

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assessing Misaligned Counterinsurgency Practice in Niger and Nigeria

Laura Berlingozzi^a and Ed Stoddard^{a,b}

^aSant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa; ^bUniversity of Portsmouth

*Contact: Laura Berlingozzi; laura.berlingozzi@santannapisa.it; @LauraBerlin5

Abstract

While representing a major military threat in Niger and Nigeria, the two branches of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP-Liptako Gourma and ISWAP-Lake Chad) have increasingly sought to win popular support (distinguishing themselves from other groups in the region, especially *Boko Haram*). Yet, despite some improvements in the recent past, both Niger's and Nigeria's different counterinsurgency practices have not been sufficiently adapted to (and therefore remain strategically misaligned vis-à-vis) ISWAP's more population-centric approach. Strategic rethinking and realignment of the still predominantly enemy-centric approaches of both states are essential so that ISWAP strategy can be countered in the long term.

Keywords: insurgency; counterinsurgency; ISWAP; Nigeria; Niger

In March 2019, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) militants operating in the Liptako-Gourma region on the borders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso started to claim attacks under the banner of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a previously different group (originally a splinter of *Jama'atu Ahl as-Sunnah li-Da'awati wal-Jihad*, JAS, also known as *Boko Haram*) operating across the Sahel, especially in the Lake Chad region (Postings 2019). While the two groups, the ISWAP-Greater Sahara branch and the ISWAP-Lake Chad branch, appear to be largely independent entities, relations between them are reportedly growing, and both have received support from the Islamic State (IS) 'core'.¹ Over time, they have evolved to present a serious military challenge to states in the region: both have had a series of successes against local militaries, killing large numbers of soldiers and raiding a string of bases (albeit at a lower level in the Liptako-Gourma region, given the more recent expansion there) (Abdullahi 2020).

Yet, more significant perhaps than their military actions, is the way both of these IS groups have come to represent a growing *political* threat (Hassan 2018; Anyadike 2019). In Niger and Nigeria, the two ISWAP groups have sought to generate broad appeal among local populations as an essential part of their strategy. While both groups are violent towards civilians who challenge them, the two have generally focused on winning popular support and concentrated attacks largely against the military (and traditional leaders and local government-aligned political elites).

Despite the similar challenge posed by both ISWAP groups in Niger and Nigeria, there has been little comparative analysis of the counterinsurgency (COIN) responses to them. Military responses to jihadist militancy in West Africa – as elsewhere – have traditionally been 'kinetic' and conventional (based on the aggressive application of the kind of force one might use against a state enemy) and often repressive towards the population. While such approaches are often thought to be counterproductive, they may suffice to a limited extent in the face of extremely violent groups such as *Boko Haram* who have meted terrible violence on civilians. They risk being *strategically* problematic, however, against groups that actively try to win over civilians.

Based on 50 interviews in Nigeria and Niger², this article examines the insurgency/counterinsurgency relationship between state forces and IS insurgents in Nigeria and Niger respectively, assessing how Nigerian and Nigerien counterinsurgency efforts measure up to these population-centric ISWAP insurgent approaches. It argues that both states' historic approaches are ill-suited to dealing with ISWAP's population-centric insurgency and that neither has significantly adapted their COIN strategies to the two ISWAPs' approaches. It thus explores the strategic

¹ While the designation of ISWAP in Niger as ISWAP-Liptako Gourma and ISWAP-Lake Chad has been adopted for clarity, the nature of the relations between the two ISWAPs will be discussed below.

² Interviews were carried out in Niamey and in Abuja during fieldwork from October 2019 until March 2020. A few interviews were done remotely via phone or online teleconferencing platforms.

misalignment between the population-focused insurgencies of ISWAP and the continued highly kinetic nature of counterinsurgency in the Sahel region.

The article is divided into three sections. The first discusses the question of population support in insurgency and counterinsurgency and that of strategic alignment between insurgency and counterinsurgency practice. It also discusses the methods employed. The second highlights the population-centric shift in insurgent tactics evidenced in the actions of both branches of ISWAP. The third examines counterinsurgency practices in Nigeria and Niger, respectively, in the context of this new ISWAP challenge. Some concluding remarks are presented in the final section.

Civilian populations in insurgency and counterinsurgency

The role of the population in armed rebellion is a key theme in much of the literature on insurgency/counterinsurgency (Taber 2002, 6; Kilcullen 2010, 7). There are several reasons for this. First, as insurgents are often materially disadvantaged vis-à-vis the state, some seek to rebalance this by stirring up a popular uprising. Second, the population is the primary resource base of many insurgencies; accessing the people makes life easier for insurgents who can, given enough time, draw recruits and material support (food, shelter, money) from among them – either directly or through ‘taxation’. Third, as Eli Berman *et al.* (2018, 9) argue, insurgent warfare is highly *information-centric* with (unlike interstate wars) the population often the most useful source of intelligence.

As Steven Metz (2011, 116) has noted, however, insurgents’ commitment to the *welfare* of the population varies considerably. He suggests that all potentially violent organisations (including insurgencies) can be seen as more or less “constituent-focused”, with Maoist-inspired groups, for example, keen on demonstrating their concern for the population’s welfare, while others, such as the post-2003 insurgency in Iraq, are more “organisation-focused” and less interested in appealing to the population. Indeed, groups in the latter category may be almost entirely extractive, stealing resources and offering little in return. Claire Metelits (2010, 4) similarly describes the difference between “coercive” insurgencies that solely extort local populations and “contractual” insurgencies that provide services in exchange for resources. It is important, however, to avoid too strong a distinction between ‘hearts-and-minds-winning’ constituent-focused/contractual, and more violent, group-focused, coercive forms of insurgency. Many insurgencies highlight their interest in the welfare of a population whilst still being highly coercive. Strategically, insurgents are, especially in the early-mid stages of an insurgency, primarily interested in population control rather than territorial control (even if the latter is their long-term goal) (Taber 2002, 6). While insurgents will increasingly attack state forces directly as they grow in power (as both ISWAPs do), the short term objective is not to hold territory, but rather to establish proto-orders that can extract resources from the population (more or

less coercively and with more or less offered in return). ISWAP has learned from the mistakes of others (*Boko Haram* and the Islamic State) who sought direct territorial control and were, as a result, defeated by opposing forces.³ For IS ‘provinces’ in Nigeria and Niger, for now, it is controlling the population that matters.⁴

