

# Boko Haram's Moderate Streak and Nigeria's Counter- terrorism Conundrum



By Jacob Zenn

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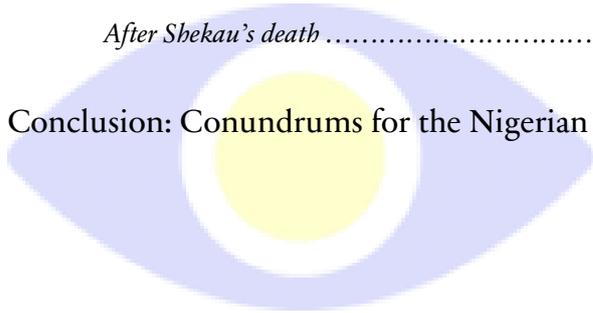
Jacob Zenn, “ISWAP – ‘The Righteous’ Video on Late Abubakar Shekau’s Fighters’ Reintegration and Loyalty to Islamic State,” 25 June 2021, [Unmasking Boko Haram](#)

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European  
Eye on  
Radicalization

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## Introduction

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Since Boko Haram's founding in 2002 and launch of jihad in 2009, the group has gained notoriety for a number of actions. Most notable was the 2014 Chibok kidnapping in which the group's leader, Abubakar Shekau, claimed to "enslave" more than 200 mostly Christian schoolgirls and then featured them reciting Islamic passages and wearing Islamic gowns in a video.<sup>1</sup> However, this abduction was but one of dozens of similarly callous attacks conducted by the group.

Also notable have been Boko Haram's massacres of soldiers and, on a number of occasions, civilians, and especially vigilantes who have cooperated with the military. A number of these massacres have also been video-recorded and released publicly by the group to demonstrate the group's pride in its brutality under Shekau's leadership, as well as its imitating Islamic State (IS)'s own brutalities, such as executing enemies and throwing them off bridges.<sup>2</sup> Suicide bombings from the first against the United Nations building in Abuja in 2011 to the present have also marked Boko Haram's rise, and hundreds of civilians, church and mosque worshippers, and soldiers have since been killed in such operations.<sup>3</sup>

However, Boko Haram has also exhibited a moderate streak that is underappreciated. This is not to suggest the moderates are anywhere near pacifist. However, relative to the excesses of Shekau this moderate streak has represented a reduction of violence against civilians, if not also Christians and aid workers. It has also presented a challenge to the Nigerian military, which itself has been criticized for its heavy-handed approach to counter-terrorism.<sup>4</sup>

Boko Haram's moderate streak has been observed in several periods, including 2003 during the Kanamma clashes; in 2007, in the aftermath of the assassination of Nigerian Salafi scholar Shaykh Jafaar Mahmud Adam; in 2011, through the formation of the Ansaru faction; in 2016, after Shekau's departure from Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP); and, most recently, in May 2021, when

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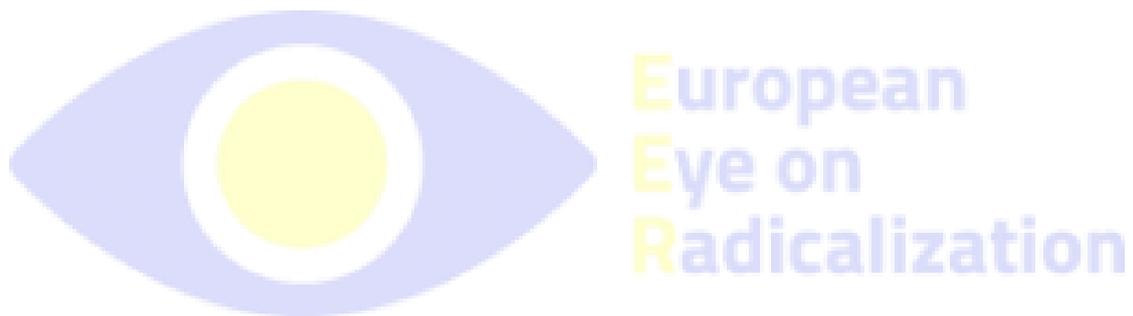
<sup>1</sup> Abubakar Shekau, "Chibok Kidnapping Second Claim," *YouTube*, 12 May 2014, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/09/abubakar-shekau-second-claim-of-chibok-schoolgirls-kidnapping-may-12-2014/>

