalia, Kenya, Yemen</td>
<td>2006–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ansar al-Sharia</td>
<td>Egypt, Mali</td>
<td>2012–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ansar al-Sharia (Tunisia)</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>2011–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ansar Bait al-Maqdis</td>
<td>Gaza Strip, Egypt (Sinai Peninsula)</td>
<td>2012–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ansaru</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2012–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ansar al-Sunna</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>2015–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Boko Haram</td>
<td>Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Mali</td>
<td>2003–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jaish al-Islam (a.k.a. Tawhid and Jihad Brigades)</td>
<td>Gaza Strip, Egypt (Sinai Peninsula)</td>
<td>2005–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>1990 - Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM)</td>
<td>Morocco, Western Europe</td>
<td>1998–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Muhammad Jamal Network (MJN)</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2011–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mujahideen Shura Council</td>
<td>Gaza Strip, Egypt (Sinai Peninsula)</td>
<td>2011–Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Salafia Jihadia (As-Sirat al Moustaquim)</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>1995–Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The chart below is a risk assessment, measuring the level of insurgency threat, showing which countries from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa are more prone to active or low-level insurgency threats and those with brewing terrorist cells or serving as transit zones.

Why are the Sahel and the Horn of Africa Attractive for Radical Islamist Groups?


The Sahel has a semi-arid climate, spanning 3,053,200 km² area and is known for its trade routes, which predate colonial boundaries, enabling the movements of goods and people between the Mediterranean, North Atlantic Ocean and West Africa. A number of reasons account for why the Sahel is an attractive zone for the expansionist movement for radical Islam.

Firstly, the Sahel is attractive to these groups because the region’s predominant religion for centuries has been Islam, as the then Umayyads and Abbasids Empires pushed the boundaries of Islam through to the west of the Arabian Peninsula. The religion and the culture of the region have since then been fused in such a way that...

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4 http://ponce.sdsu.edu/sahel_081015.html
it creates a ready field for Islamic extremist group with jihadi orientations to create illegitimate governments, providing basic social amenities for residents of the region such as healthcare, education, food and water etc.

Secondly, Islam's influence on the region has come from two main sources - the Middle East and South Asia. For this reason, it is not uncharacteristic to identify two ideological streams: securalist and Islamist. The sharp rise in the radicalisation of the region signifies the obvious influence of the latter ideological stream. Members of the Islamist persuasion lean heavily towards theocratic expansionist ideals, which has since received active or passive support from people in the region, as evidenced by the growing number of willing young men supportive to jihadi activities, acting as foot-soldiers for groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP7.

Thirdly, the region's large swaths of ungoverned land that stretches for miles gives ample space for terrorist cells to bud unhindered. With technology, criminal and terrorist enterprises can use satellite phones to communicate and trucks to easily traverse the desert area even going as far Tamanrasset through Mokhtar, both in Algeria, from Kidal, Mali, in just under 34 hr (1,068.1 km). For this reason, fighting cross-border jihadism becomes even more difficult.

Fourthly, security presence through some of the travel routes in the region are little to non-existent given how massive the expanse of desert land is, making the region a soft-spot for extremist groups to navigate through cross-border towns to carry out their operations. A good example would be the recent seven-minute footage released by Boko Haram showing a mid-air explosion of the Nigerian Alpha jet flying above its fighters. Even though the claim by Boko Haram to have downed the jet has been shown to be fake, it raises worrying concerns that the terror group could very easily have access to the crash site before the Nigerian military.

Given the lack of security presence in large swaths of land across the region, weak government, negative effects of climate change, poverty etc., it is without wonder why Jihadist groups find the area as a foothold for their expansionist ideology. These conditions are not unfamiliar, as they are quite similar to what we have seen in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, countries in which terror groups like Al-Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS run amok.

In 2012, jihadists seized northern Mali but were ousted by French and Chadian forces. The crisis in northern Mali spilled over to the centre, parts of Niger and Burkina Faso, making the crisis in the

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9 https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/war-sahel
Sahel a pressing humanitarian crisis. Even with increased military presence in these areas, in 2020 more than 6000 people were killed in terrorist attacks.

Military interventions have been in place since 2012 to combat the rapid rise in radical Islamist groups in the region. The UN Peacekeeping Mission, which sent troops to stabilise northern Mali following the 2012 seizure, brought in active counter-terrorism partners like the US and France. France leads the “Operation Barkhane”, a counter and anti-insurgent operation led against Islamist groups in the Sahel. The operation has about 5,000 French forces, headquartered in N’Djamena, the capital of Chad.

Five countries in the Sahel Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have together formed what is referred to as the G5 Sahel, developing policies and security framework to break the hold of insurgent groups in their territories.