Two approaches to counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency is a broad “umbrella term” used to capture a series of different actions that states take to weaken an insurgency (Kilcullen 2010, 1). In practice, there is no single COIN model but rather a series of different approaches, with counterinsurgency frequently divided between “population-” and “enemy-centric” variants (Kilcullen 2010, 9; Paul *et al.* 2016, 1022). Given that insurgents will often seek to win over, or at least control, the communities they are operating in, much counterinsurgency literature has focused on the importance of winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the population as a means of breaking this link. The “population-centric” understanding of counterinsurgency suggests that this is most successfully done by winning the population’s support through persuasion and the supply of public goods (first and foremost security and economic development). Ultimately, such a policy would leave the insurgents isolated from the population base and thus vulnerable. This approach focuses on the importance of complying with the rule of law and avoiding excessive force against civilians (Paul *et al.* 2016, 1022). It is not advocated for moral reasons alone, but also strategically because, in theory, it provides a more benign form of security than the militants offer and, all things being equal, it is more attractive (Kilcullen 2010, 4).

The opposite approach, “enemy-centric counterinsurgency”, sees “insurgency as much more akin to conventional warfare”, focusing on the defeat of the enemy (Paul *et al.* 2016, 1023). This prioritises regaining territorial control as an overarching objective rather than winning over the population. It is more aggressive, with the counterinsurgent using conventional force against the insurgents in an effort to destroy them, and intimidation of the population (including through violence/physical control/displacement) to force them to take the government’s side (Dixon 2012, 52). This carries risks, however. Violence by state forces can be counterproductive, fuelling the grievances that drive the insurgency (Kilcullen 2010, 4; Paul *et al.* 2016, 1028-9), as corroborated by a recent study that points out that 71 per cent of African respondents were driven towards extremist groups by perceived state abuses (UNDP 2017, 73).

Yet, just as insurgents are neither entirely constituent-focused nor entirely coercive, counterinsurgency is rarely either purely population-centric or enemy-centric (Paul *et al.* 2016).

³ Interview with Retired General, Nigerian Army, Abuja, October 2019.

⁴ Interview with UK diplomatic official, via Phone, November 2019.

States can target insurgents with force ('kill or capture'), or they can seek to induce their surrender and/or reintegration into society. Similarly, states can either physically control populations or they can seek to win support by providing security and improved governance. In practice, most counterinsurgencies incorporate a mix, with the enemy-centric model placing more emphasis on the former in both cases and the population-centric model on the latter. Even population-centric counterinsurgency is, as David Kilcullen (2010, 4, 154) notes, "inherently violent" involving the re-establishment of a political system of control by force.

An alignment issue

For a counterinsurgency to prevail, several factors are crucial. First, they need to understand the form of insurgency that the insurgents are seeking to establish and make sure that the state's COIN approach is tailored towards undermining its strengths (and certainly not adding to them). Second, if the population is the core of the insurgent strategy, it is necessary to establish a means of breaking the population-insurgent link (Paul *et al.* 2016, 1028; Kilcullen 2010, 8). Third, while the foregoing *can* be done through coercive means, approaches that seek to support and provide security for the population are more likely to be stable and less likely to risk exacerbating grievances or bolstering insurgent narratives (McFate and Jackson 2006, 14). Furthermore, success in this endeavour is *relative*: neither side needs to be perfect, they just need to be better than the other (Kilcullen 2010, 159). This means that counterproductive actions by the state can quickly make the insurgents' offer seem palatable to hard-pressed civilians in search of security.

ISWAP(s) and population-centric insurgency

This section explores the population-centric insurgency of ISWAP-Lake Chad and ISWAP-Liptako Gourma. It discusses the recent military trajectory of the two groups and then highlights the way they have sought to win support from the population. In both cases, militants have adopted a "constituent" or "contractual" basis of relations with the population, which they are then able to use as a resource base.

A tale of two ISWAPs

ISWAP-Lake Chad broke away from the original *Boko Haram* (JAS) in August 2016, retaining support from the Islamic State (Zenn 2020; ICG 2019, 5). From early on, ISWAP emphasised its distinctiveness from JAS by stressing how the then leader, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, was returning to the original focus of Mohammed Yusef (his father) against the Nigerian state,⁵ rather than the

⁵ Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

civilians. Despite leadership changes (Al-Hussaini 2020), the group appears to have retained this broadly pro-population stance.⁶

While ISWAP-LC kept a relatively low profile for most of 2016-17, the autumn of 2018 saw a substantial uptick in ISWAP attacks on military formations (Salkida 2019). This campaign took a considerable toll, and in 2019 the Nigerian Army started to withdraw troops to ‘supercamps’ – large military bases where forces could be concentrated and protected better. In practice, while the number of soldiers killed has declined, the move has ceded territory to ISWAP, at least temporarily.⁷ Although ISWAP does not fully control this territory, neither does the military, leaving space for ISWAP to embed itself among the population (Salkida 2019).

The situation is in some ways more perilous in Niger where the government faces *both* IS factions, ISWAP-Lake Chad, which operates in the southern Diffa region bordering Lake Chad in Nigeria, and ISWAP-Liptako Gourma (also known as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, ISGS), which expanded from the Gao area in Mali towards the tri-border region straddling Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Under the leadership of Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui, in March 2019, ISGS was officially integrated into ISWAP and has increasingly reinforced its operational capabilities and strength in the North Tillabéri region. While some authors (Postings 2019) argue that ISGS started to claim activities in the name of the *Wilayah* (province) of West Africa for propaganda aims, as a “branding issue rather than an actual merger” and that ISGS remains operationally independent from ISWAP, others have claimed that ISGS has links with ISWAP and that in some formal way is subordinate to the latter (ICG 2019).

As of October 2019, the Islamic State weekly newsletter, *Al-Naba*, started to refer to ISGS and ISWAP as one entity (ICG 2020). While there is minimal evidence of shared command and control structures on a tactical and operational level, recent attacks in Inates and Chinagodrar claimed by ISWAP and carried out in ISGS territory mimicked IS and ISWAP military tactics, deploying highly mobile and small armed groups equipped with light weapons and an infiltration unit of *inghimasi* (highly specialised guerrilla fighters), as well as employing suicide vehicles carrying improvised explosive devices.