<sup>2</sup> Such videos from 2014 can be seen at the following link (graphic): <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/28/boko-haram-series-of-massacre-videos-late-2014/>

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Pearson, "Wilayat Shahidat: Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber." In *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, edited by Jacob Zenn. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2018, [https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines\\_Chapter-2.pdf](https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines_Chapter-2.pdf). Ahmed Salkida, "The Story Of Nigeria's First Suicide Bomber-Blueprint Magazine," Sahara Reporters, 26 June 2011, <http://saharareporters.com/2011/06/26/story-nigerias-first-suicide-bomber-blueprint-magazine>.

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Authorities not doing enough to protect lives," 28 May 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/nigeria-authorities-not-doing-enough-to-protect-lives/>.

Abu Musab al-Barnawi ascended to ISWAP's leadership and attacked Shekau's hideout, which led to Shekau's self-detonation of a suicide bomb to kill himself, and the incorporation of fighters from Shekau's main base into ISWAP. This report details the cases where the moderate streak has surfaced, and focuses on the events since May 2021. It then suggests the most recent success of the moderate streak through al-Barnawi's overcoming Shekau may affect the course of the insurgency and present a conundrum for the Nigerian military.



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## Boko Haram's Moderate Streaks

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### *Case Study One: Muhammed Yusuf Versus Muhammed Ali*

Virtually all of Boko Haram leaders and members have stated the group's founding was in 2002. This came amidst the aftermath of 9/11, which reverberated throughout Nigeria, and especially in the majority-Muslim north.<sup>5</sup> The group's founder, Abu Musab al-Barnawi's father Muhammed Yusuf, was in Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage at the time and became resolutely pro-al-Qaeda after learning of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, domestically, there was a famous scandal in which a young female journalist, Isioma Daniel, wrote an editorial arguing that Prophet Muhammed would support a beauty pageant in Nigeria. Northern Nigerian Muslim leaders considered this blasphemy and worthy of a death sentence, and she was forced to flee Nigeria and ultimately obtain asylum in Norway.<sup>7</sup> However, she was never punished, which enraged Muhammed Yusuf and caused him to further demand jihad and sharia implementation in Nigeria.<sup>8</sup>

When Yusuf's companion, Muhammed Ali, who himself had received funds from al-Qaeda, attempted to launch a jihad from rural Kanamma, Yobe State, Nigeria in December 2003, Yusuf, however, backed out. He thought it was still premature to wage jihad, which led Ali to declare not only Yusuf, but virtually all of Nigerian society who disagreed with him, as infidels.<sup>9</sup> Yusuf, therefore, represented a moderate streak relative to Ali, who died along with around two dozen followers during and in the aftermath of the Nigerian security forces' crackdown on Ali's Kanamma-based followers in December 2003.

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<sup>5</sup> Johannes Harnischfeger, "9/11 in Nigeria: Translating Local into Global Conflicts?," *Afrikanistik Online*, 2012, <https://www.afrikanistik-aegyptologie-online.de/archiv/2012/3292>

<sup>6</sup> Abu Musab al-Barnawi, *Slicing Off the Tumor from Shekau's Khawarij by the Allegiance of Noble People*, Al-Haqaiq, 2018. <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/05/10/abu-musab-al-barnawi-slicing-off-the-tumor-book-june-2018/>.

<sup>7</sup> Reporters Sans Frontières, "Fatwa calls for journalist to be killed," 26 November 2002, <https://rsf.org/en/news/fatwa-calls-journalist-be-killed>.

<sup>8</sup> Abdulbasit Kassim, and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Brigaglia, and Alessio Iocci, "The Origins of Boko Haram, and Why the War on Terror Matters," *Diritto e questioni pubbliche* XX, no.1, June 2020; Andrea Brigaglia, and Alessio Iocci, "Entangled Incidents: Nigeria in the Global War on Terror (1994–2009)," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 10, no.2, Fall 2020.

