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Terrorism is highly dependent on cash flows for the purchase of everything from munitions and supplies to domains and pamphlets. Traditionally, one of the more challenging aspects of organizing international terrorist activities is rooted in financial transactions. The transfer of money around the world has, in the last decade, fundamentally changed the way terrorist organizations raise money to support their activities. Digital currencies like e-gold, Bitcoin, Peercoin, and Dodgecoin provide complex yet efficient mechanisms for the transfer of funds, as well as the decentralized collection of donations in a more anonymous manner than conventional banking transactions. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that terrorists are considering and, in limited instances, using digital currencies such as Bitcoin to finance activities.\(^1\) While these tools have gained in popularity, in recent years their expansion into various terrorist organizations has been slow and deliberate and has not matched pace with transnational criminal uses of these same technologies.

For the purposes of this article, the term “terrorist organization” does not include the hacktivist community, which has already demonstrated widespread utilization of these technologies. Here, the term is limited to “international terrorism” as outlined in 18 U.S.C. § 2331 - Chapter 113B. This definition is an important caveat as it frames the scope of the analysis to a specific community of actors and acknowledges that the use of these technologies has

\(^1\) This has been witnessed by tracking conversations of jihadists within various internet chat rooms and forums.
been demonstrated and documented by other actors contained within a broader definition of terrorism.

This article is designed to demonstrate the advantages and limitations of the use of digital currencies by illicit actors, specifically jihadis. Focus is placed on the technological problems posed to terrorist organizations in leveraging these currencies, as well as the benefits associated with their use. Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates, in brief, the technical challenges faced by law enforcement and intelligence agencies engaged in anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) endeavors.

**Shortcomings in the Old Way of Doing Business**

The U.S. Department of the Treasury and other government agencies recognize that terrorist organizations use a variety of methods to launder and finance terror activities. Two traditional methods that terrorist organizations have used for the financing and laundering of funds are traditional Hawala networks and conventional international banking. While the possibilities for financing terrorism extend to a wide array of methods ranging from robbery and narcotics to ransom and smuggling, it is valuable to limit the scope for analytical purposes to examining the functional and legal/regulatory challenges associated with digital currencies in the context of these historical terrorism financing methods.

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on both of these financing typologies. In the case of Hawala networks, the Department of the Treasury has provided extensive reports on their use to finance terror and launder money across borders. These networks implicitly rely on the trusted relationships of brokers within the network. While these traditional networks are efficient and difficult to track for transferring money from point A to B, they are at the same time inefficient for the decentralized collection of funds from multiple sources and the disbursement of those funds to single or multiple geographically dispersed end points. The limits imposed by a trust-based network constrain the dynamic collection and disbursement of funds within a terror network and slow down the process of funding, planning, and implementing attacks.

In contrast, conventional banking systems using ISO 9362 (SWIFT-BIC) or other modern commercial banking protocols/standards are efficient modes for conducting international financial transactions. The challenge here for terrorist groups is that these systems adhere to strong regulatory frameworks within codified national and international agreements such as those developed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The use of conventional banking systems unnecessarily exposes terrorist organizations to oversight by banks, law enforcement, and intelligence officials, which threatens their operational security.

In summary, the traditional option of Hawala and the conventional option of international banking pose unique risks for terrorist groups engaging in international financial transactions. The literature on AML/CFT efforts in these two areas is extensive. However, partly due to its novelty and partly due to its complexity, the evolving world of digital or crypto currencies like BitCoin and their impact on AML/CFT has been given substantially less attention.

**Beyond Convention and Tradition: New Methods for Financing Terror**

Much of the literature to date has focused on the functional aspects of crypto currencies and a narrow subset has focused on the practical implications of alternative pathways for financial transactions at both the national and international level. Two recent cases have elevated the role of digital currencies in the AML/CFT research space. The first major incident was the investigation, takedown, and indictment of Liberty Reserve and its founder. Liberty Reserve was a Costa Rica-based digital currency founded in 2006 and the successor to several digital gold currencies. The second incident, also culminating in 2013, was the investigation and takedown of Silk Road, an illicit online market functioning within the “Deep Web.”

Liberty Reserve functioned similarly to a conventional bank with a central ledger of transactions. However, Liberty Reserve embedded tacit anonymity by deliberately failing to mandate account holder validation. In other words, people who opened accounts were not required to provide any of the basic personally identifiable information that a conventional bank would require to conduct financial transactions. This tacit anonymity hid Liberty Reserve account holders’ activities from legal and regulatory oversight by law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Liberty Reserve added to the tacit anonymity of its users by requiring all users to deposit and withdraw funds from third-party “exchangers” to eliminate a direct paper trail to Liberty Reserve. The central objective was to

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2 Hawala – meaning transfer – is a pre-modern financial transfer system that facilitates the conduct of commerce through trusted informal networks.


4 This system provides unique identification codes for financial institutions. SWIFT-BIC stands for Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication Business Identifier Codes.


7 United States of America v Liberty Reserve S.A. No. USA-33s-274 (Ed. 9-25-58), United States District Court, Southern District of New York, May 2013.

8 “Deep Web” refers to the utilization of Tor networks to encrypt and hide web traffic.
avoid U.S. and international law and in the process create a black-market banking system. For terrorist groups, the global reach of Liberty Reserve combined with its ability to avoid revealing regulatory practices presented a solution to the problems associated with more traditional banking.9

Silk Road, unlike Liberty Reserve, was not a financial institution, but rather a commercial marketplace equivalent to an Amazon or Ebay for illicit merchandise.10 The marketplace made possible the sale of everything from narcotics to weaponry. Similar to purchasing a book on Amazon, customers of Silk Road could purchase drugs and guns from a variety of private sellers, all of whom connected anonymously to the market and all of whom used a digital currency to engage in transactions.11 The site was accessible only to users of Tor12 and conducted financial transactions through an emerging digital currency called Bitcoin (BTC).

Silk Road would not have been as successful at illicit e-commerce if it used credit cards and bank accounts which tie users to their transactions conducted in the deep web. To maintain the anonymity of the marketplace beyond access through Tor networks, the site relied on Bitcoin, a secure, non-trust-based currency. Using third-party money “exchangers” would have been inefficient and limited the ability to engage in rapid e-commerce transactions. If Silk Road had used a service such as Liberty Reserve, every user would have had to register with Liberty Reserve and one or more third-party “exchangers” willing to convert Liberty Reserve currency. To engage in any given transaction, currency would have needed to be converted or transferred at least three times.13 To overcome this problem, the site leveraged a new digital currency type that had only been conceptualized a year earlier.

The marketplace

“The marketplace was designed to eliminate the consisting of more than 5,000 relays. crypting and directing internet traffic through a network Tor is free software that enables anonymity by en

Southern District of New York, February 4, 2014. 33s-274 (Ed. 9-25-58), United States District Court, "Silk Road would not have been as successful at illicit e-commerce if it used credit cards and bank accounts which tie users to their transactions conducted in the deep web.”

Bitcoin14 was designed to eliminate the need for trust through mathematical proof of work. Trust and the ability to ensure the security and reliability of transactions are crucial to sustained iterative commerce. The ability to ensure trust in a digital currency was a major turning point that has largely facilitated the success of Bitcoin. Although Bitcoin was not designed with anonymity in mind, its construction provides anonymity to its users as evidenced in the 2013 indictment of Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht.15 All conventional Bitcoin transactions are transparent and by design open for all participants in the Bitcoin network to view. In other words, every transaction ever conducted in Bitcoin is recorded and distributed to every other user in the network. Instead of providing

9 A more detailed analysis of the inner workings of Liberty Reserve is provided in the 2013 Federal indictment: United States of America v Liberty Reserve S.A., 2013.
12 Tor is free software that enables anonymity by encrypting and directing internet traffic through a network consisting of more than 5,000 relays.
13 In contrast, Bitcoin requires only one mathematical proof and any given transaction takes between 10 minutes and 24 hours, far less time than a comparable Liberty Reserve transaction.
14 In 2008, under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto, a concept paper for a decentralized cryptographic peer-to-peer digital currency was published. The concepts presented in this paper led to the creation of a digital currency rooted in cryptographic proofs (mathematical equations) based on a cryptographic hash (the present block), the hash of the previous transaction (previous block), and what is called a nonce (a generated pseudo random number). Together these form what is called the “block chain.” To ensure there is security of the mathematical proof, each hash can be solved by only one nonce. To complete each stage of the block chain, any given computer in the network must continuously try out different numbers until it finds the correct nonce to complete the segment of the chain. Each segment of the chain is unique and formed by adding the preceding portions of the chain to the current block.