ISWAP-Liptako Gourma and ISWAP-Lake Chad have reportedly established a logistical corridor from Tillabéri and Tahoua to Diffa towards Borno State via the Zamfara State, connecting Mali with Nigeria to smuggle arms, vehicles and gas.⁸ This not only indicates mastery of Nigerien territory, but also their intention to cooperate in exploiting the marginalisation and ethnic rivalries of

⁶ While abundant literature has focused on the origins of *Boko Haram* as either originating from locally grounded dynamics between religion and politics (Thurston 2018) or as the local manifestation of developments in global Salafism (Zenn 2020), this debate is outside the scope of the article. For details on the Salafi political theology and *Boko Haram* see Brigaglia (2015).

⁷ Interview with UK diplomatic official, via Phone, November 2019.

⁸ Interview with European diplomat, Niamey, January 2020.

the populations living in Nigerien-Nigerian borderlands. The control of borders and illicit trade within a hybrid regional order (Raineri and Strazzari 2015) is essential for understanding how ISWAP-Lake Chad has found fertile ground for expansion into Niger due to the historic ethno-linguistic continuity and economic relationships that exist between the communities across the long and fluid border.

‘Securing’ the population

There is a residual fear of ISWAP-Lake Chad, given its shared history with *Boko Haram*,⁹ and reports of ISWAP-Lake Chad violence towards citizens (ICG 2019, 17)¹⁰ portray the group as targeting communities that challenge them or work with the government, such as in a recent attack on civilians near Gubio in 2020 (Salkida 2020b). Yet, other reports suggest a more tolerant and less abusive relationship between ISWAP-Lake Chad and the (Muslim) civilian population, with the former offering protection both from JAS and unscrupulous state officials.¹¹ There are accounts, for example, of ISWAP-Lake Chad clashing with JAS-aligned fighters in southern Niger to rescue kidnapped women and stolen livestock.¹² Obi Anyadike (2019) has discussed how people who have left ISWAP-Lake Chad ‘territory’ receive calls from friends encouraging them to return, highlighting that, provided they pay taxes to the group, they will reportedly be able to live freely. As long as civilians abide by the rules, ISWAP-Lake Chad seems to present less of a threat than JAS and, at times, even than the military, who sometimes accuse civilians of colluding with insurgents (Mahmood and Ani 2018, 30). In its efforts to appeal to the local population after 2016, ISWAP has benefited from the previous abuses of JAS which, by 2013-14, had already forced many of those who would have had the capacity to resist ISWAP-Lake Chad to flee.

As Morten Bøås and Kevin Dunn (2017) have argued, armed insurgencies tend to emerge as alternative modes of governance, leveraging the population’s dissatisfaction with state governance to establish themselves. This has been the case in Niger, where ISWAP-Liptako Gourma has also sought to appeal to local communities, albeit with more violence towards some members of the population than ISWAP in the Lake Chad area. As a new insurgency, ISWAP-Liptako Gourma gained access to communities through violence and deterrence, threatening and punishing local authorities and traditional leaders who did not collaborate, before trying to get the backing of the local communities by offering services and taking advantage of good relations to gather intelligence and logistical support. In the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, some ISWAP combatants have their family in the

⁹ Interview with Nigerian think tank expert on ISWAP, Abuja, October 2019

¹⁰ There are likely others that are unreported.

¹¹ Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

¹² Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

Nigerien villages close to the borders, and regularly travel to the *brousse* (the bush) during the day and return to their villages at night¹³.

In vast areas of the Tillabéri region, above all at the border with Mali, ISWAP administers pockets of territory enforcing its rule. It started with the imposition of the *hijab* on women, and continued with the burning of the civil registry, the closing down of schools and the marriage of local women to fighters in order to further integrate with local communities.¹⁴ It collects a tax (*zakat*) from pastoralists, equivalent to one-fortieth of the herd (having lifted the imposition of state taxes) and resolves disputes through application of *sharia* law which has at times proven a more effective and impartial system than the existing ones. This has attracted the support of local communities,¹⁵ so that “instead of fleeing the area, most people prefer to remain there”.¹⁶ Also, granting access to forbidden items (weapons, motorbikes) and offering a monthly allowance is a way to appeal to marginalised youths, increasing their social status within the community (ICG 2018). Due to the security vacuum, locals’ trust in the state and security forces is very low, and they tend to support ISWAP-Liptako Gourma out of coercion as they have no choice if they want to survive physically, but also economically, as “*L’État ne s’engage pas avec les jeunes, c’est les djihadistes qui s’engagent*” [“The State is not committed towards young people, rather it is the jihadists who take responsibilities towards them”].¹⁷

Economic and gender dynamics

Both ISWAP groups have integrated themselves into the local economy. For example, in Lake Chad, ISWAP controls the fishing trade in and around the Lake, issuing permits and taxing catches and the sale of fish (Salkida 2020a). Similarly, the group controls the rice trade and the lucrative pepper trade, in addition to collecting taxes (GICS 2019, 12-3). ISWAP propaganda plays on these themes with videos showing an abundance of food available for those living in ISWAP areas (Islamic State 2018). Similarly, the group places few restrictions on herdsmen and has refrained from stealing animals from those operating in its areas, again applying taxes instead.¹⁸ As a means of sustaining the insurgency economically (in addition to kidnapping and receiving funds from IS), this activity is more strategic than the practice of looting carried out by JAS, which terrified communities.

It is nevertheless still coercive. Reports exist of traders being killed for not paying taxes to ISWAP-Lake Chad (Mahmood and Ani 2018, 28) and the wider population has little choice but to engage with ISWAP’s structures. If they do abide by the ISWAP’s rules, however, they are generally

¹⁴ Interview with local NGO officer, Niamey, November 2019.

¹⁵ Interview with humanitarian worker in Tillabéri, Niamey, November 2019.

¹⁶ Interview with UN officer, Niamey, February 2020.

¹⁷ Interview with convicted prisoner for terrorist acts, Kollo, Niger, February 2020.

¹⁸ Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

not targeted by the militants. While the government has shut down markets and restricted some forms of economic activity to deprive the militants of resources, ISWAP-Lake Chad encourages markets to function and takes a cut in the form of taxes. Unlike JAS, when in need of supplies, ISWAP-Lake Chad generally pays for food rather than just taking it, although civilians probably have little choice but to agree to sell it (Mahmood and Ani 2018, 29).

