European Parliament

Jihadist networks in sub-Saharan Africa
Origins, patterns and responses

SUMMARY

Sub-Saharan Africa has become a new global hotspot for jihadist activity. Armed groups have increasingly developed strong Salafi ideologies and forged ties with movements predominantly active in the Middle East, namely Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known by its Arabic acronym, Da'esh. The rise of terrorist activity in the region of the Sahel, Lake Chad, the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa, and more recently in northern Mozambique, cannot be attributed solely to the influence of jihadist ideology from the Middle East.

A number of factors have contributed to the deterioration of security, among them poverty, corruption, various local grievances, separatist movements, pre-existing intercommunal violence between herders and farmers over land rights (exacerbated by the consequences of climate change), weak state presence, and lack of prospects for young people. In Mali, transnational jihadist groups emerged from the conflict triggered by the separatist Tuareg movement. More recently, in Mozambique, grievances and poverty in one of the country's poorest provinces in the Muslim-majority north, Cabo Delgado, provided fertile ground for jihadist ideology, nurtured further by foreign preachers and returning students who had studied in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Sudan and Saudi Arabia. The insurrection is also a protest against socio-economic asymmetries and inequalities.

The spike in violence attributed to jihadist groups and their ties to foreign movements has prompted international stakeholders, including the European Union, to launch counterterrorism operations, also involving local actors. The European Parliament has condemned these terrorist groups on several occasions and supported EU military and civilian missions in the region. Nevertheless, the military approach that the international community has preferred up to now has not succeeded in addressing deeper community grievances and strengthening state presence.

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Introduction

Two decades after the 11 September terrorist attacks in New York, terror networks Al-Qaeda and Islamic State/Da'esh continue to pose a grave threat to peace and security, adapting to new technologies and moving into some of the world's most fragile regions. According to an EPRS analysis accompanying the [Normandy Index](#) 2021, the sub-Saharan Africa region remains particularly vulnerable to the threats of terrorism, violent conflict and fragile statehood. It has never been clearer that for the EU to achieve its aims of promoting peace and security in the region, it needs to work continuously to prevent, mitigate and resolve threats, starting with identifying the main actors. Armed groups with jihadist ideologies and links to Al-Qaeda and Islamic State have emerged across several areas of sub-Saharan Africa, mostly inhabited by Muslim majorities. The [Islamic State in the Greater Sahara](#) (ISGS) has killed several hundred civilians in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger since the start of 2021, while the group's 'West Africa Province' branch, also designated as the [Islamic State in West Africa Province](#) (ISWAP), will likely gain from the weakening of Boko Haram, with additional spillover of terrorists and foreign fighters from Libya.

Meanwhile, the expansion of ISIL/Da'esh in Central Africa – and especially in northern Mozambique – could have far-reaching implications for peace and security in the region. As [said](#) by UN counter-terrorism chief, Vladimir Voronkov, 'A global response is urgently needed to support the efforts of African countries and regional organizations to counter terrorism and address its interplay with conflict, organized crime, governance and development gaps'. According to the UN Secretary General's July 2021 [report](#) on the threat posed by ISIL/Da'esh to international peace and security, 'the autonomy of regional affiliates has been further strengthened, especially in West Africa and the Sahel, East and Central Africa … Some of the most effective Da'esh affiliates are spreading their influence and activities on the continent, including across national borders. Spillover from Mali into Burkina Faso and the Niger, incursions from Nigeria into the Niger, Chad and Cameroon, and from Mozambique into the United Republic of Tanzania, are all very concerning'.

The [worrying trend](#) of jihadist activity is that its perpetrators largely exploit existing insecurities caused by separatist movements, intercommunal tensions and weak government presence, to take control of certain areas. In parallel, they forge ties with international terrorist groups, namely Al-Qaeda and ISIL/Da'esh. On the one hand, this [raises the profile](#) of local groups and provides them with foreign support, social communication tools and sometimes even funds. On the other hand, the spreading of jihadist violence in sub-Saharan Africa has allowed groups such as ISIL/Da'esh to [maintain a support base](#) despite significant losses in the Middle East and North Africa. The increase in violence and pledges to Al-Qaeda and ISIL/Da'esh have [boosted](#) international involvement in sub-Saharan Africa over concerns that the region will become a [new jihadist battlefield](#). Several counterterrorism operations, EU military and civilian missions have been deployed in the region. However, [little suggests](#) that traditional counterterrorism approaches alone will be sufficient to stabilise fragile regions in the African continent. In fact, since military response has so far failed to improve security, some see this as evidence that approaches centred on community outreach and [better governance](#) may prove more successful.