Because each transaction is the result of a hash-based (mathematical) proof-of-work requiring significant computational power, it is probabilistically unlikely that any one user can double spend any given Bitcoin. The ability to double spend was a fundamental problem associated with

“Unless terrorist organizations can sufficiently educate all members that use crypto currencies to do so at a very high level, the use of these networks may leave the overall organization vulnerable.”

earlly concepts of digital currencies, as the validation process might make it possible for an individual to essentially purchase things from two different vendors using the same currency value at the same time without either vendor knowing that the money used to purchase a good or service had already been spent.

Since there is no central oversight mechanism like a bank or in the case of cash, physical currency, the creators of Bitcoin minimized potential manipulation of the system by creating a mathematical means to ensure the validity of each transaction in relation to the balances present in a consumer’s account. Therefore, because every user in the network has a record of all transactions, it is highly unlikely that any given user can spoof (falsify) transactions so long as the majority of ledgers in the network indicate a transaction has occurred. This creates a non-trust-based verification that provides every user with knowledge of every transaction that has ever taken place since Bitcoin started in 2009.
While the transactions themselves are not hidden, the individuals engaged in the transactions are largely anonymous.

Even though Bitcoin users do not provide any direct PII, they are not completely anonymous. Users can be tracked by a careful examination of transactions, primarily by analyzing the repeated use of specific public keys that direct funds for payment. Investigators can use technologically advanced analytical techniques to map user transactions across the network and pair them across datasets to find individual network users. Essentially, constructing a pattern of behavior based on transactions can reveal tremendous amounts of information about a user, to include where they shopped, how much they spent, the frequency of transactions, and any transactions with a party that collected PII.

These discovery techniques are time-consuming and imperfect, but have been successful in reducing the anonymity of Bitcoin users who use the same public key for multiple transactions. Similarly, analysts use these techniques to reduce or remove the anonymity of users who use multiple sets of public keys to complete transactions in an attempt to maintain anonymity. This can provide an opening for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to begin work on deconstructing a terrorist finance network. Specifically, the more transactions made to a single or set of public keys, the less likely it is that the parties involved will maintain anonymity in a distributed funding or donation network. Unless terrorist organizations can sufficiently educate all members that use crypto currencies to do so at a very high level, the use of these networks may leave the overall organization vulnerable.

Jihadists Discuss Crypto Currencies

Individuals interested in jihad seem to be paying attention to this complexity and have posted YouTube videos, discussions links, and links to research on the anonymity of Bitcoin on various discussion boards. These same individuals have spent time and effort to discuss the problems of financing associated with jihad. One user even explicitly writes about the potential to purchase weapons and ammunition and the ability to exchange digital currency for hard currency. Yet despite this optimism, the same user goes on to discuss the level of technical expertise required by users to engage in financial transactions using Bitcoin.20

These forum discussions are important in the context of AML/CFT research as they highlight a deliberate effort on the part of individuals associated with jihadist movements to understand a new and evolving technology to raise money for terrorist activities. While these discussions indicate an asymmetry in the level of knowledge between more technical jihadists and their less technical counterparts, they also illustrate an effort by more technical members of the community to inform and educate their peers on the proper use of digital currencies. Moreover, there are direct references to using digital currencies to transfer money into countries where conventional or traditional methods of financial transactions are difficult due to a lack of network capacity or surveillance and regulation.

Although some websites affiliated with terrorist organizations have begun collecting Bitcoin donations, this practice appears to be relatively limited. One example would be http://kavkazcenter.com. It is possible that as the technical capacity of these organizations increases, their use of digital currencies will also increase. This increase is likely to be small, however, in relation to overall terror financing through other channels such as hawala, kidnapping, front companies, narcotics sales, oil sales, and many more.

17 Ibid.
19 These are some of the links that have been posted on jihadist discussion boards: http://youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Um63OQz3bjo#!,
http://bitcoinweekly.com/articles/how-bitcoin-security-works-by-analogy,
20 These discussions were posted to the Shumukh al-Islam Network on April 29, 2013.
Conclusion
Given the interest that terrorist organizations have shown in leveraging digital currencies, their use of such mediums for conducting financial transactions will only increase in the future. The development of digital currencies poses a long-term challenge to law enforcement and intelligence agencies as the technical skill of their targets and the level of complexity of the currencies available increase.

Yet, because these currencies are all based on the mathematics that serve as the foundation for modern cryptography, it is possible that their use might also offer opportunities for the tracking of illicit behavior. Herein lies the dilemma of using digital currencies. As one person develops a cryptographic algorithm allowing transactions to be more anonymous, another person immediately begins work on solving it to peel back the anonymity. Cryptography is a never-ending mathematical and computational arms race and crypto currencies, such as Bitcoin, are likely affected as better algorithms and more powerful computers are developed.

Both terrorists and governments will likely struggle to leverage these tools to their advantage in the coming years. The main takeaway, however, is that when certain pathways for financing terrorist activities become more difficult, there are increasingly going to be alternative means available to finance terror and launder money as technology and technological skills increase.

Aaron Brantly is Assistant Professor of International Relations and Cybersecurity in the Department of Social Sciences, Cyber Policy Fellow at the Army Cyber Institute, and Cyber Policy Fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

Boko Haram: Recruitment, Financing, and Arms Trafficking in the Lake Chad Region
By Jacob Zenn
In July 2014, Cameroon’s Defense Ministry announced that Boko Haram was a growing threat in the Lake Chad region and now has approximately 15,000 to 20,000 members.1 A Nigerian journalist with longstanding contacts with Boko Haram, however, says that Boko Haram has up to 50,000 members.2 Even the lower estimate of the two would mean Boko Haram has similar manpower as militant groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and pro-Russian militias in eastern Ukraine.3 The higher estimate may be correct if “members” include not only armed militants but also individuals who cooperate with Boko Haram, whether intentionally or coerced. Using this inclusive definition of “members,” two of Boko Haram’s newest recruitment profiles are of forcible conscripts, especially teenage boys and girls, and financiers, who are primarily businessmen, arms traffickers, and kidnappers in Cameroon.

This article reviews Boko Haram’s recruitment from the time its leader, Abubakar Shekau, declared jihad against Nigeria and the United States in 2010 until the present. It then discusses the role of forcible conscripts and financiers in Boko Haram operations in 2014. The article finds that the strategic shift of Boko Haram’s armed militants to seize and hold local government areas (LGAs) in its self-described caliphate in northeastern Nigeria explains why it increasingly requires forcible recruits and financiers in its membership network.5

Ideology, Economic Vulnerability, and Infiltration
After Nigerian security forces killed Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf in clashes with his followers in July 2009, Yusuf’s deputy, Shekau, emerged as his successor.6 Shekau’s loyalists included Yusuf’s disciples who found inspiration in al-Qa’ida’s style of militancy and Yusuf’s and Shekau’s call for a “pure” Islamic state in Nigeria. Boko Haram also attracted criminals that members recruited in prison and were freed in rescue operations, including the first attack under Shekau on Bauchi prison in September 2010.7

Boko Haram’s operations in late 2010 required minimal training, such as drive-by assassinations of local politicians and religious leaders, who were “guilty” of mixing Islam with “infidel” notions of democracy, secularism and

1 The group Boko Haram identifies itself as Jama’at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da’ wa wa al-Jihad, which is Arabic for “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad.” The term “Boko Haram” means “Western education is sinful” in the Hausa language.
3 The journalist mentioned was Ahmed Salkida. See Emmanuel Elebeke, “Boko Haram has 50,000 Members in its Camp,” Vanguard, August 28, 2014.
5 Nigeria has 774 local government areas (LGAs), including more than 20 in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa that are considered under Boko Haram’s control as of October 2014. See “Boko Haram Leader Proclaims ‘Islamic Caliphate’ in Nigeria,” Vanguard, August 24, 2014.
Western education. Boko Haram also paid small fees to fruit sellers and al-majiri\(^8\) boys to scout on security forces and burn down churches and schools.\(^9\) However, when Boko Haram began carrying out sophisticated bombings, such as on churches on Christmas Day in 2010 and the Federal Police Headquarters and UN Building in 2011, and kidnapping foreigners in 2012, it relied on Nigerians who received funding or training from abroad with al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and who were part of Ansaru’s\(^10\) sbura (leadership council).\(^11\)

Ansaru, in particular, acquired inside information to carry out key attacks, including the ambush of Nigerian troops in Kogi before they deployed to Mali in January 2013, the rescue of several dozen Boko Haram members from the Special Anti-robbery Squad prison in Abuja in November 2012, and kidnappings of foreign engineers in northwest Nigeria in 2012.\(^12\) Boko Haram similarly has cooperated with several rogue customs officers in northeastern Nigeria, who turn a blind eye to cross-border arms trafficking.\(^13\)