This (relatively) more relaxed approach extends to women who live in ISWAP-Lake Chad areas. In contrast to JAS, which could be incredibly abusive, ISWAP-Lake Chad is more accommodating to Muslim women (they continue to kidnap and enslave non-Muslim women and have killed female Muslim healthcare workers). This *generally* less harsh approach to women yields certain benefits. Women can move more easily around Borno state and are often sent as recruiters, including in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps.¹⁹ ISWAP also implements a less strict social code, and women are exonerated from doing hard labour.²⁰ Gender dynamics also play out at a psychological level for men. One interviewee described how proud Borno Kanuri men do not want to live on government handouts, thus returning to ISWAP areas where they can farm or fish restores their pride. The current situation for men in IDP camps leaves them feeling “emasculated” whereas ISWAP offers them an opportunity to feel “more powerful”.²¹

The situation is the same in the ISWAP-Liptako Gourma area, where women play an important role in, and on the peripheries of, the insurgency. Given prevailing gender norms, women, especially those in rural areas, have little agency over their lives. Nonetheless, they play fundamental supporting roles in the insurgency, providing shelter and food for their spouses and furnishing logistical support through intelligence gathering.²² They are in charge of the education of their children and are thus highly valuable for insurgents. Also, as combatants are integrated into the communities, women do not report the engagement of family or community members to the authorities, as they would be stigmatised and would face retaliation by ISWAP. Thus, in order to protect their families, especially their husband and children, and the community at large, women are unlikely to collaborate with state authorities. Indeed, some women, particularly the elderly, encourage men to participate in the insurgency, leveraging patriarchal constructs of toughness, the ability to provide for and protect the family, and strength and virility based on hegemonic masculinity.²³

In the cross-border area, the familiarisation of an increasing number of young people with the armed professions (*métier des armes*) (Debos 2013) has been a trend in the past two decades. Especially for nomadic populations, armed activities are rewarding in terms of income, but they are

¹⁹ Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

²⁰ Interview with Nigerian think tank expert on ISWAP, Abuja, October 2019.

²¹ Interview with Nigerian think tank expert on ISWAP, Abuja, October 2019.

²² Interview with women’s rights NGO official, Niamey, November 2019.

²³ Interview with NGO official, Niamey, November 2019.

also a source of socio-economic emancipation (ICG 2018). In this difficult context, financially supporting the household is associated with an increase in social status. The ability to provide for one's family is also likely to influence positively the possibility of getting married, as the required dowry is often unaffordable for unemployed youths (Raineri 2020).

Military-civilian dynamics and counterinsurgency in Nigeria and Niger

This section explores the counterinsurgency actions of the Nigerian and Nigerien governments. It documents the broadly conventional, enemy-centric (rather than population-centric) and territorially bound understanding of COIN in both states and highlights the impact on civilians. The latter parts discuss changes in Nigerian and Nigerien counterinsurgency postures in recent years (including modest improvements in Nigeria's human rights picture) but highlight how these are not attributable to adaptation in the face of ISWAP.

Two different models of enemy-centric COIN

Like many militaries, the Nigerian military has traditionally been geared towards conventional operations (Walker 2016, 188). This has translated into a broadly enemy-centric military approach to the *Boko Haram*/ISWAP crisis. As Akali Omeni (2020, 195) notes, the Army's "capstone doctrine and culture centres around [the] idea of planning and operationalizing for a traditional adversary against whom conventional capabilities can be maneuvered at scale and overwhelming firepower can be brought to bear". While officials highlight that there is no reason why Nigeria cannot adapt,²⁴ this culture of operations has been difficult to change. The same approach has been used since the beginning of the crisis. Omeni (2020, 191-192) describes how the response to *Boko Haram*'s first uprising – the Battle of Maiduguri in 2009 – was carried out in a highly kinetic way, crushing the initial rebellion in short order, but exacerbating it in the long term.

A conventional understanding of conflict (and victory) appears to be present at the political level. President Muhammadu Buhari has repeatedly stated that *Boko Haram* is "technically defeated" (Olaniyan 2018). This goal was declared in the context of *Boko Haram* controlling over 20 local government areas. Victory was defined as recapturing these areas and reducing the group's ability to launch large-scale operations. Indeed, reflecting Nigerian forces' "ammunition mentality" (Omoigui 2015; Omeni 2020, 195), on taking up the role of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) in 2015, Major General Turkur Buratai renamed the counter *Boko Haram* mission from the previous *Zaman Lafiya* (Peace in Hausa) to *Lafiya Dole* (Peace by Force). In February 2020, *The Cable* (2020) reported Major General Buratai as stating that Nigeria had won the war against the insurgency because militants were no

²⁴ Interview with retired General, Nigerian Army, Abuja, October 2019.

longer in control of territory. Re-securing territory and defeating the enemy are laudable goals, but they highlight the conventional thinking behind the counterinsurgency. Neither is sufficient to beat an insurgency that can go underground and reappear later.

The picture is somewhat different across the border, but the effect of Niamey's counter-ISWAP efforts is also a form of enemy-centric counterinsurgency. While the military has conducted conventional operations alongside international, mainly French, forces (also often accused of overly militarised responses), the government has also relied on local, sub-national, 'self-defence' forces. Faced with ISGS' expansion, in early 2017 the Nigerien government started to cooperate with ethnic-based armed groups such as the Malian Touareg, the Doussahaq, the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defence Group and Allies (GATIA) and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) (ICG 2018). The latter are backed by the Malian government and also collaborate with French-led Operation Barkhane. Niamey's decision was motivated by a desire to maintain influence in the region, located far away from the capital, but also to achieve better results as local armed groups understand the territory better than state forces.

Initially, their operations in the Tillabéri region seemed to halt ISWAP's expansion, but violence perpetrated by these ethnic-based militias pushed some Fulani communities, particularly the Toleebe, to join the jihadists, causing tit-for-tat ethnic massacres and encouraging even more fighters to side with ISWAP-Liptako Gourma (ICG 2018). Armed militias legitimised their actions with the narrative of countering terrorism whilst many Fulani herders justified joining insurgent groups for pragmatic reasons (to protect their communities). In the end, the government strategy to back certain ethnic groups exacerbated rivalries and fostered grievances towards the central government, triggering a cycle of inter-tribal unrest and conflict. In July 2018, the Nigerien government suspended these operations realising that the approach had backfired (Armstrong 2019) and that outsourcing defence responsibilities triggered a violent short-circuit. Overall in Niger, the counterinsurgency model has not taken the protection of civilians and the eradication of insurgents equally into account.