Jihadist networks in sub-Saharan Africa

Sahel and the Liptako-Gourma region: Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)

The Sahel's Liptako-Gourma region has experienced violent jihadist insurgency since the early 2010s, first affecting Mali and later spreading to neighbouring Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Chad. Following its emergence out of the [2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali](#), jihadist insurgency accelerated due to weak state governance and increasing intercommunal tensions, among others. Despite the affected countries' significant efforts to counter the violence, it not only persists but is also mounting. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) [estimates](#) that crises in this

region have claimed more than 5 000 lives and triggered significant displacement of populations. As of 28 July 2021, more than 2 million people have been displaced, including 1.8 million internally displaced people and 183 000 refugees, respectively 91 % and 9 % of the displaced population.

Jihadist groups

Many stakeholders, including the EU, the United States and the United Nations, refer to several armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa as 'terrorists'. This briefing instead refers to them as 'jihadist groups'. There is no internationally recognised definition for the concept of terrorism, and armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa are often interrelated with local militias as well as criminal groups. The armed groups mentioned in this briefing are violent groups that have openly adopted jihadist ideologies and are suspected of having ties to the ISIL/Da'esh or Al-Qaeda movements. Jihadist groups subscribe to an extreme Salafist ideology, according to which Muslims have a religious duty to replace regimes that they consider 'un-Islamic' with a new order governed by strict application of Islamic law. Jihadists see violence as necessary in setting this new order.

Complex origins of jihadist violence in the Sahel

Jihadist groups Ansar al-Din, Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb emerged during the 2012 Tuareg insurgency in northern Mali, forming an alliance with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a separatist Tuareg movement. After the deployment of French troops under 'Operation Serval' helped recapture most insurgent-held territory in 2013, the Malian government and the Tuareg insurgents, including MNLA, signed the Algiers Peace Agreement in 2015. However, the agreement failed to include other armed groups that emerged from the conflict, resulting in the persistence of jihadist insurgence. In 2016, a new conflict erupted in central Mali. Desertification and environmental degradation had led to increased competition over land and resources between farmers – mostly from the Dogon ethnic group – and herders – mostly Fulani. In response to these tensions as well as a series of jihadist attacks, Dogon and Fulani communities mobilised on both sides in the form of ethnic militias. Meanwhile, jihadist groups instrumentalised ethnic tensions to attract more Fulani recruits and took advantage of insecurity to step up their attacks. Eventually, jihadist violence spilled over to Burkina Faso and Niger, while Malian armed forces became increasingly overstretched and unable to stabilise the region.

European Union missions in the region

The EU has deployed three common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions to the region, including the civilian missions EUCAP Sahel Niger (2012-2022), EUCAP Sahel Mali (2013-2023), and the military training mission EUTM Mali, launched in 2013. The new integrated strategy in the Sahel, adopted in April 2021, addresses root causes of conflict by focusing on governance and a 'return of the state' in conflict-affected areas. However, the strategy will have to overcome several challenges in order to effectively stabilise a deeply insecure region.