The United States is not left out in all these, boasting of about 1,200 troops in West Africa with 800 of them based in Niger\textsuperscript{10}. The US also successfully closed a $110 million drone base in Niger\textsuperscript{11},

\textsuperscript{10}https://breakingdefense.com/2020/05/us-military-support-in-sahel-allies-at-work/
\textsuperscript{11}https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/19/world/africa/west-africa-special-operations-medevac.html
the Niger Air Base 201, near Agadez.

Although Senegal has not witnessed any major insurgency threats yet, the worry is that its 419km shared border with Mali could see a spillover of these groups as they seek refuge from active combat with French and G5 Sahel forces.

Unlike Senegal, the story is not the same for Nigeria, which has been strenuously battling radical Islamist insurgency for over a decade. The country ranks ninth from a list of the top 10 countries with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the world. By the end of 2018, a report written by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre put the figure of internally displaced persons in Nigeria at about 2.2 million people. The report indicates that in 2018 alone, 541,000 were displaced largely due to terror related activities.

Technically not a part of the Sahel, Cameroon ranks 13th on the 2020 Global Terrorism Index Report with 615 terror attacks from 2007 through 2019. The country faces a number of security challenges: insurgency in its far north region and secessionist conflict in its anglophone region. For this report, we have included Cameroon because the country is the second most targeted country after Nigeria in terms of attacks by Boko Haram.

The Horn of Africa:

The Horn of Africa, the easternmost projection of the continent comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Somaliland. However, terror activities in the region goes beyond the 1,882,757 km² of the region, going deep into East Africa. Lately, the presence of terrorist cells, active jihadist groups and attacks have been common in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and South Sudan.

Terror activities in the Horn of Africa draw significant inspiration from al-Shabaab in Somalia. Despite the growing foreign military presence in Djibouti, the spate of attacks on Somalia has not waned. However, the attacks have not been limited to Somalia alone, with periodic incursions and attacks on Kenya and Tanzania.

Ranked 14th in the 2020 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), the crackdown on terrorism in Egypt has steadily moved from the Sinai Peninsula to the capital, Cairo. On 28 September 2020, Egypt's security forces killed two suspected militants in Qalyubia governorate, in the Greater Cairo area. The Egyptian Ministry of Interior said in a statement that a shootout erupted when police raided a hideout in Al Qalg used by suspects planning terrorist attacks. Sharing a border with Sudan, ranked 26th on the 2020 GTI report, it is easy to see why such terror activities have continued
to spillover even down to South Sudan, which is now ranked 22nd.

There is also a link between the Cabo Delgado insurgency in Mozambique with East Africa. Even though Mozambique's crisis appears local, al-Shabaab has established links to Islamist militias in East Africa. Radical spiritual leaders there have assisted with the religious and even military training of youths in northern Mozambique.

Kenya and Ethiopia are not left out of this crisis. The 2020 GTI report placed Kenya and Ethiopia as 23rd and 28th respectively, an indication of the worsening presence of terrorist cells and sporadic attacks carried out by al-Shabaab.

The Horn's attractiveness to terror networks stems largely from its geographic contiguity with the Middle East. For instance, the distance between Yemen and Djibouti is a mere 762km. African terror groups looking to gain a foothold in various areas of operation look towards the Middle East for spiritual guidance as well as training and logistics. The short distance between both regions also affords large swathes of ungoverned spaces and countries with weak government presence (from Burundi to Yemen, Lebanon etc) which gives non-state actors a lot of legroom to operate.
As we see in the Sahel, continuous military engagement with terror groups has become the favourite solution for great powers. Currently, there are 13 different foreign militaries on the continent with France and the US leading the way. The proliferation of foreign military on the continent has raised serious objections from the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council, largely due to the inability to track the movement of weapons to and from these military bases. At last count, there were 7,000 US military personnel on a rotational deployment in Africa and close to 7,500 French troops. France has its largest military presence in the Sahel region, following its long colonial history with countries in the region such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

The US troops carry out joint operations with their African hosts against Islamic extremist groups in Uganda, South Sudan, Senegal, Niger, Gabon, Cameroon, Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Also, it continues to offer tactical and training support to at least 40 countries on the continent.

The chart below shows the distribution of military bases on the continent with 11 of them situated in the Horn of Africa.

The Search for a Caliphate: Expansionist Agenda of Radical Islam from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa
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Number of terrorist attacks in African countries between 2007 and 2019
Below is a table outlining the number of terrorist attacks on the continent arranged in order of their severity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Number of Attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>4382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>3060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data sources: ACLED, Media reports, SBM Intelligence
Al Qaeda and ISIS Litoral Movement

Over the past few days, Nigerians on the popular microblogging platform, Twitter, have been reacting to news that some of the deadliest terror groups in the world were moving southwards towards the country’s economic nerve.