Losing 'hearts and minds'

The respectively direct and indirect forms of enemy-centric counter insurgency in Nigeria and Niger have had profound effects on civilians. Indeed, counterinsurgency efforts have taken a negative toll and alienated large sections of the population. There are two main ways that the militaries in both countries have sought to control the link between the population and insurgents: clearance operations, screenings and arrests; and control over the economy. All breed resentment and play into ISWAP narratives.

'Clearance COIN', screening and indiscriminate arrests

A key tactic of the Nigerian military has been to clear forcibly civilians living in insecure militant-influenced areas out of their communities into garrisoned towns and militarily secure IDP camps (Carsten and Lanre 2017). From the enemy-centric point of view, this has the tactical advantage of severing the link between communities and militants and allowing for the use of unrestricted force against militants without concern for civilian casualties. It has, however, been criticised for the lack of protection for those who remain, individuals who are not registered at an IDP camp (especially Kanuri and Baduma men), given the assumption that they must be sympathetic to the jihadists (Callamard 2019).²⁵ This also extends to humanitarian organisations who are accused of giving sustenance to the jihadists if they support individuals who remain.²⁶

Indeed, many civilians in northeast Nigeria are very disillusioned with the current circumstances, especially following the move to supercamps. They have seen soldiers retreat from bases nearby to their homes (for understandable reasons given the losses soldiers were taking), but now civilians sometimes feel that they are considered enemies for not also leaving to secured areas and garrisoned camps.²⁷ Clearances are evidently very unpopular. In January 2020, Borno State Governor Babagana Zulum intervened to stop the clearance of Mainok and Jakana towns, which sit along the increasingly insecure Damaturu-Maiduguri road (see below).

Following clearances, populations are 'screened', and many are often arrested. There is a perception among some soldiers that "there are no civilians" in certain parts of Borno State and that all the people found in these areas are insurgents or supporting them (Nagarajan 2019, 12). There are reports, following clearances, of troops arresting fighting-age men and deporting them to detention centres in Maiduguri or elsewhere. These arrests are often not subject to due process, leading to accusations that they are arbitrary (Anyadike 2018).

The conditions of these detention facilities are very poor. Obi Anyadike (2018) highlights the story from the Boboshe area of Borno, which was cleared of the presence of *Boko Haram* in late 2015-early 2016. Fleeing persons were 'screened' with some men sent to the Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri and the women sent to an IDP camp near Bama, where conditions are poor with little food or water and threats of sexual abuse. Periods of detention vary, but there are large numbers of people who have been detained (sometimes without charge) for many years. Anyadike also reports one woman as saying that her children repeatedly ask what happened to their father who was sent to Giwa but had not returned after several years. "What can I say? Do you think they will ever trust this government again?", she notes. In some cases, men have been extrajudicially killed (either following

²⁵ Interview, Western Diplomat, Abuja, by Phone November 2019.

²⁶ Interview, Western Diplomat, Abuja, by Phone November 2019.

²⁷ Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

screenings or after a period of detention). Following the recapture of Bama in 2015, for example, soldiers were accused of killing men who had not been cleared as residents (Amnesty International 2015, 41).

Similar approaches have been implemented by Nigerien authorities. Since the Inates attacks in December 2019, the Niger Armed Forces (FAN) have allegedly emptied several villages in combat zones, ordering thousands to flee their homes, and have been accused of chasing and brutalising those who tried to return to recover their goods and livestock (Carayol 2020). A recent report by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) also claims that the FAN were responsible for 34 extrajudicial killings between February and March 2020 in the border area between Mali and Niger (MINUSMA 2020). In an effort to sever support for the militants, the FAN are reported to have targeted Fulani herders accused of assisting jihadists. In turn, this has led to a stigmatisation of the entire ethnic group, even though the militant groups recruit across ethnicities. As with the border villages in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, where insurgents are embedded in the communities, there has been a pattern of equating the local population with jihadists as it is very difficult to discern who are and who are not supporters of ISWAP-Liptako Gourma.²⁸ Recent Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) data also highlights the abuses by Nigerien government forces against the local population in the Tillabéri area (Nsaibia 2020). In fact, in the framework of the Almahaw Operation, which replaced Operation Dongo, FAN arrested 102 people in the areas of Inates and Ayorou. These people, mostly Ikelan Touareg – the lower Touareg caste – and a few Fulani herders disappeared and were found in mass graves at the beginning of April 2020 (Prevost 2020).

The surge in state violence against civilians is clearly an example of misaligned counterinsurgency. Targeting the population is counterproductive as it reinforces the link between local communities and the insurgents. Instead of providing support for the population, the FAN, urged by the government and Western partners to deliver results, have fuelled the insurgency. Notwithstanding training on human rights and International Humanitarian Law by EUCAP Sahel Niger and Western partner nations, the FAN are also poorly equipped and badly trained (including at officer level), which increases the chances of abuses.²⁹ The Nigerien Defence Minister has launched an inquiry but denied all allegations of abuses, further feeding the alienation of the local population and undermining any short-term military achievements (Nsaibia 2020).

Restricting the economy

²⁸ Interview with local humanitarian official, Niamey, January 2020.

²⁹ Interview with Western military trainer, Niamey, February 2020.

Around Lake Chad, access to water and fertile land has traditionally been a source of tensions between Kanuri and Hausa communities. But this space was not ‘ungoverned’. It has been historically governed through strategic alliances with local tribes, and the system has worked until recently with the rise of militancy, criminal activities and intercommunity violence.

Faced with these threats, the Nigerian government has placed significant restrictions on economic activity in areas affected by armed groups. Restrictions include limitations on civilian farming, restrictions on the use of farmland for security purposes (digging trenches/fortifications), restrictions on the movement of pastoralists, interdiction of goods and the closure of markets (GICS 2019, 24). These have been put in place both for physical security reasons (to stop information reaching militants, to stop farmland from being used in attacks) and to stop the armed groups from accessing food and other resources (Nagarajan 2019, 17). However, these practices restrict the traditional economic strategies of communities (for example, farming in different areas depending on weather patterns) (Vivekananda *et al.* 2019, 64) and cause significant difficulties for communities cut off from their livelihoods. These restrictions on livelihoods, for people living in difficult and often unsafe conditions in IDP camps, mean a relative increase in the attractiveness of living in ISWAP areas. Adding to this frustration is a widespread perception that some in the military are taking advantage of these curtailments. Soldiers are accused of trading livestock, using confiscated land near checkpoints for farming (when locals are confined to towns) (Nagarajan 2019, 17) and seeking to control the fish trade.³⁰ The militants know this and play on these themes in their propaganda. As Nagarajan notes (2019, 7), since 2019, increasing numbers of people are willingly moving back to live in ISWAP-Lake Chad dominated areas.