The region has recently experienced a significant increase in violence, with Niger's two worst terrorist attacks taking place in January and March of 2021. Several active jihadist groups, among them ISIS-West Africa and ISIS-Greater Sahara, are currently operating in the Sahel tri-border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, but mostly concentrated in the Liptako-Gourma region. Some of these groups are forging alliances with each other, thus increasing their territorial influence and capacity to withstand actions by armed forces. These include the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) alliance, whose attacks account for more than 64 % of all episodes linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel since 2017. Contrary to earlier jihadist groups, the JNIM alliance does not enjoy or seek wide popular support; instead, it has increasingly tapped into local criminal networks and mounted attacks on civilian populations. Parts of the Sahel are also experiencing severe food insecurity and climate-related vulnerabilities, which have resulted in a complex regional humanitarian crisis. The absence of stable and legitimate state structures provides a further challenge to regional stabilisation. The first and second military coups in Mali and the appointment of a military general to head Chad's interim government are evidence of increased militarisation of the highest levels of government.
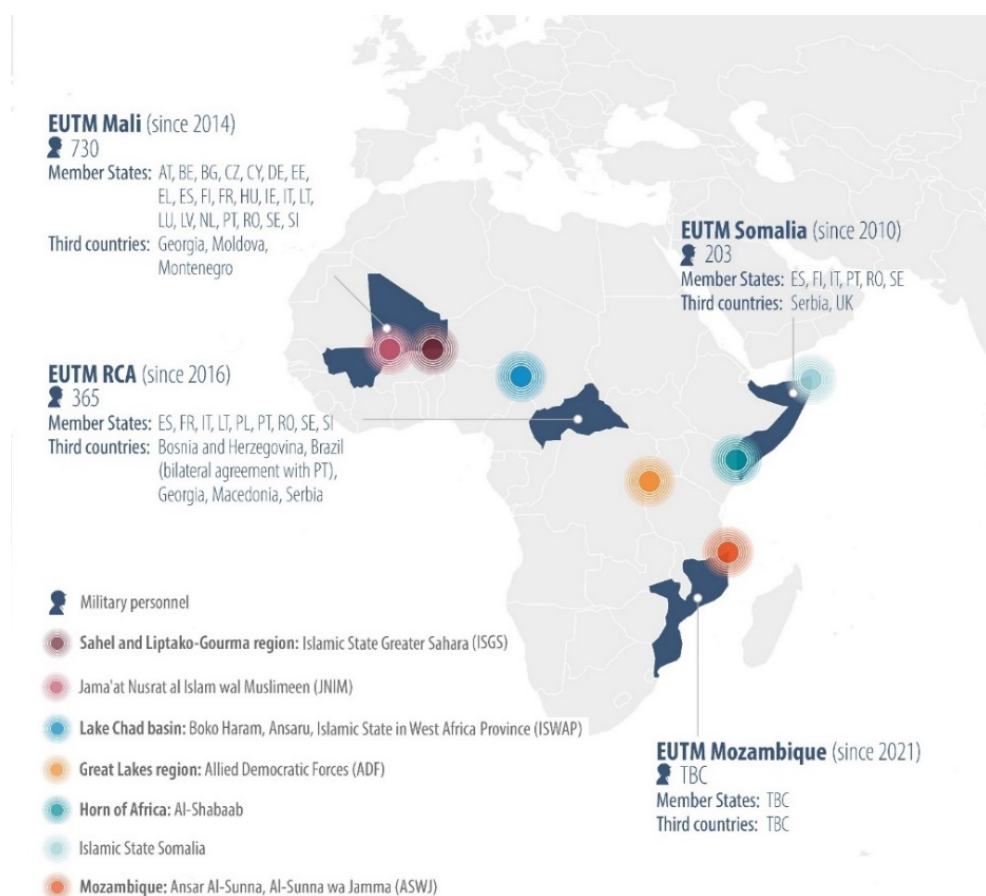
Lessons from the Sahel counterterrorism response

Since August 2014, French Operation Barkhane has deployed some 5 100 military personnel in the region, with an annual budget of €880 million in 2020. Alongside the French troops, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a UN-backed initiative (see UN Security Council Resolution 2359 (2017) became operational in 2017. Moreover, at the annual summit of the African Union (AU) in February 2020, African leaders requested the AU Commission to develop a framework for a possible six-month deployment of a force composed of the Multinational Joint Task Force (mandated by the AU Peace and Security Council to fight Boko Haram, the terrorist group based in the Lake Chad basin) and 3 000 troops to deter terrorist groups in the Sahel. In March 2020, 11 EU Member States supported politically a common European intervention in the Sahel. Named Takuba, 'sword' in Tuareg, the operation was delayed for a long time; Estonian, Czech, Swedish, Italian and Greek forces finally deployed in early 2021. Denmark should join the troops in 2022. Germany refuses to join, while Belgium and the Netherlands will have a minimal presence.

Task Force Takuba presents a two-fold modification of the existing counter-terrorism approach. First, it complements conventional army missions through smaller special operations, which are more mobile and targeted. Second, it aims to fill capacity gaps in the local armed forces through joint operations. This furthers the logic that the withdrawal of foreign forces can only be envisaged once national militaries can hold the territory. Experts have also pointed out that weak governance and state control are often the main reasons behind jihadist mobilisation, calling for a rethink of security responses in the Sahel. To address security issues, a number of joint military forces currently operate across the region (see Figure 1). The UN Secretary General asked the Security Council in July 2021 to consider increasing troop numbers in Mali. In parallel, regional and international alliances allow to better coordinate responses to insecurity. The regional Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) provides a platform to discuss security and development within its five member countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The Sahel Alliance, created in 2017, supports development projects, while the Coalition for the Sahel, created in 2020, coordinates security, humanitarian and development responses.