## *Case Study Two: Muhammed Yusuf's Disapproving Jafaar Adam's Assassination*

Four years after the Kanamma clashes, Muhammed Yusuf incorporated Ali's followers into his following, even though Yusuf and Ali had conflicted over whether it was appropriate to wage jihad in 2003. In addition, Yusuf's preaching about establishing an Islamic state in Nigeria based on the Taliban and al-Qaeda's methodology, while denigrating the Nigerian state and the West for abuses of Muslims, attracted a diverse cross-section of society to Yusuf, including elites as well as impoverished urban youths.<sup>10</sup> However, at this same time, Nigeria's mainstream Salafis, who had once promoted al-Qaeda in the years after 9/11, distanced themselves from jihadism and began to shun and denounce Yusuf, including labeling him "Boko Haram," which means "Western education is blasphemous," to mock his aversion to Western education.<sup>11</sup>

Amid growing antagonism between Yusuf's followers and the most prominent Nigerian Salafi preacher, Shaykh Jaafar Mahmud Adam, the former followers of Ali, who were now part of Yusuf's broader followership, assassinated Adam. However, Yusuf proceeded to attend Adam's funeral to console his family members, albeit Adam's closest disciples demanded he leave. Yusuf's son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, also wrote disapprovingly years later about the assassination of Adam and blamed the attack on the late Ali's followers.<sup>12</sup>

The assassination of Adam once again indicated a relative moderate streak in the group, which by then was commonly called Boko Haram. Yusuf, for example, opposed assassinating rival Muslim preachers. However, Yusuf's then-deputy, Shekau, years later, would brag about the group having killed Adam.<sup>13</sup> Although Shekau was under Yusuf's command when Adam was assassinated, Shekau later embodied the more extreme ideological streak in the movement that would surface after Yusuf's death in July 2009 and Shekau's assumption of leadership.

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<sup>10</sup> Kassim and Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader*.

<sup>11</sup> Author's interview of Muhammed Ali's companion, Abu Aisha, Kano, Nigeria, October 30, 2017, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/03/30/abu-aisha-interview-2017/>.

<sup>12</sup> Abu Musab al-Barnawi, *Slicing*.

<sup>13</sup> Abubakar Shekau, "Message to Bad Scholars," *Telegram*, 13 February 2020, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2020/02/15/boko-haram-abubakar-shekau-video-message-to-bad-scholars-especially-isa-ali-pantami-february-13-2020/>.

### Case Study Three: Ansaru's Opposition to Abubakar Shekau



Abubakar Shekau<sup>14</sup>

In July 2009, the Nigerian government cracked down on Yusuf's following, which had grown into the hundreds of thousands and become a legitimate challenge to state authority.<sup>15</sup> During this crackdown, Yusuf and several hundred followers were killed and Shekau was shot, but survived. On the one-year anniversary of Yusuf's death, Shekau announced he was leader of Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JASDJ, or "Sunni Muslim Group for Preaching and Jihad"), although "Boko Haram" remained the group's exonym among the public.<sup>16</sup>

After a year of leading JASDJ, Shekau's sub-commanders began revolting on grounds that he betrayed Muhammed Yusuf's legacy by ordering the killings of fighters for minor infractions and Muslim civilians simply for not joining JASDJ. The sub-commanders who had trained with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) as early as the time of Muhammed Ali's death, and even more intensively after Yusuf's death, then wrote to AQIM to explain Shekau's "deviance and excesses."<sup>17</sup> AQIM finally approved these dissident sub-commanders separating

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<sup>14</sup> "Boko Haram – Abubakar Shekau and Co-fighters 'Glad Tidings to the Believers' Video – November 17, 2020", *Unmasking Boko Haram*, 1 December 2020, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2020/12/01/boko-haram-abubakar-shekau-and-co-fighters-glad-tidings-to-the-believers-video-november-17-2020/>