For its part, in an effort to counter the insurgencies, Niger has since 2017 placed the Tillabéri, Tahoua and Diffa regions under a state of emergency which entails a mandatory curfew, a ban on motorbikes (the most common means of transportation) and limitations on the purchase of gas. Due to these restrictions, these security measures have severely affected the local population, taking a high toll on economic sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, herding and trade. Clearly, these decisions were taken without considering communities’ interests or local dynamics.

The state of emergency also requires all humanitarian actors delivering assistance to have a military escort which has severely impeded their work as some of them refuse to be associated with the military. These COIN measures imposed by state authoritarianism and regimentation have also been used as a way to silence civil society actors, as the escalation of civil unrest in the country has

³⁰ Interview with Nigerian think tank expert on ISWAP, Abuja, October 2019.

been repressed. Overall, these security measures put a strain on the local communities, further weakening their livelihoods and further alienating them.³¹

Improvements?

There are some signs of improvement in both cases, but neither really responds adequately to the population-centric stance of both ISWAP groups. In Nigeria, the situation does appear to be improving with fewer cases of arbitrary killings and detentions recorded in recent years in the North East (Callamard 2019). However, it is not clear what has driven this change. On the one hand, there is recognition in parts of the military that the former situation made things worse and that a ‘hearts-and-minds’ strategy is required.³² In February 2020, President Buhari also called for a review of the strategies against ISWAP-Lake Chad (although it is unclear presently what that would mean in practice) (*Premium Times* 2020). At the same time, other factors have influenced the behaviour of the military, including pressure from human rights organisations and the risk for senior officers of being blacklisted internationally for human rights abuses.³³ Additionally, Western countries have blocked weapon sales to Nigeria due to human rights concerns, and this may also be driving improvements.³⁴ However, while US President Barack Obama delayed a huge sale of military equipment to Nigeria over human rights concerns in 2017, the process was started up again under the Donald Trump Presidency (Zengerle and Onuah 2017).

While the picture has improved from a human rights point of view, the military’s approach has not fundamentally changed in the North East, and the general pattern is still based on garrison towns, supercamps, clearances and a hard, enemy-centric approach. Recent research by Amnesty International seems to reveal the continuation of these tactics, with communities along the Maiduguri-Damaturu road forcibly moved from their homes and their villages razed to the ground (Amnesty International 2020). As noted above, this raid was in response to an increased rate of attacks along this road in early 2020 (Haruna 2020), but it does highlight the continuation of an enemy-centric COIN approach.

There is little sign of the Nigerian state shifting its tactics towards the insurgents and the more kinetic approach still predominates. As the government now acknowledges that reliance on self-defence militias is counterproductive, it has stepped up its efforts in joint and national operations. It participates in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) along with Nigeria, Chad, Benin and Cameroon (Audu and Ibrahim 2020), and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, launched in 2017, together with Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, focusing predominantly on the Liptako-Gourma region.

³² Interview with Retired General, Nigerian Army, Abuja, October 2019.

³³ Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

³⁴ Interview with Maiduguri-based Researcher, via Zoom, April 2020.

Moreover, Nigerien soldiers collaborate in several joint special forces' operations with French-led Operation Barkhane (Le Roux 2019), as well as in the joint Almahaw-Barkhane missions, and operations Saki II, Hadarin Daji and Almahaw. While insurgencies in Niger were initially regarded as an external problem concerning Mali and Nigeria, following their expansion, Nigerien responses are well integrated in multilateral efforts. Niger has consequently not been pushed by external pressure to change its *modus operandi* towards a less kinetic approach.

In the Tillabéri region, ISWAP attacks against Nigerien military outposts took place in Inates on 10 December 2019, resulting in the death of 70 soldiers, and in Chinagodrar on 9 January 2020, killing more than 100.³⁵ The Inates' attack turned the tide in ISWAP-FAN violence as it was the first large-scale offensive to inflict considerable damage on the FAN. Abul Walid al-Sahraoui has succeeded in masterminding a complex strategy, managing not only to create an increasing number of unstable zones across three different countries – Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso – and to organise well-coordinated attacks on military outposts, but also to provoke Western and national retaliation efforts, which feed into recruitment propaganda. The two attacks demonstrate the escalation of ISWAP-Liptako Gourma's campaign as part of the emerging trend of large-scale operations targeting the state rather than the population. This serves not only to exhibit its capacities to its enemies and increase its legitimisation towards the IS core, but also to seize weapons, ammunition and vehicles.

Furthermore, in response to these attacks, at the G5 Sahel meeting held in Pau on 13 January 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron identified the Liptako-Gourma area as the main military objective of joint international and national efforts to counter terrorism and defined ISWAP-Liptako Gourma as “the primary enemy, as it is the most dangerous” (Macron 2020). In turn, the Nigerien government, which was deeply shaken by al-Sahraoui's successful operations, adopted an even more kinetic approach to counterinsurgency with the creation of 12 Special Forces Battalions³⁶ in an attempt to build highly mobile forces, rather than more static camp-based FAN forces. Yet, they are being given shorter six-months training compared to the two years of Western Special Forces operator standards, in order to be operational as soon as possible. Again, this is not a shift towards a more population-centric approach, but rather a stepping up of an enemy-centric counterinsurgency approach.

Conclusions

Nigeria and Niger have pursued different counterinsurgency models that are nonetheless both enemy-centric – seeking to target militants with overwhelming force and using forceful methods to separate

³⁵ Interview with security expert, Niamey, February 2020. The source confirmed that the actual death toll is higher than the official one (which stands at 89).