Forcible Conscripts: Chibok as a Turning Point

The kidnapping of more than 250 girls, mostly Christians, in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria on April 14, 2014, brought international attention to Boko Haram’s forcible recruitment. Yet that incident was neither the first nor last time Boko Haram employed the tactic. Boko Haram militants and their wives began kidnapping young girls in early 2013 to use as assets to trade in prisoner exchanges, use as decoys to lure troops into ambushes, and serve as porters and cooks.\(^14\) Two days before the Chibok kidnapping, on April 12, 2014, Boko Haram took several girls from a college in Dikwa, Borno State. In addition, on April 19, May 5, and June 10, 2014, the militants took more than 40 girls from towns near Chibok, and on October 20, 2014, took 45 more girls from Wagga, Adamawa State and “married” the young ones after the Nigerian government reported an agreement with Boko Haram on releasing the Chibok schoolgirls, which did not materialize.\(^15\) Internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled Borno estimate that Boko Haram may have abducted between 500 and 2,000 women since 2013, but most incidents go unreported.\(^16\)

Only after the Chibok kidnapping did Boko Haram start using women in operations, including the wives of slain or arrested militants and beggars who were offered a “few naira notes.”\(^17\) During the month of Ramadan in June 2014, there were six female suicide bombers, all under 16-years-old, who carried out four attacks at universities and fuel stations in Kano, a military barracks in Kano, and a fuel station in Lagos. In addition, one 10-year-old girl was detected with a suicide vest in Katsina in July 2014.\(^18\)

The explosives were placed under the girls’ bijabs or clothing and detonated remotely, possibly without them knowing.\(^19\) There was media speculation that they were from Chibok. However, it appears more likely they were among the dozens of girls recruited by Boko Haram’s “female wing” in Kano, which was led by Hafsat Bako. She is the widow of a deceased Boko Haram commander and was based in Borno’s Sambisa Forest, where some of the Chibok girls were initially held, and her arrest in June 2014 coincided with the end of the series of female suicide bombings.\(^20\) Her role in the female wing and in Sambisa Forest therefore suggests an operational link between the kidnapping in Chibok and the deployment of the female suicide bombers.

\(^{17}\) Naira is the national currency of Nigeria. See “Kano Bombings’ Traced to Female Beggars,” Thsi Day, August 4, 2014.
\(^{19}\) “Women, Kids as Suicide Bombers,” Vanguard, August 15, 2014.

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\(^{8}\) Al-majiri (literally meaning “migrants,” derived from the Arabic word musabir) are young Islamic students in northern Nigeria, who beg for alms in return for shelter and Qur’anic lessons from local leaders. There are millions of al-majiri students in northern Nigeria, with many in Kano and Borno. See “Al Majiri Education: Journey to Nowhere,” Vanguard, April 19, 2012.


\(^{10}\) Jama’atu Ansaril Muslimeen bi Biladis Sudan (Ansaru) was founded in January 2012 by former Nigerian AQIM militants, who focused on kidnapping foreigners and bombing churches in the Middle Belt in Nigeria. It, however, ideologically opposed Boko Haram’s use of takfiri ideology to justify the killing of Muslims.

\(^{11}\) These leaders included Yusuf’s former third-in-command, the Cameroonien Mannan Nur, and U.S. specially designated Nigerian terrorists Adam Kambar and Khalid al-Barnawi.


\(^{16}\) Author’s interview of journalists who interviewed IDPs in Gombe and Adamawa States. Salihu Garba, “Yan Nai Beach: 250 Women, Girls,” This Day, August 15, 2014.

\(^{17}\) Naira is the national currency of Nigeria. See “Kano Bombings’ Traced to Female Beggars,” Thsi Day, August 4, 2014.


\(^{19}\) “Women, Kids as Suicide Bombers,” Vanguard, August 15, 2014.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
bombers, even though the schoolgirls were likely not the bombers.

**Legitimizing the Chibok Kidnapping via Historical Manipulation and ISIL**

The future of many of the schoolgirls kidnapped in Chibok and other towns in northeastern Nigeria is likely as “wives” of militants (“slaves” in Shekau’s own words). As “wives,” their value to Boko Haram is greater than as bartering chips in an increasingly improbable deal with the Nigerian government because of Boko Haram’s dispersal of the girls into multiple groups and their inability to reconvene all, or even half, of the girls if a deal were reached. Even if Boko Haram returned 90% of the Chibok schoolgirls, the militants would still have more than 20 girls from Chibok and hundreds of other girls to leverage in future negotiations or keep enslaved. In a potential deal, the militants would also likely demand territorial concessions from the Nigerian government that would guarantee Boko Haram sovereignty in dozens of LGAs in northeastern Nigeria under its control.

Shekau, who praised the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’s (ISIL) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a July 2014 video statement, declared these LGAs as “part” of an Islamic State in a separate video statement released in October 2014. The video featured ISIL’s *rayat al-uqab* flag behind Shekau and played ISIL’s signature nasheed, *My Umma, Dawn Has Arrived*, as background music while Shekau made the declaration, signaling that Boko Haram sees its caliphate as part of al-Baghdadi’s. Boko Haram will legitimize the “slavery” of the Chibok schoolgirls based on a textual interpretation of the Qur’an and the support the kidnapping received from ISIL as well as al-Shabab. ISIL cited the “Nigerian mujahidin” in the October 2014 edition of its magazine *Dabiq* as precedent for ISIL’s own kidnapping of several hundred non-Muslim Yazidi women in northern Iraq, who ISIL forced to become “sex slaves” of militants. Boko Haram therefore may not be carrying out kidnappings of women in 2014 for the same purposes it kidnapped women in 2012 and 2013. Rather, Boko Haram, like ISIL, may be seeking to revive practices that were virtually non-existent since the end of the last caliphate era in Nigeria (and Iraq and the Levant) in the early 20th century. Such practices include kidnapping mostly non-Muslim girls to “contribute their children to the next generation” of the caliphate and *hadd* punishments, such as beheading, stoning, whipping, and hand-cutting of “criminals,” which Boko Haram carries out in LGAs under its control.

**Forgible Recruitment of Teenage Boys**

Since the Chibok kidnapping in April 2014, Boko Haram has increasingly kidnapped teenage boys in northeastern Nigeria and “re-educated” them at Qur’anic schools that are often in Cameroon. Signposts in Arabic language that Boko Haram erected in Cameroonian border towns with ISIL’s *rayat al-uqab* insignia on them say, “It is a crime and treason not to join jihad.” This is likely Boko Haram’s justification for the forcible conscription and killing of boys (and girls) who refuse.

The militants use untrained boys to acquire intelligence and carry out the first wave of attacks on villages or barracks. When they gain experience, they can be part of the second wave designed to overwhelm the security forces after the first wave weakens their positions and morale. Boys may also be given a quota of how many security officers or “high value targets” they must attack, and risk death at the hands of their commanders if they fail or show “cowardice.”

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Boko Haram also appears to be focusing on Cameroon for its non-forcible recruitment of men, possibly because the destruction of villages in Nigeria has alienated youths and caused them to flee to IDP camps outside of Borno or join the anti-Boko Haram Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) vigilante group. In Cameroon, which until 2014 was spared from large-scale attacks, locals often consider Boko Haram “just another religious group” or “the boys.” According to Cameroonian police, there have been more than 500 new recruits in villages along the border with Nigeria, some of whom were “drugged or manipulated” in training camps. They provide Boko Haram with the ability to use Cameroon as a rear base for attacking Nigeria, to raise money through kidnapping foreigners, and to traffic weapons into Nigeria from Cameroonian border towns.

Financiers, Arms Traffickers and Kidnappings in Cameroon

When Boko Haram was an above ground movement before 2009, it had wealthy members who served as intermediaries between financial sponsors, such as local government officials or wealthy Salafists abroad, and Muhammad Yusuf. Now officials have distanced themselves from Boko Haram, while mainstream Salafist and al-Qaeda funding decreased as a result of Boko Haram’s massacres, the break-up of Ansaru’s shura in Kaduna in 2012, and the French-led military intervention in northern Mali in 2013, which disrupted the AQIM supply line to Boko Haram. However, Boko Haram has made inroads with new financiers, who are from Borno and bordering areas of Cameroon’s Extreme North Region and are often ethnic Kanuris like Yusuf, Shekau and most Boko Haram members. These financiers provide Boko Haram with weapons and a route to negotiation with the Cameroonian government in kidnapping-for-ransom operations.

One Cameroonian financier, Alhaji Abdalla, is a vehicle exporter based in Amchide whose business operations extend to Qatar (the vehicles likely move from Doha to other ports in Asia). He served as a key negotiator for Boko Haram in talks with the Cameroonian government for the release of the French Moulin-Fournier family of seven, which was kidnapped by Boko Haram (likely in coordination with Ansaru) in Waza (a town 16 miles east of Amchide) in February 2013. The government paid a $3.14 million ransom and released Boko Haram prisoners in April 2013 in exchange for the family.