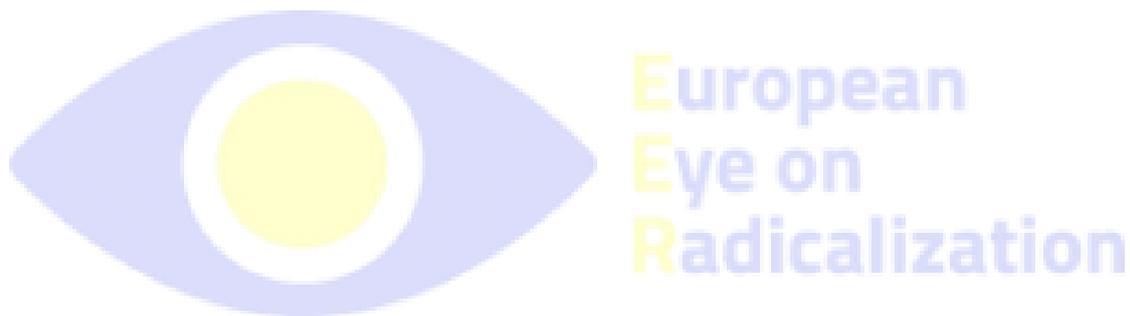
<sup>15</sup> Roman Loimeier, "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria," *Africa Spectrum* 47, no.2–3 (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Abubakar Shekau, "Risalat Taazaiyah," *Ansar al-Muhajideen Forum*, 12 July 2010, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/05/13/abubakar-shekau-risalat-taaziyah-condolence-letter-july-12-2010/>.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Rasheed Hassan al-Bulaydi, "Sharia Advice and Guidance for the Mujahideen of Nigeria," *Al-Andalus*, 28 April 2017, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/25/aqim-al-andalus-sharia-advice-and-guidance-from-al-bulaydi-for-the-mujahideen-of-nigeria-2017/>.

from Shekau and forming Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan ("Ansaru," or Group of Supporters of Muslims in the Land of the Blacks).

Ansaru differed from JASDJ through narratives about reviving the pre-colonial Islamic state of Usman dan Fodio and focusing on abducting Westerners for ransom and attacking only Nigerian security forces and Christians who allegedly were in conflict with Muslims in Nigeria's volatile Middle Belt region.<sup>18</sup> Although Ansaru soon met its demise when JASDJ loyalists killed its members and Nigerian security forces broke up its commanders' cells, the group offered a relatively more moderate jihadist "counter-narrative" to JASDJ and an attack style that was less brutal or at least that tended to spare civilians. The group, therefore, represented a more moderate approach to waging jihad than that of Shekau.



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<sup>18</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Ansaru: Who Are They And Where Are They From?," *Council on Foreign Relations-Africa in Transition*, 1 July 2013, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/ansaru-who-are-they-and-where-are-they>.

#### *Case Study Four: Abubakar Shekau's Departure from ISWAP*

Abubakar Shekau withstood the challenge to his leadership from Ansaru, and even though he had once pledged loyalty (*bay'a*) to al-Qaeda, in March 2015, he now pledged loyalty to the IS “caliph,” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. This occurred amid JASDJ’s shocking territorial conquests in Borno and adjacent parts of northeastern Nigeria and Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, which covered a landmass roughly the size of Belgium. At the same time, there was a high level of internal pressure on Shekau, who was reluctant to cede authority to al-Baghdadi, from Abu Musab al-Barnawi and other high-level JASDJ members, but Shekau had to relent and follow IS’s orders or risk being overthrown from within.<sup>19</sup>

After the pledge, ISWAP superseded and made obsolete JASDJ, while Abu Musab al-Barnawi and other sub-commanders reported to IS about Shekau’s abuses of power. By August 2016, as ISWAP recovered from the military offensives against it and began to recover its lost territories, IS ruled in favor of ISWAP’s relative moderates, including al-Barnawi, in their disputes with Shekau. This resulted in Shekau leaving ISWAP and relaunching JASDJ and establishing his base in Sambisa, Borno, while ISWAP operated in the rest of Borno under al-Barnawi’s leadership.<sup>20</sup>

ISWAP proceeded to criticize Shekau’s “factionalizing the mujahidin” and, like Ansaru, some of whose members had by now defected to ISWAP, generally avoided harming ordinary Muslim civilians.<sup>21</sup> JASDJ under Shekau, in contrast, continued abducting both Muslim and Christian civilians, especially women, as “slaves” and raiding villages, although both ISWAP and JASDJ conducted massacres of vigilantes who it believed collaborated with the Nigerian military.<sup>22</sup> ISWAP nevertheless became the preeminent group in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region and by 2021 was ambushing Nigerian military convoys and establishing rudimentary state-like structures in its territories, all while maintaining full loyalty to IS and condemning their Shekau rival.