Figure 1 – EU missions and main jihadist networks in sub-Saharan Africa

EUTM Mali (since 2014)
👤 730
Member States: AT, BE, BG, CZ, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI
Third countries: Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro

EUTM RCA (since 2016)
👤 365
Member States: ES, FR, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI
Third countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil (bilateral agreement with PT), Georgia, Macedonia, Serbia

EUTM Somalia (since 2010)
👤 203
Member States: ES, FI, IT, PT, RO, SE
Third countries: Serbia, UK

EUTM Mozambique (since 2021)
👤 TBC
Member States: TBC
Third countries: TBC

👤 Military personnel
🔴 Sahel and Liptako-Gourma region: Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS)
🔴 Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)
🔵 Lake Chad basin: Boko Haram, Ansaru, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP)
🟠 Great Lakes region: Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)
🔵 Horn of Africa: Al-Shabaab
🔵 Islamic State Somalia
🔴 Mozambique: Ansar Al-Sunna, Al-Sunna wa Jamma (ASWJ)

Source: Map by Samy Chahri, based on EPRS and EEAS data, 2021.

Lake Chad basin: Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP)

Jihadist violence is also rife in another region of the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin. Jihadist group Boko Haram ('Westernisation Is Sacrilege' in the local language, Hamza), which later changed its name to The Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), first emerged in 2002 in north-eastern Nigeria and later expanded its activity to Chad, Niger and Cameroon. Despite regional and international military cooperation on the ground, persisting issues such as overstretched military forces continue to hamper stabilisation efforts. Ansaru, whose Arabic name is *Jamāʿatu Anṣāril Muslimīna fī Bilādis Sūdān* ('Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa'), is a breakaway faction of Boko Haram, first announced in 2012. In 2019, ISWAP was the second-deadliest terrorist group globally, and the deadliest in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the 2020 Global Terrorism Index.

Origins and fragmentation of Boko Haram/ISWAP

Table 2 – Boko Haram/ISWAP

📍 **Area of operation**	Lake Chad Basin
👑 **Leadership**	Mohamed Yusuf (2002-2009) Abubakar Shekau (2009-2021) Abu Musab al-Barnawi (2016-present) [breakaway faction]
🤝 **Recruitment**	From rural and poor communities, dominated by Kanuri ethnic group
🔺 **Tactics**	Suicide bombing, kidnapping of school children, targeting of national military, government officials and UN forces' personnel
💰 **Income source**	Suspected money transfers from ISIL/ Da'esh, cross-border smuggling of weapons and other supplies
☠ **Fatalities**	1 068 deaths attributed in 2019

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace & EPRS, 2021.

Boko Haram members prefer to be known by their Arabic name – *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* – meaning 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad'. Boko Haram emerged in 2002 in Nigeria's north-eastern Yobe state, led by the Salafist preacher Mohamed Yusuf. Following the extrajudicial killing of Yusuf by Nigerian state forces in 2009, his deputy Abubakar Shekau took over the leadership. In 2015, Shekau pledged allegiance to ISIL/Da'esh and changed the group's name to ISWAP. ISWAP carried out more brutal attacks, including the kidnapping of 200 schoolgirls in 2014 and another 100 in 2018. In 2016, the group split into two factions. Abu Musab al-Barnawi became the leader of the breakaway faction, supported by ISIL/Da'esh leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In May 2021, al-Barnawi's faction killed Shekau, reportedly due to his indiscriminate attacks.

Compounding threats to security

ISWAP's activity is not the only source of insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin. Growing competition over resources has resulted in deadly intercommunal violence, particularly in north-western Nigeria. Climate-related vulnerabilities have disrupted traditional livelihoods and increased competition over land. Rampant insecurity has led to the emergence of criminal groups engaging in illicit activities, such as robbery of herders and gold miners and kidnapping for ransom. Moreover, porous borders in the Lake Chad region are facilitating the smuggling of weapons, to the benefit of both criminal and jihadist groups. Jihadist, criminal and intercommunal violence has severely impacted civilians in the Lake Chad region, including through rising displacement and human rights abuses by national and regional armed forces. Meanwhile, the appointment of an interim military

government in Chad and the #EndSARS political protest movement in Nigeria are evidence of growing political instability and popular discontent, which may affect governments' ability to respond to insecurity across the their territory.