In July 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped from Kolofata (a town three miles from Amchide) the town’s lamido (local ruler) and his family and the wife of Cameroon Deputy Prime Minister Amadou Ali, who represented the Cameroon side in negotiations for the recruitment of men, possibly because the destruction of villages in Nigeria has alienated youths and caused them to flee.

In October 2014, however, Boko Haram released the wife of Amadou Ali and the lamido and his family, along with 10 Chinese engineers who were kidnapped in April 2014 from Waza, after the Cameroonian government paid approximately $600,000 in ransom to cover the remaining payment for the Moulin-Fourniers. In addition, Cameroon released 30 prisoners, including some who were imprisoned in Maroua in July 2014 after being caught stockpiling weapons in the town of Kousseri on Cameroon’s border with Chad. Others released from prison included a leading Boko Haram recruiter, the mastermind of a kidnapping of two Italian priests and a Canadian nun in a town north of Maroua in June 2014, and the top Cameroonian Boko Haram commander, Abakar Ali. Abakar Ali had been arrested in September 2014 in Kousseri and revealed under interrogation that he coordinated arms trafficking with the mayor of Fotokol (a town on Cameroon’s border with Nigeria at Gambarou-Ngala), who was subsequently arrested with stockpiles of weapons at his residence.

Boko Haram has alienated youths and caused them to flee.
Cameroon also reportedly returned to Boko Haram some of the weapons and ammunition it confiscated from Boko Haram in Kousseri. 45

The pattern of Boko Haram kidnappings of foreigners in exchange for ransoms and the release of weapons traffickers occurred in several other instances. When Boko Haram kidnapped a French priest in “coordination” with Ansaru in November 2013 from a town 16 miles south of Amchide, the militants released him weeks later for a multi-million dollar ransom and a Kanuri weapons trafficker. 46 Boko Haram also released the two Italian priests and Canadian nun after several weeks in captivity in June 2014 in another prisoner exchange and ransom deal. 47

The tie between arms traffickers and Boko Haram commanders was also highlighted in key arrests in Cameroon. One Chadian weapons trafficker was arrested in Waza in June 2014 working on behalf of a Maroua-based Boko Haram commander and possessed $15,000 from deals that he made in Chad. 48 Days before his arrest, Cameroon uncovered weapons stockpiles in Maroua’s central market. 49 In addition, in June 2014, Cameroon discovered travel documents from Libya (Africa’s largest arms market since 2011) and Qatar and receipts from car exports to Qatar in a Boko Haram camp, which suggests a possible link to Alhaji Abdalla, who was Boko Haram’s negotiator in the Moulin-Fournier and other kidnappings. 50

Across the border in Nigeria, one of the financiers of the Chibok kidnapping and a plotter of the assassination of the amir of Gwoza was a Kanuri named Babaji Yaari, who runs a lucrative cart taxi business. 51 He coordinated the Chibok kidnapping with the leader of Boko Haram’s female wing, Hafsat Bako, who was discussed above. Bako was arrested based on the Nigerian security force’s interrogation of Yaari. 52 The transfer of many of the schoolgirls to Cameroon and Chad after the kidnapping suggests that Bako’s and Yaari’s network and the network of kidnappers, financiers, and arms traffickers in Cameroon likely overlap. 53

Conclusion
This article reveals several new trends in the Boko Haram insurgency. First, Boko Haram’s recruitment now includes hundreds, if not thousands, of forcibly conscripted boys and girls, who are often taken to and “re-educated” in


Boko Haram’s recruitment now includes hundreds, if not thousands, of forcibly conscripted boys and girls, who are often taken to and ‘re-educated’ in Cameroon.”

amirs as the militants gain control of more LGAs. 54 Moreover, the arrest of Tuaregs from Mali fighting for Boko Haram in Cameroon in September 2014 suggests that its kidnapping and arms trafficking operations may be attracting militants who can strengthen the cross-border insurgency in Nigeria and Cameroon. 55 Second, Boko Haram is increasingly launching operations in Cameroon’s Extreme North Region and attempting to seize control of Cameroon’s border towns, such as Fotokol, Amchide and Kolofata, to secure supply lines for receiving weapons from Chad and Libya for use in Nigeria. 56 Boko Haram may also seek to gain control of interior towns in Cameroon. This type of recruitment demonstrates Boko Haram’s need for more human resources to control territory in its self-described caliphate in northeastern Nigeria, and increasingly also in Cameroon. 54

The introduction of new commanders other than Abubakar Shekau, who was previously the only public face of Boko Haram, in videos of an attack in Gwoza in Borno State and the decapitation of a Nigerian air force pilot in August and October 2014 show Boko Haram’s intent to reveal new commanders and...
The “reunification.” Vol. 7. Issue 10
2

Boko Haram’s Regional Cross-Border Activities

By Scott Menner

ON JULY 27, 2014, over 200 Boko Haram militants stormed Kolofata, a town in Cameroon’s Extreme North Region. They targeted Vice Prime Minister Amadou Ali’s house, kidnapping his wife and sister-in-law, as well as Seini Lamine, a senior religious leader and the town’s mayor.1 The night before, Boko Haram killed four Cameroonian soldiers and kidnapped at least 13 others.2 Earlier in the month, Boko Haram kidnapped two sons of Bieshair Mohaman, Cameroon’s traditional leader in Limani on July 15, 2014.3 In northern Nigeria, authorities traced4 some of the explosives used in recent suicide attacks to a quarry in northern Cameroon that was raided by Boko Haram in May 2014.5 Boko Haram has targeted Niger as well. In December 2013, Nigerien authorities foiled a Boko Haram plot to kidnap the central government representative, the local governor, and the military zone commander in Diffa.6 There is also increasing evidence that Boko Haram may be active in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad.

Finally, one of the key questions for the Nigerian government is whether a deal for the release of the Chibok schoolgirls, or any type of ceasefire with Boko Haram, is possible and whether it would require Nigeria to cede territory to Boko Haram.”

that caliphate through its own newly-declared caliphate, but with takfiri ideology replacing the Sufi traditions of the descendants of the Kanem-Borno amirs, who Boko Haram has killed or expelled from northeastern Nigeria.59 Boko Haram’s seizure of Abadam on Borno’s border with Niger’s Diffa Province in October 2014, which is also part of the historic Kanem-Borno empire, could signal future Boko Haram operations in Niger, where Boko Haram has supply lines that are currently more often used for receiving food and fuel than weapons.60 The “reunification” of the former Kanem-Borno Caliphate areas would seemingly erase the legacy of colonialism that Boko Haram founder Muhammed Yusuf criticized in his sermons for “amalgamating [Borno] to the infidels...leaving Niger in poverty...and creating ethnic problems and political divisions in Chad.”61

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Finally, one of the key questions for the Nigerian government is whether a deal for the release of the Chibok schoolgirls, or any type of ceasefire with Boko Haram, is possible and whether it would require Nigeria to cede territory to Boko Haram. According to Muhammed Yusuf’s sermons, establishing an Islamic State was a prerequisite for Boko Haram to have the “independence” to negotiate on equal footing with the “infidel” Nigerian government.65 It therefore appears that Boko Haram still follows Yusuf’s doctrine, but now also with a model and legitimacy from ISIL on how to create this Islamic State through guerrilla warfare and territorial control.

Jacob Zenn is an analyst of African and Eurasian Affairs for The Jamestown Foundation in Washington DC and an expert on countering violent extremism for think-tanks and international organizations in West Africa and Central Asia. Mr. Zenn is the author of “Northern Nigeria’s Boko Haram: The Prize in al-Qaeda’s Africa Strategy,” which was published by The Jamestown Foundation in 2012, and in November 2013 he provided testimony to the U.S. Congress on “The Continuing Threat of Boko Haram and Ansaru.” He writes in his capacity as an independent expert and his views do not engage any of the policies or positions of current institutional clients.


2 One soldier who survived the attacks indicated that Boko Haram may have kidnapped up to 13 of his comrades in the attack. See “Boko Haram Clashes with Cameroon Soldiers in Cross-Border Attacks,” Reuters, July 26, 2014. See also “Two Cameroon Soldiers ‘Killed in Crossborder Boko Haram Attack,’” Cameroon Web News, July 25, 2014.


58 “Greater Kanoura” is a nationalist term used in the 1950s that refers to majority Kanuri areas of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger in the 1980s. See Minahan, J. Nations Without States (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996).


62 Abu Shekau’s (and Muhammed Yusuf’s) tafsir to Boko Haram members, video from pre-July 2009, accessed May 2014.
This article analyzes Boko Haram’s cross-border activities in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and its presence in the CAR. Although it is difficult to ascertain precisely why Boko Haram is undertaking these cross-border activities, there are at least four explanations for how it has carried out this activity: the region’s borders are long and fluid, militaries in the region are ineffective, multilateral cooperation is failing, and Boko Haram exploits historic ethno-linguistic cross-border ties.