³⁶ Interview with Western military trainer, Niamey, February 2020.

insurgents from the population. These approaches have proven problematic and potentially strategically self-defeating when facing insurgents who, even if they coerce those who turn against them, regard winning over the population as a core part of their strategy. Indeed, the response in Niger has fallen short so far of attaining the desired results of defeating ISWAP-Liptako Gourma, and a broader political approach, including intra- and inter-community reconciliation and a focus on local grievances is still absent. In Nigeria, where intercommunal tensions are less of an issue, the state's response has not increased the population's security in a holistic sense and has at times detracted from it. COIN measures have failed to provide locally apt, population-centric responses, and in many cases have aggravated the phenomenon they seek to counter. Human rights violations perpetrated by the armed forces feed into jihadist narratives of insurgents as 'protectors' of the community, contributing to consolidation of their control over populations.

ISWAP-Liptako Gourma and ISWAP-Lake Chad are aware of the weaknesses of state COIN approaches and have been developing approaches that take advantage of the misalignment of insurgent and COIN strategies. While ISWAP-Liptako Gourma gained access to communities by violently targeting local elites, they have since then also sought to win over populations through the provision of services. While JAS targeted the population for years, ISWAP-Lake Chad has emphasised its pro-population position and – compared to JAS – has been considerably less violent towards the Muslim population (notwithstanding their brutality against Muslims linked to the state, against Christians and more generally anyone who challenges them).

As noted above, there have been changes in focus in Nigerian and Nigerien COIN in the last few years. However, in Nigeria these have been driven in part by external pressures, rather than a result of the state's broader reformulation of how it interacts with its population. In Niger, deeply shaken by the first large-scale attacks on national soil, the government has been prompted to act quickly and is adopting an even more kinetic approach, stepping up its efforts in terms of creating its own special forces capacities, strengthening its undergoing COIN operations and reinforcing its collaboration in multilateral joint efforts.

This is not to say that the militaries of both states should avoid targeting ISWAP. Both ISWAPs represent brutal insurgencies and it is understandable that states take concerted military action against them. We are fully aware that counterinsurgency is not at all easy. However, some reformulation and realignment of the approaches of both states is essential so that the population-centric part of ISWAP strategy can be challenged, and its control over people weakened. Putting the highest possible levels of security for civilians in their communities (or wherever they have been displaced) at the heart of COIN strategies would significantly assist this effort.

Notes on contributors

Laura Berlingozzi is a PhD candidate in International Relations at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy, and a Visiting Fellow at the Recherche et Études en Politique Internationale (REPI) at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium.

Ed Stoddard is a Marie Curie Research Fellow in Conflict Studies at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy, and a Principal Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, United Kingdom. Email: ed.stoddard@port.ac.uk; Twitter: @StoddardEd

References

Abdullahi, M. 2020. Nigerian Troops Suffer Heavy Losses in ISWAP Ambush. *HumAngle*, 24 March. <https://humangle.ng/heavy-losses-on-nigerian-troops-following-iswap-ambush/>.

Al-Hussaini, B. 2020. New ISWAP Boss Slays Five Rebel Leaders, Silences Clerical Tones. *Premium Times*, 3 March. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/379975-new-iswap-boss-slays-five-rebel-leaders-silences-clerical-tones.html>.

Amnesty International. 2015. Stars on their Shoulders, Blood on Their Hands. War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military. London. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR4416572015ENGLISH.PDF>.

Amnesty International. 2020. Nigeria: Military Razes Villages as Boko Haram Attacks Escalate. 14 February. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/nigeria-military-razes-villages-as-boko-haram-attacks-escalate/>.

Anyadike, O. 2018. Abuses and Disappearances Mar Nigerian Counter-insurgency Campaign. *The New Humanitarian*, 11 October. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2018/10/11/Boko-Haram-abuses-and-disappearances-nigerian-counter-insurgency-campaign>.

Anyadike, O. 2019. Reporter's Diary: Boko Haram and the Battle of Ideas. *The New Humanitarian*, 6 August. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2019/08/06/Nigeria-boko-haram-ISWAP-and-battle-ideas-Lake-Chad>.

Armstrong, A. 2019. Behind the Jihadist Attack in Niger's Inates. International Crisis Group, Q&A Africa, 13 December.

Audu, B. J., and Ibrahim, S. 2020. Niger Republic Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency in a Complex Terrain. In U. A Tar and B. Bala, eds. *New Architecture of Regional Security in Africa: Perspectives on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin*: 317-30. London: Lexington Books.

Berman, E., Felter, J. H., and Shapiro J. N. 2018. *Small Wars, Big Data: The Information Revolution in Modern Conflict*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bøås, M., and Dunn K. C. eds. 2017. *Africa's Insurgents: Navigating an Evolving Landscape*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Brigaglia, A. 2015. The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram. *Diritto & Questioni Pubbliche*, 15 (2): 174-201.

Callamard, A. 2019. End of Visit Statement of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions on Her Visit to Nigeria. 2 September. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24934&LangID=E>.

Carayol, R. 2020. Au Sahel, les massacres s'amplifient malgré le Covid-19 [In the Sahel, massacres augment notwithstanding Covid-19]. *OrientXXI*, 28 April. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/au-sahel-les-massacres-s-amplifient-malgre-le-covid-19,3830>.

Carsten, P., and Lanre, O. 2017. Nigeria Puts Fortress Towns at Heart of New Boko Haram Strategy. *Reuters*, 1 December. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security-borno/nigeria-puts-fortress-towns-at-heart-of-new-boko-haram-strategy-idUSKBN1DV4GU>.

Debos, M. 2013. *Le métier des armes au Tchad. Le gouvernement de l'entre-guerres* [The Profession of Arms in Chad: The Government of the Interwar]. Paris: Kharthala.

Dixon, P. 2012. Beyond Hearts and Minds: Perspectives on Counterinsurgency. In P. Dixon, ed. *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq And Afghanistan*: 51-89. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Global Initiative for Civil Stabilisation (GICS). 2019. Survival and Expansion: The Islamic State's West African Province. April. <https://conflictstudies.gics.live/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/GICS-Survival-And-Expansion-of-the-Islamic-States-West-African-Province-Full.pdf>.

Haruna, A. 2020. SPECIAL REPORT: Increasing Boko Haram Attacks on Highways Threaten to Cut Borno Off from Nigeria. *Premium Times*, 24 January. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/373896-special-report-increasing-boko-haram-attacks-on-highways-threaten-to-cut-borno-off-from-nigeria.html>.