This reaction followed some local media quotes of Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, the Commander of the United States (US) Special Operations Command, Africa (USSOCAF) about plans by terrorist groups al-Qaeda and ISIS to penetrate Southern Nigeria and other parts of West Africa.

According to the Sunday Tribune¹⁴, Mr Anderson said the US will continue to partner with Nigeria in sharing intelligence “We have engaged with Nigeria and continue to engage with them in intel sharing and in understanding what these violent extremists are doing.”.

“And that has been absolutely critical to their engagements up in the Borno state and into an emerging area of northwest Nigeria that we’re seeing al-Qaeda starting to make some inroads “So, this intelligence sharing is absolutely vital and we stay fully engaged with the government of Nigeria to provide them with an

¹⁴https://tribuneonlineeng.com/isis-al-qaeda-planning-to-penetrate-southern-nigeria-us-warns/amp/
understanding of what these terrorists are doing, what Boko Haram is doing, what ISIS-West Africa is doing, and how ISIS and al-Qaeda are looking to expand further south into the coastal areas”.

The media briefing shares similarities with a previous briefing made in August 2020, where Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, also said Al-Qaeda was making inroads into northwest Nigeria.

Although the USSOCAF commander’s statement on the threat posed by extremist groups in Nigeria is likely based on intelligence and assessment of these groups and trends, some of his warnings to a certain extent don't fit the-existing jihadists trajectory in the country.

However, Nigeria is not left alone in all these; with the Sahel region and indeed West Africa seeing increased terror-related activities, it is apparent that Mr Anderson's statement is likely informed by America's long fight against terrorism and an understanding of the global network of Islamic fundamentalists and terror groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda and Hizbullah.

In addition, the statement underscores America's interests in the region because since the last decade, Islamic fundamentalist groups directly linked to Al Qaeda and ISIS have cropped up in Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Chad and Niger.

15https://ng.usembassy.gov/tag/major-general-dagvin-e-m-anderson/
Following the territorial control by some terror groups in the region, a part of the expansionist agenda, it is becoming more apparent that the influence of the Al Qaeda-linked Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which had its strong hold from southern Algeria is now spreading to eastern Mauritania, northern Mali, northern Niger, and northern Chad.

Many of these groups engage in criminal activities to finance their operations and expansion. The Al Qaeda-affiliated Ansaru, notorious for the abduction of foreigners, has maintained a presence in Northwest Nigeria for years but the group went underground and maintained a low profile for some years before its reappearance in 2020. The group was designated in November 2013, by the United States Department of State alongside Boko Haram, as foreign terrorist organizations.

On January 17, 2020, Ansaru claimed responsibility for targeting the convoy of the Emir of Potiskum, Yobe State in Kaduna. This marked a resurgence and in response, the Nigerian police and military launched several ground and aerial operations targeting Ansaru camps.

In December 2020, the Abubakar Shekau-led Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the abduction of over 300 students from Government Science School Kankara in Katsina, corroborating earlier reports of Boko Haram “affiliate” and element presences in the complex web of insecurity ravaging the northwest.

Although Shekau’s claim has not been verified with security
analysts stating that it was rather a different armed group that was responsible for the kidnapping, the fractious nature of the North-West and parts of the North-Central with possibly tens of armed gangs carrying out attacks on travelers, schools and communities provides an opportunity for the Boko Haram factions to expand there, and for Ansaru to revive itself.

Months earlier in a video on June 15, 2020, Boko Haram sent a message to armed groups in the North West and North Central, which was one of the major indications of the group’s efforts to form alliances and sub-faction outside its traditional sphere of influence in the Northwest.

In July 2020 the Nigerian Air Force announced it had launched airstrike in the Maru area of Zamfara against an Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) camp, however, the area targeted is linked with the Ansaru group rather than ISWAP.

ISWAP had in October 2019, through ISIS newspaper - al-Naba claimed responsibility for an attack on Nigerian troops in Sokoto state.

Both Ansaru and ISWAP are connected with the spike in violence in the Northwest according to a report by the International Crisis Group. The Brussels based think tank stated that as security
deteriorated the region has steadily come under the renewed influence of jihadist groups making inroads and forging tighter relationships with aggrieved communities.
Nigeria: Are Jihadist groups moving to the south

Being the hardest hit by terrorism in the continent and listed as third in the Global Terrorism Index\textsuperscript{21} with over 22,441 deaths since 2001, we would focus our attention on reports of Jihadist expansionist plans to southern Nigeria.