**Niger**

In the aftermath of the 2012 Malian uprising and Nigeria’s implementation of the 2013 State of Emergency to crack down on Boko Haram, refugees flooded into neighboring countries, including Niger, which immediately feared Boko Haram infiltrations. In southern Niger, Boko Haram members have plotted to bomb public places. In 2012, Nigerien authorities arrested 15 suspected Boko Haram members in Diffa, where they were planning to attack the local military garrison.7

More recently, Boko Haram members in Diffa ambushed an army patrol and escaped to the Nigerian side of the border.15 Three Boko Haram members were captured and the next day nine more were arrested in connection to the attack.16 Similar attacks, comparable to the Diffa kidnapping plot mentioned above,17 may increase as Boko Haram attempts to deter increased Nigerien counterterrorism efforts. If Niger takes an increased role in the international coalition to defeat Boko Haram, the militants may transform Niger into a more active theatre of operations.

**Chad**

Although there is little information on the details of Boko Haram’s activities in Chad, military sources in N’Djamena interviewed by the International Crisis Group reveal that Boko Haram elements are present in N’Djamena and elsewhere in the country.18 Some rumors, including a story in the *Premium Times* on September 12, 2014, based on Chadian Army sources and communications obtained between Nigerian field officers and the Nigerian military, allege that Modu Sheriff, former Borno State governor, is a sponsor of Boko Haram. The rumors say that he has harbored and trained Boko Haram militants in Abéché, Chad.19 In addition, arms trafficking routes suggest that weapons intended for Boko Haram pass through Chad’s territory from Libya, Sudan, and the CAR.20

Chadian President Idriss Déby has raised the alarm about instability in the Lake Chad basin and about “the permanent threat” from Boko Haram and AQIM.”

**References**

10 Lewis, “Niger Fears Contagion from Nigeria’s Boko Haram Islamists.”
11 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
role in French-led counterterrorism operations is likely a double-edged sword. According to a United Kingdom travel warning, Chadian participation in counterterrorism operations with France increases the “risk that terrorist groups may cross into Chad to carry out attacks.”25 The U.S. State Department addressed border
concerns for Chad on June 30, 2014, saying, “[d]espite recent stability, Chad’s historically volatile security environment could deteriorate unexpectedly, particularly in border areas.”26

The cracks in Chad’s border security widened on August 6, 2014, when Boko Haram militants crossed into Chad and gunned down six Nigerians in Dubuwa village. The Nigerians fled an attack two weeks prior on Kirenowa,27 a Nigerian town close to the Cameroonian border. In a more brazen attempt to enter Chadian territory, on August 16, 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped at least 97 young men and boys, as well as several women from the Doron Baga fishing village in Nigeria near Lake Chad. Reports on this incident vary, including those that suggest Boko Haram militants loaded the victims into speed boats and ferried them to an island under Chadian control29 where Chadian security officials intercepted a convoy of buses, rescuing 85 hostages and arresting six men accompanying them.10 These incidents suggest that a shrinking Lake Chad and its archipelagic geography increases the porosity of the border region and creates a transit corridor for Boko Haram and potentially other violent non-state actors to move between Nigeria and its neighbors.

Further evidence shows that Boko Haram may intend to carry out more attacks in Chad. After the May 2014 Paris Summit for Security in Nigeria in which President Déby agreed to launch a “total war”31 against Boko Haram, an audiotape surfaced on Alwihda Info that threatened Chad for its participation in the military coalition.32 The tape threatened President Déby and an attack in N’Djamena. The speaker’s voice was identified as a Chadian.33 In response, Chad deployed security forces in N’Djamena and the French Embassy installed protective measures.34

Cameroon
Cameroon has the longest and perhaps the most vulnerable border with Nigeria, and Boko Haram has been able to operate relatively easily in Cameroon, carrying out logistics operations, assassinations, kidnappings, and recruitment. Even though the first signs of Boko Haram’s cross-border activities in Cameroonian territory emerged in early 2012,36 Cameroon President Paul Biya only reorganized border security in March 2014, deploying an additional 700 troops to patrol the border.37

In March 2014, three Boko Haram arms dealers were arrested in the Extreme North Region for trafficking arms through Chad into Cameroon on their way to Nigeria.38 In a second incident, “While Cameroon was at first a victim of spillover violence from Nigeria and a transit state for arms trafficking, it has now become a rear base from which to attack Nigeria and an arena for Boko Haram’s kidnapping-for-ransom activities.”

in June 2014, 40 Boko Haram members were arrested in Maroua and accused of using a market to conceal a large stockpile of weapons to be used in cross-border incursions into Nigeria.39 Also in June 2014, Cameroonian authorities discovered a large Boko Haram weapons cache and arrested a Chadian arms dealer.40


27 Kirenowa was the one of the first places that Nigerian forces removed a Boko Haram camp in 2013 following the State of Emergency declared by President Goodluck Jonathan. A fisherman from Kirenowa said that all indications point to a return of Boko Haram in full force to Marte and “other local government areas along the shores of the Lake Chad.” Boko Haram reportedly hoisted its flags and indoctrinated children in these villages in 2013 and may be poised to do it again. See Hamza Idris, “Boko Haram Trails Nigerians to Chad, Kills 6,” Daily Trust, August 6, 2014.

28 Ibid.


34 Ibid.


37 “CrisisWatch Database · International Crisis Group · Cameroon.”


In addition, while Cameroon was at first a victim of spillover violence from Nigeria and a transit state for arms trafficking, it has now become a rear base from which to attack Nigeria and an arena for Boko Haram’s kidnapping-for-ransom activities. Boko Haram, which once preferred to profit from kidnapping foreigners like a French family in February 2013, 41 a French priest in November 2013, 42 two Italian priests and a Canadian nun in April 2014, 43 and ten Chinese nationals in May 2014, 44 has diversified to targeting locals like the Cameroon vice prime minister’s wife, the sons of traditional leaders, and soldiers. 45

In recent months, Boko Haram has intensified its cross-border assaults in order to ensure safe passage to Cameroon’s border towns by establishing a buffer zone between its territory in Nigeria and the Cameroon’s military. This marks a major shift in Boko Haram’s behavior as President Biya, Boko Haram’s leader, had not ordered attacks in Cameroon since 2010, aside from assassinating individuals who had criticized him. 46 After Boko Haram increasingly clashed with Cameroon soldiers throughout early 2014, and after the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls, President Biya sent approximately 1,000 special forces troops to the border in May. 47 Cameroon’s increased security posture gave Cameroon troops an advantage for only a short time. 48 From late July to early August 2014, Boko Haram has killed more than 30 civilians and abducted nearly 70 others from the border towns, 49 and at least 25 Cameroonian soldiers died at the hands of Boko Haram during August 2014 alone. 50

Boko Haram’s presence in Cameroon has renewed fears of widespread recruitment activities. Because Cameroon is facing a refugee crisis on two fronts, one from Boko Haram’s violence in Nigeria and another from the sectarian violence in the CAR, Boko Haram may see the refugees as vulnerable targets and has allegedly begun to kidnap youth to force them to join its ranks. 49 However, some recruits have joined Boko Haram willingly and received their parents’ permission. 51 In fact, Boko Haram may have intended to capture or kill Amadou Ali instead of kidnapping him because he led an effort to rescue 500 youth that had recently disappeared and were thought to have been kidnapped by Boko Haram. 53

**Fighters in One Week,** *Punch,* June 8, 2014.


57 “CrisisWatch Database - International Crisis Group - Cameroon.”


61 “Nigeria-Centrafrique, La Dangereuse Connexion,” *Jeune Afrique,* March 12, 2014; “Séléka: La Présence de...”

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49 “CrisisWatch Database - International Crisis Group - Cameroon.”

50 Niyi Odehode, “Cameroon Kills 102 Boko Haram...”

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The Central African Republic
In January 2013, the UN assistant secretary general for peacekeeping operations asserted that the CAR resembles northern Mali in 2012 – a complete absence of central government in which al-Qaeda-affiliated militants can operate. He speculated about Boko Haram’s involvement in the CAR saying, “[W]e have some indications that there is some kind of presence here.” 56 Furthermore, an alleged Boko Haram statement that appeared on the website Checchi Unzia on February 14, 2014, “vowed to avenge the spilled blood of Muslims massacred by the Christian anti-balaka militia in the [CAR].” 57

Since then, Alwihda Info reported that French and Chadian intelligence believe that Boko Haram has connected with Seleka rebels and that it is supporting them with weapons in exchange for diamonds. 58 Furthermore, the Central African group Revolution and Justice (RJ), whose self-proclaimed purpose is to protect northern CAR’s territory from Seleka and elements of the Chadian rebel group Baba Laddé’s Popular Front for Recovery (FPR), 59 claims that it captured several Seleka militants as well as “two jihadists from Boko Haram” when Seleka militants attempted to cross the border between the towns of Boguila, CAR and Goré, Chad. 60 *Jeune Afrique* claims that French intelligence confirmed that Nourredine Adam, the Seleka former second-in-command, traveled to Nigeria, 61 which...
stoked fears in Paris over the potential birth of an alliance between Adam and Boko Haram. These connections may have encouraged Séléka to carry out attacks and kidnappings of their own in Cameroon.