A militarised counterterrorism response

In response to the expansion of jihadist activity, Lake Chad countries launched the 'Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to fight Boko Haram' with French support in 2012. The French Operation Barkhane has a permanent base in Chad's capital N'Djamena, close to the Lake Chad basin. In Nigeria, the national army has managed to push back ISWAP factions to a few remaining areas, but these victories have not managed to stifle the group's expansion to Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Several logistical issues continue to hamper efforts to stabilise the region, including lacking military manpower and overstretched troops. The absence of decentralised military commands and coordination between units in the Nigerian army has made military responses less efficient, while the fragility of the Chadian army also threatens to destabilise counterterrorism operations. Meanwhile, the governor of Nigeria's Borno state, one of the most affected by jihadist violence, has asked federal authorities to enlist mercenaries to fight ISWAP. However, contracting private military companies involves several risks, including the inability to hold them accountable for abuses. In response to persisting ISWAP activity, Nigerian authorities have incorporated a non-military approach to the issue, by launching Operation Safe Corridor in 2016. This disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation (DDR) programme is there to create incentives for those seeking to leave the group. However, the programme is facing criticism, including over dismal living conditions in facilities for demobilised combatants – issues that threaten to deter donors and defecting combatants alike.

Great Lakes region: Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) is one of the oldest militant armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa. The ADF is highly secretive and its ties to foreign jihadist movements remain unclear. Since 2017, the ADF has stepped up attacks in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), targeting military forces, civilians and humanitarian workers. Military efforts to disband the ADF have failed, particularly due to the vastness of the territory and the multitude of other armed groups that dominate eastern DRC.

The ADF was formed in 1995 in Uganda as a merger between the puritanical Muslim Tabliq movement and the remnants of the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), seeking to overthrow President Yoweri Museveni's (1986-present) government. However, a series of military operations in 1995-2003 forced the ADF to take refuge in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu in eastern DRC. While the group conducts periodic raids into Uganda, it mostly carries out attacks in eastern DRC. The ADF's first leader, Jamil Mukulu, was trained in militant camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan and therefore had close ties to foreign jihadist movements. Mukulu was arrested in 2015 in Tanzania and replaced by the ADF's current leader, Musa Seka Baluku, who reportedly pledged allegiance to ISIL/Da'esh in 2016. Part of the group now reportedly operates under the Islamic State

Table 3 – Allied Democratic Forces

Area of operation	Eastern DRC provinces of Ituri and North Kivu
Leadership	Jamil Mukulu (~2000-2015) Musa Seka Baluku (2015-present)
Recruitment	From Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and DRC
Tactics	Periodic attacks against FARDC and MONUSCO forces, civilians and humanitarian workers
Income source	Illicit cross-border trade in coffee, timber and gold
Fatalities	Responsible for 254 deaths in 2019 (89% civilians)

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace & EPRS, 2021.

Central Africa Province (ISCAP) label. While ISIL/Da'esh claimed responsibility for an ADF attack in 2019, it has never publicly acknowledged the group as an ally. The ADF is a highly secretive group, but it is suspected of having ties to local militias (known as Mai Mai groups) and has previously served as a proxy in border conflicts between DRC and Uganda. These historical ties to other powerful actors in the region help explain the group's resilience for over a decade.

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Heartland of armed groups

The eastern parts of DRC are not only experiencing jihadist violence but also continual insecurity caused by a multitude of other armed groups dating back to the Congo Wars (1996-2003). For the past two decades, these groups have carried out sustained attacks against national armed forces, UN troops and civilians, and control large swaths of territory. This widespread insecurity is particularly due to the absence of the state in this region, as well as the porousness of the Uganda-DRC border. As a consequence, there are over 5 million internally displaced persons in DRC due to conflict and violence, predominantly in the eastern part of the country. Several Ebola outbreaks have also significantly increased the demand for humanitarian aid, but the presence of armed groups has made it difficult for NGOs to gain access and navigate a highly insecure region. DRC remains one of the world's most neglected humanitarian crises, with 19.6 million people in need of assistance.

Responses to insecurity in the Great Lakes

International humanitarian and peacekeeping actors have been present in the eastern parts of DRC for at least two decades, and the EU supports several development projects and provides humanitarian assistance there as well. Alongside these efforts, the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUSCO) (see Table 1) has been active since 2010 and has carried out several operations against armed groups, including the ADF, alongside the Congolese national armed forces (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, FARDC). FARDC have also carried out their own operations in parallel and managed to significantly weaken the ADF over the 2019-2020 period. However, these combined military efforts have failed to eradicate the ADF's activity, and it has become the region's deadliest armed group. In March 2021, the US State Department designated the ADF (which it calls 'ISIS-DRC') as a foreign terrorist organisation; however this could negatively affect humanitarian efforts in the region despite boosting international involvement. In May 2021, DRC President Félix Tshisekedi announced a 'state of siege' in eastern DRC due to a stark rise in conflict-related deaths, imposing a military administration and martial law in the region. While the army has reportedly gained control of new areas since Tshisekedi's announcement, violent attacks have persisted in other locations.