Hassan, I. 2018. Opinion: The Danger of a Better Behaved Boko Haram. *The New Humanitarian*, 21 August. <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2018/08/21/opinion-nigeria-militancy-peace-boko-haram>.

International Crisis Group (ICG). 2018. Frontière Niger-Mali: Mettre l'Outil Militaire au Service d'une Approche Politique [Niger-Mali Border: Putting the Military at the Service of a Political Approach]. *Report* 261. 12 June.

ICG. 2019. Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province. 16 May. <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/273-facing-the-challenge.pdf>.

ICG. 2020. Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery. *Africa Report* 289. 3 June. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery>.

Islamic State. 2018. New Video Message from the Islamic State: Tribulations and Blessings "Wilayat, Gharb Ifriqiyya". 11 July. <https://www.jihadology.net/2018/07/11/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-tribulations-and-blessings-wilayat-gharb-ifriqiyyah/>.

- Kilcullen, D. 2010. *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Le Roux, P. 2019. Responding to the Rise of Violent Extremism in the Sahel, *Africa Security Brief* No. 36. African Center for Strategic Studies, December
<https://africacenter.org/publication/responding-rise-violent-extremism-sahel/>.
- Macron, E. 2020. Press Conference, G5 Sahel Pau Summit. 13 January.
<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/01/13/sommet-de-pau-declaration-conjointe-des-chefs-detat>.
- Mahmood, O., and Ani, N. 2018. Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org/research/books-and-other-publications/factional-dynamics-within-boko-haram>.
- McFate, M., and Jackson, A. 2006. The Object Beyond War: Counterinsurgency and The Four Tools of Political Competition. *Military Review*, January-February: 13-26.
- Metelits, C., 2009. *Inside Insurgency: Violence, Civilians, and Revolutionary Group Behavior*. New York: NYU Press.
- Metz, S. Insurgency. In K. E. Haug and O. J. Maa, eds. 2011. *Conceptualising Modern War*: 111-137. London: C. Hurst and Co.
- Nagarajan, C. 2019. Gender Assessment of Northeast Nigeria Conducted for Managing Conflict in North East Nigeria (MCN). Maiduguri, June.
- Nsaibia, H. 2020. Atrocities in the Sahel: The impetus For Counterinsurgency Results Is Fueling Government Attacks on Civilians. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 20 May.
- Olaniyan, A. 2018. Down, But Not Yet Out: Boko Haram and the Concept of Technical Defeat. Kujenga Amani, 23 August. <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2018/08/23/down-but-not-yet-out-boko-haram-and-the-concept-of-technical-defeat/>.
- Omeni, A. 2020. *Insurgency and War in Nigeria: Regional Fracture and the Fight Against Boko Haram*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Omoigui, N. 2015. Nigerian Civil War File: Federal Nigerian Army Blunders of the Nigerian Civil War. *Dawodu.com*. <https://dawodu.com/omoigui25.htm>.
- Paul, C., Clarke, C. P., Grill, B., and Dunigan, M. 2016. Moving Beyond Population-centric vs. Enemy-centric Counterinsurgency. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27 (6): 1019-42.
- Postings, R. 2019. Islamic State Puts the Sahel in West Africa – for now. *The Defense Post*, 30 May. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/05/30/islamic-state-greater-sahara-west-africa/>.
- Premium Times*. 2020. Buhari Tasks Military on Strategies Against ISWAP Threats. 26 February. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/379215-buhari-tasks-military-on-strategies-against-iswap-threats.html>.

- Prevost, N. 2020. Niger, cent-deux civils massacrés puis ensevelis dans des fosses communes [One hundred and two civilians massacred and then buried in mass graves in Niger]. *MondAfrique*, 3 August. <https://mondafrique.com/niger-cent-deux-hommes-massacres-puis-ensevelis-dans-des-fosses/>.
- Raineri, L. 2020. Dogmatism or Pragmatism? Violent Extremism and Gender in the Central Sahel. *International Alert*, July.
- Raineri, L., and Strazzari F. 2015. State, Secession, and Jihad: The Micropolitical Economy of Conflict in Northern Mali. *African Security*, (8) 4: 249-71.
- Salkida, A. 2019. Special Report: Why Troops are Losing Ground to ISWAP. *Sahara Reporters*, 2 January. <http://saharareporters.com/2019/01/02/special-report-why-troops-are-losing-ground-iswap>.
- Salkida, A. 2020a. How Boko Haram Sustains Operations Through International Trade in Smoked Fish. *HumAngle*, 26 April. <https://humangle.ng/how-boko-haram-sustains-operations-through-international-trade-in-smoked-fish/>.
- Salkida, A. 2020b. Agonies Of Communities In The War Front: Brutalized, Exploited And Traumatized By Army and Insurgents. *HumAngle*, 14 June. <https://humangle.ng/agonies-of-communities-in-the-war-front-brutalized-exploited-and-traumatized-by-army-and-insurgents/>.
- Taber, R. 2002. *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*. Lincoln: Potomac Books.
- The Cable*. 2020. Exclusive: Sacking Service Chiefs Won't End Boko Haram Says Buratai. 12 February. <https://www.thecable.ng/exclusive-sacking-service-chiefs-wont-end-boko-haram-says-buratai>.
- Thurston, A. 2018. *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Oxford University Press.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2017. Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. 7 September. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/09/07/vers-1-extremisme-violent-en-afrique.html>.
- United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). 2020. Note sur les tendances des violations et abus de droits de l'homme, 1er Janvier - 31 Mars 2020 [Note on the Trends in Human Rights Violations and Abuses, January 1-March 31, 2020]. Division des Droits de l'Homme et de la Protection, April 2020.
- Vivekananda, J., Wall, M., Sylvestre, F., and Nagarajan, C. 2019. Shoring Up Stability: Addressing Climate and Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Region. Berlin: Adelphi. <https://shoring-up-stability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Shoring-up-Stability.pdf>.
- Walker, A. 2016. *Eat the Heart of the Infidel: The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram*. London: C. Hurst and Co.

Zengerle, P. and Onuah, F. 2017. Trump Plans to Move Ahead with Nigeria Planes Sale: Sources. *Reuters*, 10 April. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-usa-aircraft-sales/trump-plans-to-move-ahead-with-nigeria-planes-sale-sources-idUSKBN17C2C5>.

Zenn, J. 2020. *Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.