A high-level French diplomat described the CAR as an “explosive cocktail” where Boko Haram, Séléka, Arabs from Darfur, Janjaweed, mercenaries from Chad, and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) are likely crossing paths. Some observers on the ground have witnessed regions overtaken by Islamist militants where churches are attacked and alcohol consumption and pork are banned.

Conclusion

Boko Haram’s intensified cross-border activities in the last two years have been enabled in part by four components.

First, the region’s borders are long and shifting, allowing Boko Haram to escape capture, evade the Nigerian Army’s offensives, and develop havens where they can plan attacks and recruit new members. The 2,000-mile border Nigeria shares with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon has almost 1,500 illegal or unmonitored crossing routes. Moreover, the shrinking of Lake Chad has made what had historically been a difficult border to traverse more permeable and enables the movement of Boko Haram and potentially other violent non-state actors in ways that were heretofore impossible.

Second, regional militaries are deficient. Chad’s military has been relatively effective at preventing incursions by Boko Haram, but Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria are suffering from poor communications and a lack of patrol vehicles, equipment, training, and motivation to counter Boko Haram activities. Nigerian troops in particular have mutinied and refused to fight due to the lack of firepower, deficient pay, and low morale. Similarly, Cameroon’s Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), created to fight violent highway robbery, only began receiving training from United States Africa Command in 2012 and has been deemed “not very competent” by the director of Yaoundé’s War College.

Third, multilateral cooperation is falling. Despite the May 2014 Paris Summit for Security in Nigeria where Nigeria and its neighbors agreed to cooperate on security issues, all of the parties have a long history of failing to establish clear measures for multilateral cooperation to address cross-border vulnerabilities. Some also hold historical grudges from border conflicts. The two major issues preventing effective cooperation are the right of pursuit across international boundaries and intelligence sharing. While Nigeria was granted the right of pursuit in Niger, joint border patrols have yet to start. Nigeria’s other neighbors fear Nigerian troops operating on their territory because they have a reputation for human rights violations. Nigeria and its neighbors are currently hashing out legal agreements for pursuit and for the multinational force due to be in place by November 20, 2014, but this could be another of a series of recent agreements since May 2014 that have yet to come to fruition.

Fourth, Boko Haram has strong ethno-linguistic cross-border ties. The historic ethnic, linguistic, and cultural ties of the region, particularly the Sunni Muslim cohesion of Kanuri, Hausa, and Shuwa Arab groups that transcend national boundaries facilitates cross-border movement and makes policing the area extremely difficult. Boko Haram takes advantage of this, penetrating the borders along with the regular flow of refugees and people participating in cross-border trade. Authorities have trouble distinguishing Boko Haram members from other citizens, which consequently can backfire if harsh measures are used against individuals mistakenly associated with Boko Haram.

Without collectively addressing these four components that have allowed Boko Haram’s cross-border activity to expand, the group will continue to inflict human casualties and significant economic damage, not just in Nigeria, but throughout the broader region.

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62 Ibid.
73 Thomas Fessy, “Niger Hit by Nigeria’s Boko Haram Fallout.”
The Motivations of Syrian Islamist Fighters
By Vera Mironova, Loubna Mrie, and Sam Whitt

With the Syrian civil war now well into its third year, there are scores of armed rebel forces fighting against the Bashar al-Assad regime, as well as against one another. In the marketplace of rebel groups vying for support, rebel fighters are offered incentives and face coercive pressures to join one group over another. The weakening of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) over the past year has led many Syrian rebels to rethink their allegiances on the battlefield. Possible suitors include nominally “Islamist” groups, including moderate revolutionary organizations like Ahrar al-Sham. A growing concern, however, is that rebels may be driven into the ranks of more extremist organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This leads to a key question: what inspires thousands of ordinary Syrian people to join up with Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq?

To understand who these Syrian fighters are and what motivates them, the authors have been conducting survey research from inside Syria. Over the past year, the authors have surveyed more than 300 FSA fighters as well as Syrian civilians and refugees and 50 Syrian Islamist fighters in the Islamic Front (Ahrar al-Sham) and JN, the latter of which is al-Qa`ida’s affiliate in Syria.¹

This article proceeds by presenting a series of questions as the authors gave them to the interview subjects. It then discusses the implications that arise from their answers. To briefly summarize the findings, the interviews reveal that in contrast to foreign fighters, who have generally come to Syria on a quest for spiritual fulfillment and to build an Islamic state through jihad, Syrian fighters are joining Islamist groups primarily for instrumental purposes. Islamic groups are perceived as better equipped, led, and organized, and therefore are seen as more capable of defeating the al-Assad regime, which remains the primary goal of Syrian rebels. However, while organizational strength appears to initially attract individuals to Islamist groups, this research shows that individuals who are part of Islamist groups become more radical over time. This increases the importance of preventing individuals from joining these groups.

Why Are You Fighting?
Why do “prospective” Islamists decide to participate in the fighting in the first place? Islamists were asked why they joined their group, and many responses were quite consistent with views expressed by rebel fighters from the reportedly more moderate FSA.² As can be seen in Table 1, the most common rationales for joining are to defend their community, to defeat the al-Assad regime, and to take revenge against al-Assad forces.

Table 1. Reasons Given for Joining Rebel Groups (FSA vs. Islamists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>FSA (%)</th>
<th>Islamists (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To take revenge against Assad's forces</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To defend my community</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because Assad must be defeated</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I support the goals of the group</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt inspired by people in the group</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because all my friends joined</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All my family wanted me to join</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I wanted people to respect me</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn't want to join, but was forced to</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I joined because I needed money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FSA fighters are risking their lives for similar reasons: to take revenge against al-Assad forces (79% FSA vs. 79% Islamists), to defeat the al-Assad regime (69% FSA vs. 90% Islamists), and to defend their communities (71% FSA vs. 84% Islamists).

Of course, many Islamists also claim that they are fighting for Islam and to build an Islamic state, but this is not among the top three responses. Instead, the authors find that underlying social-community ties and sectarian-political grievances may be an important predictor of who joins and who does not. People who volunteer to fight have strong attachments to their communities and nurse grievances against the al-Assad regime. Religious ideation is secondary or even a tertiary motivation for joining. Many Islamists and moderate Islamists claim unanimously to support the goals of their group, they may also intentionally over-represent their own religiosity and attachment to the group. In a clarifying question “what is the most important reason for joining,” only a quarter (25%) claimed that “fight for Islam, and to build an Islamic State” was their main reason for fighting.

Another interesting result from the discussions with Syrian Islamist fighters is how they view the motivations of other individuals who joined their group. For example, when asked, “Why do you think others joined your group?” (see Table 2), the religious reason “to fight for Islam” is not even among the top three most popular responses. The main reasons listed by Islamist fighters are remarkably similar to those of FSA fighters (first, to defend their

¹ The survey was conducted in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, in locations where fighters were stationed based on local knowledge. The interviewer was granted permission to conduct surveys with FSA rebel fighters by their superiors and by an informal “Islamic court” for interviews with Syrian Islamist fighters (including fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front/Ahrar al-Sham). Unknown population parameters and security concerns preclude random sampling, so the study relies on non-probability, cluster sampling surveying no more than five per cluster. Samples are well-balanced across gender, age, education, and whether the subject was employed before the war began (a proxy for pre-war income/savings). The study received human subject approval from High Point University. Some of the information in this article appeared on the blog Political Violence @ a Glance on August 13, 2014.

² To be clear, unless otherwise specified, the term “Islamists” in the context of this article refers to the 50 Syrian Islamist fighters whom the authors were able to interview.

³ Respondents were asked to mention all reasons that apply.
community; second, because al-Assad must be defeated; and third, to take revenge against al-Assad forces).