Insecurity in the Horn: Al-Shabaab and Islamic State Somalia

Jihadist group Al-Shabaab has been active in the Horn of Africa since the 1990s, emerging as an offspring of an insurgent group that had been active during the Somalian civil war. Since then, it has kept the country in a perpetual state of insecurity and expanded its reach to neighbouring Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Despite heavy military investment by foreign and regional actors, Al-Shabaab remains highly active. Following the collapse of the Said Barre military regime in Somalia in 1991, another jihadist group, Al-Itihaad al-Islami (AIAI), emerged alongside other rebel groups competing to fill the ensuing power vacuum. Al-Shabaab was financially and ideologically supported by Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin-Laden who helped train several of its leaders. In the early 2000s, Al-Shabaab joined forces with an alliance of sharia courts known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and occupied the Somali capital Mogadishu. In 2006, the Ethiopian military intervention on Somali soil led to the fragmentation of the ICU-AIAI and left behind the more radical group of Al-Shabaab. Despite the appointment of a civilian government in Somalia, civil war continues to rage across the country, allowing Al-Shabaab to remain active. Under the leadership of Ahmed Abdi Godane, the group pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012. After Godane was killed by a US drone strike in 2014, Abu Ubaidah took over its command.

Fragile statehood and regional expansion

Table 4 – Al-Shabaab

📍	**Area of operation**	Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania
👑	**Leadership**	Abdi Godane (~2006-2014) Abu Ubaidah (2014-present)
🤝	**Recruitment**	Forced recruitment of women and children, but also voluntary recruits, mainly marginalised youths; ideological messages communicated in Swahili
🔺	**Tactics**	Cross-border attacks, suicide bombings, hostage-taking
💵	**Income source**	Piracy, kidnapping and extortion, illegal taxation
☠	**Fatalities**	578 deaths attributed in 2019

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace & EPRS, 2021.

The persistence of Al-Shabaab in the Horn can largely be attributed to the lack of state presence and the widespread insecurity caused by others involved in the Somalian civil war. The country ranks 2nd out of 179 countries in the 2021 Fragile States Index. The Somali government continues to struggle to control large swaths of the territory, and the conflict with separatist forces in Jubbaland has contributed to pushing Al-Shabaab towards the Kenyan border. Since 2010, the group has conducted cross-border attacks into Uganda and Kenya. Its most deadly incursions include the attacks on Kampala, Uganda, in 2010, and on the Westgate mall (2013) and a hotel complex (2019) in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2019, casualties caused by the group increased by 14 % in Somalia and 83 % in Kenya according to the 2020 Global Terrorism Index. Corruption in the Kenyan security sector, discrimination against Muslim communities in Uganda, and illicit trade along regional borders threaten to further promote Al-Shabaab's expansion.

Counterterrorism: From military offensive to community outreach

Since the Ethiopian intervention on Somalian territory in 2006, international actors have remained present in Somalia amid continuing insecurity. The African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been operational since 2007 and the UN Mission (UNSOM) since 2013. Between 2007 and 2019, the EU provided over €1.94 billion to AMISOM through the African Peace Facility; in addition to this, there are two CSDP missions deployed in Somalia, namely the EUTM Somalia military mission (since 2010) and the civilian mission EUCAP Somalia (since 2016). Despite these international stabilisation efforts, security remains fragile, and the prospect of AMISOM's withdrawal threatens to further erode it. Some experts see the EUTM's lack of field mentoring capabilities and the Somalian defence forces' lack of coordination and adequate military equipment as additional factors compromising security.

The new European Peace Facility may help to address some of these shortcomings of a military nature (see details below). Yet, the Council on Foreign Relations warns that stability in Somalia 'depends on more than just counterterrorism', and says that weak state structures and the lack of a legitimate government are root causes of insecurity. In fact, the October 2021 elections are likely to raise levels of violence, and particularly jihadist activity. In Kenya, failure to achieve lasting results through a counterterrorism approach compelled the authorities to adopt a community-based response to combat jihadist activity in 2015, which succeeded in limiting the expansion of Al-Shabaab on Kenyan territory. However, Tanzanian authorities have adopted a centralised security-focused approach, similar to Kenya's initial strategy, which threatens to become counter-productive by fuelling intercommunal tensions and pushing youth towards military groups.