There is growing concern\textsuperscript{22} over security in coastal areas of West Africa, as Jihadist groups spread\textsuperscript{23} their operations and activities in parts of Sahel particularly Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. An important question to address is why these groups would be interested in moving towards litoral areas. The answer is not far-fetched and appears to be two-pronged.

Firstly, there is an economic advantage to moving southward. Southern Nigeria is the epicentre of much of the country’s economic activities and where its major source of forex (oil) is located. Like Mozambique, key infrastructures around the production of oil are closer to coastal areas and this is likely a major motivation to move across the Niger river.

What this demonstrates, we believe, is that there are fewer economic activities in the Sahel due to issues of drought,
desertification, and security threat. Also, beyond sporadic kidnapping for ransom of locals in the region or forced taxation, there is no way for these groups to finance their activities. In other places where jihadist groups have built a financing network, they have laid claim to mineral deposits that they can easily trade for money. For example, Laremont & Gregorian note that these "terrorist-financing networks [have been] involved in the purchase and sale of diamonds in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Proceeds from the sale of these "blood diamonds" are reported to fund Hizbullah; the Afwaj al Muquwamah al Lubnaiyyah (AMAL), or Lebanese Resistance Detachment; and Al Qaeda operations"24. This is another reason we have seen an increase in attacks on gold mines in Zamfara state.

Secondly, in keeping with its theocratic and expansionist agenda to build an Islamic caliphate, there is a need for these jihadist groups to expand beyond their current location in the Sahel. By overwhelming the Nigerian military using guerilla tactics, these groups are hoping to establish terrorist cells in North West and North Central Nigeria strong enough to penetrate the southern geopolitical region of the country.

It is important to note that even though there is brewing concern

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around the movement of Islamic militant groups towards coastal areas, they have not made significant progress entering into the urban communities of Niger, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Nigeria. In Nigeria, for example, territorial areas formerly under the control of Boko Haram and ISWAP, like Marte, have been reclaimed and are now under the control of the Nigerian military. With constant attacks on border towns in the North-East and now the North-West of the country, it is unclear how long the already stretched military will be able to keep regained territories under its control.

This could also explain the concern with Southern Nigeria, during the briefing. The USSOCAF commander was reported to have stated that the US was sharing intelligence on what terror groups are doing, and how these groups are looking to expand further south into the littoral areas.
The disturbing revelation led to a wave of public outcry especially online over the threat to southern Nigeria. While concerns are legitimate and call for robust action from the government to detect and disrupt the threat.

So far, the farthest south that any of the three terrorist groups has operated in is Kogi State: in 2013, Ansaru claimed responsibility for an attack near the town of Okene on a military detachment heading to Mali for peacekeeping operations which killed two soldiers and five others; three years later, the leader of the organization, Usman Abubakar Umar who went by the nom de guerre Khalid al-Barnawi was arrested in Lokoja, the state capital.

In June 2014, Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility for two explosions in a fuel depot in Lagos which killed at least two people. His claims were corroborated by unnamed security analysts who noted that the first attack was the work of a female suicide bomber while the other was an improvised explosive device thrown over a fence. However, official accounts of the incident tag it as being caused by a gas canister explosion, raising suspicion that the true nature of the incident was suppressed.

The capacity of these groups to extend operations south of the River Niger will involve overcoming numerous obstacles.
and challenges particularly the cultural, historical, social and geographical difference between the terrain in the south and north.

On a historical note, the south has had fewer interactions with sects that subscribe to the Salafi-jihadi expansionist ideology, meaning that Muslims in the south of Nigeria would be considered more secularists than Islamists. Crucially, in the South, religion does not form the core of identity as it does in the North.

Culturally, much of the predominant ethnic groups in the south of the country lean towards Euro-American values in contrast to those of Middle Eastern and South Asian influence that is commonplace in the north.

Following several failed attempts to establish cattle ranches in the south of the country, and the growing allegations of kidnapping being carried out by people of Fulani herding communities, clashes with communities in the middle belt of the country and the rise of local vigilante groups, there is likely to be less receptive to groups who identify with an Islamist agenda as we see up north.

[https://ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/sahel-terrorism-risk-assessment.html]
On a geographical note, the southern part of Nigeria is primarily tropical with rainforest in sharp contrast to the north, which is primarily savannah and is being encroached upon by the Sahara. Terrorist groups in the north have long been able to take advantage of the terrain to carry out their operations. So far, it is yet to be seen, at least in countries where Islamist groups are prominent, whether these groups can operate successfully and hold camps in the rainforest.

These factors are strategic towards hindering or aiding the groups to gain local support and build an operational base. Nevertheless, the current deterioration of the security and economic resilience of the country needs to be addressed to ensure long term stability and security.
ABOUT SBM

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