Table 2. Reasons Given For Why Others Joined Your Group (Islamists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To defend their community</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because Assad must be defeated</td>
<td>93.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To take revenge against Assad’s forces</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They support the goals of the group</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They joined to fight for Islam, to build an Islamic state</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They felt inspired by people in the group</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They joined to get training, combat experience</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because all their friends joined</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their family wanted me to join</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed money</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Reasons Given for not Joining Other Groups (Islamists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the strongest rebel group in Syria now</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This group provides better financial support than other groups</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All my friends joined this group</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I support the goals of this group more than other groups</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This group cares more about their fighters than other groups</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel closer to people in this group than other groups</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If something happens to me, this group will help my family</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This group provides better training, support than other groups</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is the only group that truly fights for Islam</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am inspired by the leaders of this group</td>
<td>65.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why Did You Join this Islamist Group as Opposed to Other Groups?
The marketplace of rebel groups in Syria has been growing for some time. Even those with strong Islamist preferences have many options to choose from. In asking fighters about why they avoided joining other groups, the authors find that “fighting for Islam” or “to build an Islamic state” are not the only rationales for why fighters selected one group over another. For many fighters, their group preferences are based on structural and organizational cues: they think their group has better resources, better training and better services (Table 3). For example, many indicate that their group takes good care of injured fighters, and if a fighter gets killed, the group will compensate his family. In interviews with fighters who first joined FSA and then switched to Islamist brigades, almost all mentioned non-religious reasons: “My friends left my old group and I left with them,” “I didn’t like people in my old group,” “My friend got injured and they didn’t support him,” “I was with my old group [FSA] until I fought with Ahrar al-Sham. I liked their way of treating fighters and I joined.”

What Are Your Views on Islam?
The adoption of radical Islamic views could be a consequence of joining Islamist groups rather than a root cause. Many fighters are aggressively socialized and exposed to radical religious preaching once inside the group. Approximately 74% of surveyed Islamists claim that they have become more religious since fighting (compared to 37% of FSA fighters) and now, three years into the conflict, 96% indicate that religion plays a very important role in their life (compared to 43% among FSA). All but one Islamist said that they attend religious lectures, study, and recite the Qur’an daily. Also, all the Islamists claim to feel much closer to the people of their same religion (compared to 20% of FSA) and 92% think that religion should have a crucial role in future Syrian politics (compared to 60% among FSA).

Are You Fighting for Jihad?
Many Syrian Islamist fighters have conflicting views on what “jihad” means and whether they are waging jihad in Syria. Many (63%) believe that participation in jihad is not an individual requirement (fard ayn), but a collective obligation (fard kifayya). Answers to the question “Is the Syrian War a Jihad?” and “What is Jihad?” range from the overtly religious (“Jihad is giving your soul for the name of God”) to responses which are only distantly related to religion (“When you see a woman being raped just because she is against the government, you know that it’s the time for jihad”). Despite being in an Islamist rebel group, only 76% of surveyed fighters claim that the war in Syria is about jihad. Also, Islamists were unanimous in agreement that the war in Syria, jihad or otherwise, is about revenge. This underscores how underlying grievances against the al-Assad regime could still be driving Syrian rebel fighters into Islamist groups.

Therefore, while some rebels are fighting under an Islamist banner and some are not, they may share similar goals. If more people in Syria are joining Islamist groups today, it may have less to do with religious ideation or extremism, and more to do with the perception that Islamist groups are better organized and better equipped than the struggling FSA. As a matter of recruitment strategy, entrepreneurial Islamist group leaders appear to be better at using religion to channel collective sectarian grievances. All the Islamist fighters interviewed in this study report strong trust in their group leadership, receive most of their news and organization from within their group, and tend to tune out other sources of information (only one respondent said, for example, that he trusted news from Western sources like the BBC).

Of course, this could mean that rebel fighters can be easily manipulated to serve a wide range of goals and functions. Elite competition may also explain why, despite many common goals, there is fierce in-fighting among various Islamist groups and the Free Syrian Army. Most (81%) of Islamists think that the goals of their group are not compatible with those of other rebel groups and 58% agree that even if al-Assad is removed from power, their group will have to fight other rebel groups.

Conclusion
At present, the authors’ research suggests that rebel fighters are generally revenge-seeking and driven to Islamist groups not primarily due to ideological motivations, but rather for instrumental reasons. However, once inside the group, they are vulnerable to elite manipulation. Consequently, their desire for revenge against al-Assad could be channeled in other directions through calculating and competitive elites through ideological and religious indoctrination. In addition, rebel fighters no longer just blame the al-Assad regime for the conflict in Syria. They also cast blame on Iran and Lebanese Hizb Allah as well as the United States and Western powers, who many feel have abandoned them in this conflict. Islamist groups appear to be having great success harnessing and exploiting Syrian anger for purposes well beyond fighting the al-Assad regime, which is why the current drive in Islamist recruitment in Syria could have important spillover consequences for conflict elsewhere.

Vera Mironova is a Graduate Research Fellow at the Harvard Program on Negotiations and a fifth year Ph.D. candidate in the Political Science Department at the University of Maryland.

Loubna Mrie is a Magnum Fellow at New York University.

Sam Whitt is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at High Point University.

Syrian and Iraqi Jihads Prompt Increased Recruitment and Activism in Southeast Asia

By James Brandon

DURING THE LAST three years, jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq have developed a strong international component, attracting around 12,000 foreign fighters from 50 countries. Among these are Southeast Asian jihadists who have joined the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and a range of other jihadist groups.

This article outlines how these volunteers, who mostly hail from Indonesia and Malaysia, have become involved with ISIL and other groups, and the likely implications of this in their home countries, in Syria and Iraq, and further afield. The article also examines how events in Syria and Iraq have impacted existing Southeast Asian jihadist and militant groups, including the potential for ISIL and other organizations to inspire increased militancy in the region.

Indonesia
The head of the Indonesian National Police, Gen. Sutarman, said in August 2014 that at least 56 Indonesians were believed to have joined ISIL, of whom three have been killed, although this figure may also include those who have joined other jihadist groups. Most fighters seem to have traveled to Syria from Salafist-influenced religious schools in the Middle East, although they often have prior involvement in radical Indonesian circles. Typical of these is Riza Fardi (aka Abu Muhammad al-Indunisi), who was killed in East Ghouta, near Damascus, in November 2013. According to the radical Indonesian website “Voice of al-Islam,” Fardi was born in West Kalimantan and attended the hardline al-Mukmi boarding school in Solo. The school is closely associated with Jemaah Islamiya (JI) and six of the Bali bombers were educated there. After this, he attended the al-Iman University in Yemen, run by Abdul-Majeed al-Zindani, a longstanding senior leader of al-Islah, the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Fardi then traveled to Syria to join the small Suqour al-Izz jihadist group, mainly composed of Saudi Salafists, before being killed while fighting against Syrian government forces.

Other Indonesian jihadists have died in Iraq conducting suicide attacks with ISIL. Wildan Mukhollad bin Lasmin, 19-years-old, died carrying out a suicide car bomb attack in Iraq in February 2014, having earlier fought in Aleppo. He too had previously studied at a hardline Islamist school in Indonesia, followed by study in Egypt. In July, ISIL published a video titled Join the Ranks that featured alleged Indonesian members calling for volunteers to “migrate to the Islamic State as an obligation decreed by Allah”; however, it is unclear from the content (which features seven gunmen on a tropical-looking beach) if it was even filmed in Iraq or Syria. On October 12, 2014, jihadist websites published Indonesian-language statements saying that another Indonesian ISIL volunteer, Hanzhalah al-Indunisi, had died conducting a suicide attack near Beiji in Iraq “killing dozens of Shi’a soldiers.”

“The head of the Indonesian National Police, Gen. Sutarman, said in August 2014 that at least 56 Indonesians were believed to have joined ISIL.”

5 “Rakyat Indonesia sayangkan nyawa jihadis yang ter-sia-sia,” Khabar South-East Asia, March 14, 2014.
6 “ISIS Recruitment Video Join the Ranks Urges Indonesian Muslims to migrate to the Islamic State,” ABC (Australia), July 29, 2014.
Hardline and militant Islamist organizations in Indonesia have meanwhile provided rhetorical support for Syrian jihadists, and for ISIL in particular. Most prominently, according to local media, on July 18, 2014 Abu Bakar Bashir, the jailed former leader of the regional terrorist group JI, along with 24 other convicted terrorists in Pasir Putih prison, publicly announced support for ISIL fighters. It is reported that he did so in a message to Mohammad Achwan, chairman of Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT), JI’s successor group, although Achwan said this fell short of a formal pledge of allegiance to ISIL’s leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Soon afterwards, Achwan and other senior JAT members left JAT to set up their own group after refusing to follow Bashir’s public declaration of support for ISIL. Other smaller militant groups, such as the East Indonesia Mujahidin, also pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi.