Mozambique's Cabo Delgado: Al-Sunna wa Jamma (ASWJ)

Table 5 – Ansar al-Sunna

📍 **Area of operation**	Cabo Delgado province, northern Mozambique
👑 **Leadership**	Musa (Gambia) & Nuro Adremane (Mozambique) (former) Abu Yasir Hassan (current)
🤝 **Recruitment**	Communities impacted by poverty; youth recruitment
⚠️ **Tactics**	Attacks near mining sites and on government facilities, beheadings, kidnappings
💵 **Income sources**	Illicit trade in wood, charcoal, ivory and rubber; foreign and domestic donations
☠️ **Attacks & fatalities**	3 100 deaths from organised violence and 917 violent incidents (2017-2021)

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace & EPRS, 2021.

While jihadist activity in northern Mozambique dates back to the mid-2000s, a significant increase in violence in the past year has brought attention to the severity of the Cabo Delgado insurgency. Ansar al-Sunna, also known as Al-Sunna wa Jamma (ASWJ) or 'ISIS-Mozambique' (US State Department), which first emerged as an armed group in October 2017, has probably gained in attraction by leveraging social and economic community grievances among Muslim youth living along the coast. Ansar al-Sunna has stepped up its attacks in the resource-rich Cabo Delgado province; in August 2020, it took control of the strategic port of Mocimboa da Praia. In August 2021, Mozambican and Rwandan government forces took control of Mocimboa da Praia. The ASWJ's attack has claimed more than 3 100 lives and displaced over 817 000 persons.

Emergence of ASWJ: From local grievances to jihadist insurgency

The Ansar al-Sunna movement ideology was inspired by the teachings of the late radical Kenyan preacher, Sheikh Aboud Rogo, whose videos circulated across east Africa in Swahili. Ansar al-Sunna set itself apart from the dominant Sufi Muslim ideology in the region by adopting the more radical Salafist ideology, establishing its own mosques and madrassas to recruit local youths under the leadership of a Gambian known as 'Musa' and of a Mozambican called Nuro Adremane. Adremane was trained in Somalia and many young recruits also received their education in foreign countries, including Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Sudan and Saudi Arabia. Ansar al-Sunna gained national and regional attention after its 2017 attack on the port of Mocimboa da Praia. The group gradually stepped up its attacks; its 2021 attack on the city of Palma resulted in the suspension of the Total gas project nearby. The group reportedly pledged allegiance to ISIL/Da'esh in 2018 and has ties to the Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP). It has significantly expanded its area of control within Mozambique as well as parts of southern Tanzania since 2020.

Exacerbating factors

Ansar al-Sunna's activity is partly a reaction to local grievances against the central Mozambican government and multinational companies extracting natural resources. Indeed, the Cabo Delgado province is among the country's poorest, with high youth unemployment and little government investment. While it is the African region with most international investment in resource extraction (such as petroleum, gas and gemstones), employment at these sites has mostly gone to foreigners. Moreover, such projects often involve the expropriation of local land for multinationals without proper compensation to local communities. Private security firms contracted by mining companies have been accused of human rights abuses against miners and the local population, for example at the UK's Gemfield site in Montepuez. These issues are a long-standing source of popular discontent and are suspected to be a major reason behind the jihadist violence currently unfolding in Cabo Delgado. The lack of a strong state presence in Cabo Delgado has largely fuelled a variety of threats

to security across the region. Unpoliced borders have allowed for the recruitment of foreign fighters by Ansar al-Sunna, while local militia groups have been emerging to combat jihadist violence. The region has long been a breeding ground for organised crime, including heroin trade along the coastline, with criminal networks suspected of having links to the insurgency. Moreover, the existence of almost 700 000 internally displaced people due to the conflict threatens to create pressure on neighbouring provinces and spread the insecurity to areas south of Cabo Delgado.