Elsewhere, small-scale pro-ISIL demonstrations have occurred sporadically, while in Bekasi city in August 2014 supporters of JAT publicly swore allegiance to ISIL at a local mosque, underlining divisions in JAT over ISIL. Although such stunts can raise broader public awareness of ISIL, notwithstanding occasional arrests of suspected militants there has been no perceptible increase in the number or scope of reported militant plots in Indonesia. The above pledges are likely to have a limited real-world impact, largely because those involved are generally veteran Islamists already committed to radical agendas.

Malaysia

According to the Malaysian police, around 40 Malaysians are believed to have joined armed groups in Syria and Iraq as of August 2014. Meanwhile, the Syrian government has said that 15 Malaysian jihadists have died in the conflict, but this cannot be independently confirmed. Of these, the most visible and active Malaysian fighters are based around Hama, in western Syria, where they operate as a self-contained group within the relatively small Ajnad al-Sham. From their prolific social media output, this Malaysian group appears to be composed of around 15 fighters, grouped around a core of older individuals, but including others from a wide range of backgrounds. The group’s main leader, until his death in early September 2014 following a Syrian government airstrike in Hama, was 49-year-old Mohammed Lotfi Ariffin, a preacher who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Tajikistan in the early 1990s; upon his return to Malaysia he was detained under the Internal Security Act from 2001 to 2006. He subsequently joined the Islamist Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), and was a leader of its youth wing in the northern state of Kedah; PAS publicly expelled Ariffin when news of his involvement in Syria became widely known, although after his death some PAS officials hailed him a “martyr.”

By contrast, very few Malaysians are known to have joined ISIL. According to an ISIL statement in Malaysian entitled the Malaysians’ apparently relaxed and friendly interactions with local Arab fighters, had a relatively limited but enthusiastic following of Malaysian online sympathizers. Ariffin had 16,000 “likes” and Zainal had 1,600 “friends” on Facebook.

Other notable members of the Hama group included Zainan Harith (aka Abu Turab), a 52-year-old veteran jihadist from the Malaysian militant group Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM), who was killed by Syrian government shellfire in the town of Arzeh, near Hama, in August 2014. Another KMM veteran, 47-year-old Zainuri Kamarudin, was injured in the same incident. Other members are more diverse, including Akel Zainal, a former drummer in 1990s Malaysian rock band “The Ukays,” and several younger volunteers, including a 21-year-old who first contacted Ariffin by messaging him on Facebook. As this illustrates, this Malaysian group sees social media as a key recruiting and propaganda tool. Both Ariffin and Zainal have regularly posted photos, short Salafist-tinged ideological admonitions, and updates on their current activities in Syria on Facebook, although both their accounts were taken offline in September/October. Their posts, which showed not only combat images but also the Malaysians’ apparently relaxed and friendly interactions with local Arab fighters, had a relatively limited but enthusiastic following of Malaysian online sympathizers. Ariffin had 16,000 “likes” and Zainal had 1,600 “friends” on Facebook.

For Malaysia, the relative calm on the home front is an illusion. As local media reported, the relatively small Ajnad al-Sham appear to be a self-contained group within the ISIL’s official affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. From their prolific social media output, this Malaysian group appears to be composed of around 15 fighters, grouped around a core of older individuals, but including others from a wide range of backgrounds. The group’s main leader, until his death in early September 2014 following a Syrian government airstrike in Hama, was 49-year-old Mohammed Lotfi Ariffin, a preacher who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Tajikistan in the early 1990s; upon his return to Malaysia he was detained under the Internal Security Act from 2001 to 2006. He subsequently joined the Islamist Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), and was a leader of its youth wing in the northern state of Kedah; PAS publicly expelled Ariffin when news of his involvement in Syria became widely known, although after his death some PAS officials hailed him a “martyr.”

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in April 2014. Although officials did not explicitly connect the cases, in May 2014 one individual in Port Dickson was charged with “promoting acts of terrorism” in Syria.

Although evidence is necessarily limited, there are some important differences between the Malaysians active with Ajnad al-Sham and those with ISIL in Iraq. For instance, the former have been permitted to organize themselves in a small unit, engaging in mainly conventional fighting, running their own social media operations, and enjoying friendly relations with Arab fighters. By contrast, as with Indonesians, there is no evidence of Malaysians engaging in conventional fighting in ISIL or of any quasi-independent Malaysian grouping within ISIL, as is the case with Ajnad al-Sham. Moreover, the lone recorded Malaysian suicide bomber with ISIL likewise does not appear to have been part of any wider Malaysian or Southeast Asian group. In addition, the fact that within approximately a month of his arrival, ISIL used him as a suicide bomber possibly suggests they regarded the training he had received in Malaysia as of little or no utility.

Unlike in Indonesia, there is some evidence that ISIL and other groups are inspiring increased militancy in Malaysia. Most notably, in August 2014 police arrested 19 suspected militants for allegedly planning attacks on several targets in Putrajaya, near Kuala Lumpur, including pubs, discos and a prominent Carlsberg brewery. Although the authorities said the group’s plans were still at the “discussion” phase, the suspects had reportedly purchased aluminium powder, a potential bomb-making ingredient. The police claimed the group had been “inspired” by ISIL, and that some of the suspects intended to travel to Iraq or Syria for further training, although the exact nature of their link to ISIL remains under investigation.

**Philippines**

In the Philippines, the response from existing jihadist groups to events in Syria and Iraq has been enthusiastic but largely rhetorical. On July 23, 2014, supporters of Abu Sayyaf, the country’s most hardline jihadist organization, uploaded a video to YouTube of one of its leaders, Isnilon Hapilon, and a group of apparent fighters collectively pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi. They promised al-Baghdadi “loyalty and obedience in adversity and in comfort,” although adding this would be void if they “see in him any obvious act of disbelief.” It is unclear if this bay’a represents the whole of Abu Sayyaf, particularly given its fragmented leadership.

Separately, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) pledged loyalty to ISIL, although a spokesman said the group would not impose ISIL-style Islam in the Philippines, somewhat undermining the pledge’s credibility. Despite these statements, however, there is no clear evidence of Filipinos heading to Syria or Iraq. Although government documents leaked in August 2014 estimated the number of Filipinos with ISIL at “close to 200,” the country’s influential armed forces responded that they were unaware of any Filipinos fighting in Iraq or Syria, and the Foreign Ministry has said any numbers were “hypothetical.” In contrast to Malaysia and Indonesia, there is no evidence from Iraq or Syria of Filipinos fighting alongside ISIL or other groups; likewise, no related domestic plots have been reported.

**Conclusion**

Given the large size of Southeast Asian Muslim populations, the number of recruits to jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria are relatively low, even lower than those from European countries.
this may partly reflect the difficulties and cost of traveling to the Middle East, levels of engagement with pro-jihadists at events and on social media are also low, suggesting limited overall support for jihadist groups compared to levels of interest in the other Middle East conflicts such as the Israel-Palestinian issue. At present, it appears unlikely that events in Iraq and Syria will trigger a broader, popular revitalization of Southeast Asian jihadism, particularly as Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries enjoy strong – if uneven – economic growth, while their maturing political systems also allow outlets for peaceful dissent. Likewise, ISIL’s rise has mostly been used by local jihadist groups to rhetorically underline their existing ideological positions rather than to radicalize local populations or mount fresh attacks. That said, the Malaysia plot and the increased activism of some Indonesian groups demonstrate the continuing potential for ISIL, particularly through its use of evocative concepts like the caliphate, to trigger a limited uptick in regional militancy. Indonesian veterans of the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad played an important role in inspiring the 1990s-2000s wave of militancy in Indonesia. This illustrates the potential for even small numbers of jihadist returnees from the current conflicts to trigger a significant increase in domestic militancy.

In the Middle East itself, the small numbers of Southeast Asian fighters are unlikely to significantly alter the military balance. However, as shown by ISIL’s use of Malaysian and Indonesian suicide bombers in Iraq, foreign volunteers can also bolster groups’ unconventional capabilities, potentially preserving better-trained local Arab fighters for other tasks. That said, available evidence suggests that, so far, most Southeast Asians who are fighting in the region have joined smaller, relatively less extremist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and Ajnad al-Sham rather than ISIL, perhaps because these groups have existing, visible, and contactable Southeast Asian members with a strong social media presence. By contrast, Southeast Asian radicals safe in their home countries seem more likely to offer rhetorical verbal support to ISIL, particularly following ISIL’s declaration of a caliphate. The presence of Southeast Asian jihadists in Syria and Iraq may have other impacts, however, as shown by the British jihadists’ video references to a Cambodian volunteer. Exotic foreign fighters can be used to powerfully reinforce jihadist narratives that Muslims worldwide are rallying selflessly to the jihadist cause. It is therefore quite possible that the appearance of Southeast Asians in Syria and Iraq may prompt more radicalization in third countries than in their home nations.

James Brandon is an Associate Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) in London and is the former Director of Research at the Quilliam Foundation. He presently works in Singapore for an international risk consultancy.