Counterterrorism response

Mozambican authorities have responded to the insurgency through military means and with support from external actors. The US provided a special-forces detachment to train national defence forces in March 2021, while the EU launched a military mission, EUTM Mozambique, on 12 July 2021. The military training mission in Mozambique was a priority of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU. The commander is Portuguese Brigadier-General Nuno Lemos Pires; it should thus be operational on the ground in early October 2021, with an expected duration of 28 months. Portugal has confirmed that it will deploy 60 supporting troops to the country, as part of a defence cooperation plan due to last until 2026. On a regional level, Tanzania and South Africa have so far declined to participate in counterterrorism efforts, although Tanzanian troops allegedly fired a rocket into Mozambican territory in November 2020. The South African Development Community (SADC) decided in April 2021 that it would send a technical team to coordinate joint action with the Mozambican government. Mozambican authorities have also hired private military contractors to combat the insurgency. These private firms, alongside the Mozambican forces, have allegedly committed severe human rights abuses, raising concerns that the conflict is exacerbating violent behaviour on all sides. In March 2021, the US State Department designated ASWJ ('ISIS-Mozambique') as a foreign terrorist organisation, which may have harmful consequences on the provision of humanitarian aid and funding to the region. Experts suggest that the key to stabilising Cabo Delgado lies beyond a military response and suggest addressing state absence, poor governance, and the lack of economic development as ways to reduce jihadist recruitment and expansion across borders. Following the victory of the Mozambican and the Rwandan military over the insurgency in Mocimboa da Praia in August 2021, the government of Mozambique will facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to Mocimboa da Praia, meeting its obligations under the Kampala Convention (an African Union treaty on internal displacement) and international humanitarian law.

The European Parliament's position

The European Parliament (EP) has passed a number of resolutions addressing jihadist violence in sub-Saharan Africa, its causes and consequences, and EU responses (see Table 6). The EP has raised concerns about the increase of jihadist violence in Nigeria and Mozambique, as well as repressive government responses to jihadist activity in Burkina Faso. It has also warned of the security implications of the military takeover of the Chadian government, both for national and regional counterterrorism operations. Parliament has consistently advocated for stronger EU cooperation with African countries on security issues particularly in regions affected by jihadist terrorism, namely the Sahel, West Africa and the Horn of Africa. The EP has pushed for strengthening EU CSDP missions, including by improving their flexibility and providing partners with military equipment.

European Parliament supported the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (or the Global Europe Instrument, which is part of the 2021-2017 multiannual financial framework) and allocation of €29 181 million (in current prices) to sub-Saharan Africa; €6 358 million for the instrument's thematic component, including stability and peace; and €3 182 million for rapid response to conflicts and humanitarian crises. Through this instrument, the EU will be able to finance a wide range of projects both to bolster short-term security responses and address long-term needs in conflict-affected areas across sub-Saharan Africa. EP also endorsed the European Peace Facility (EPF), a new off-budget fund, through which the EU will be able to supply military equipment to partners, including those struggling with high levels of jihadist activity.

Table 6 – Selected EP resolutions on insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa, issued since 2019

Resolutions / Main topics	Security concerns	EU responses	Humanitarian situation and human rights	Issues of governance
Implementation of the CSDP (2021)	✓	✓		
EU-African security cooperation (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The humanitarian situation in Mozambique (2020)	✓		✓	✓
The situation in Chad (2020)	✓		✓	✓
Nigeria terrorist attacks (2020)	✓		✓	✓
Implementation of the CSDP (2020)	✓	✓		
Arms exports (2020)	✓	✓		
Violations of human rights … in Burkina Faso (2019)	✓		✓	✓
Decision establishing a European Peace Facility (2019)	✓	✓		

Source: European Parliament, 2021.

However, some warn that practical use of the EPF will require strong political oversight and that the EPF risks fuelling rather than stabilising conflicts by strengthening repressive military forces. Nevertheless, the European Parliament is eager to address a number of emerging and hybrid security threats, and also wishes that the EU will boost its credibility as a reliable security partner. Although the EU may have invested increased budgetary resources, military missions and political capital in handling terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa, there is still a major mismatch between the scale of violence affecting this region and the EU's response. As an alternative to increasing military responses, experts suggest re-evaluating approaches to jihadist violence across sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the Institute for Security Studies, jihadist groups are increasingly able to withstand military offensives and 'their job is made easier when states have weak security institutions, poor governance and large ungoverned spaces'. More coordinated international responses, such as the operationalisation of the African Standby Force (ASF), confirmed at the July 2021 African Union summit, could regroup and strengthen the multiple ongoing joint forces and responses across the continent. Moreover, as suggested by the International Crisis Group, counterterrorism responses must also address the root causes of radicalisation; among other things, this includes addressing intercommunal tensions, poverty, issues related to the freedom of religion or belief and providing basic public services in regions affected by jihadist violence.

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