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<sup>19</sup> Andrea Brigaglia, “Slicing off the Tumour’: The History of Global Jihad in Nigeria, as Narrated by the Islamic State,” *Politics and Religion Journal*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Abubakar Shekau and Man Chari, “Message from the Soldiers Video,” *Youtube*, 8 August 2016, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/09/abubakar-shekau-and-man-chari-message-from-the-soldiers-video-august-8-2016/>.

<sup>21</sup> ISWAP, “Slay Them Wherever You Catch Them,” *Telegram*, 14 February 2020, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2020/02/15/iswap-slay-them-wherever-you-catch-them-video-part-2-february-14-2020/>.

<sup>22</sup> Abdulkareem Haruna, “Gubio Attack: Death toll now 81; village head, six others abducted,” *Premium Times*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/397061-gubio-attack-death-toll-now-81-village-head-six-others-abducted.html>.

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## Overcoming Shekau: The Final Victory of Boko Haram’s Moderates

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As can be seen, the “Boko Haram” movement, which refers to ISWAP, JASDJ, and Ansaru, has exhibited a contestation between more moderate and more extreme ideological streaks, with the latter embodied mostly by Shekau and Muhammed Ali before him. Indeed, when Abu Musab al-Barnawi wrote a book condemning Shekau in 2018, he compared Shekau to Ali’s followers in 2003, who were then known as the “Nigerian Taliban.”<sup>23</sup> The more moderate streak, in contrast, has been embodied by Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Ansaru before him, which makes it unsurprising that al-Barnawi noted in his book that some Ansaru members eventually defected to follow his leadership in ISWAP. Importantly, neither ideological streaks opposed jihad against the Nigerian government or loyalty to and identification with external, global jihadist groups like al-Qaeda or IS.



*The only image of Abu Musab al-Barnawi, right<sup>24</sup>*

The main difference between the ideological streaks was whether ordinary Muslims who did not join the jihad, but also did not support the Nigerian government or military, should be killed. Shekau believed such ordinary Muslims

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<sup>23</sup> Abu Musab al-Barnawi, *Slicing*.

<sup>24</sup> “Al-Urwha al-Wutqha – Interview with the Official Spokesman”, *Unmasking Boko Haram*, 27 January 2015, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/10/al-urwha-al-wutqha-interview-with-the-official-spokesman-january-27-2015/>

were “infidels” and could be targeted for killing or abductions, while Abu Musab al-Barnawi believe the jihadists should seek to win such Muslims’ support and avoid harming them. This was not the only disagreement, however. Shekau also ordered hundreds of young girls, including some by coercion, to conduct suicide bombings, which IS opposed; released maniacal videos, including scratching his crotch,<sup>25</sup> which Ansaru had mocked and IS disliked (this we know because inter alia it never allowed Shekau to be featured in any ISWAP videos); and hoarded supplies ranging from electricity generators, to food, to computer printers, which sub-commanders resented, especially when civilians were impoverished.<sup>26</sup>

The contestation between moderate and extreme ideological streaks, and specifically between Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Shekau, finally culminated in the events of May 2021 and succeeding months. This involved IS ordering Abu Musab al-Barnawi to send ISWAP fighters into Shekau’s Sambisa base to kill Shekau and demand the loyalty of Shekau’s fighters be renewed to IS. The chronology of these events and the audio, video, and written communications detailing them are described below.

### *The End of Shekau*

The first sign of al-Barnawi’s plans to attack Shekau occurred in May 2021 when al-Barnawi released an audio to his *shura* explaining that IS designated him as ISWAP’s new “caretaker” leader. Al-Barnawi had been named by IS as ISWAP leader in August 2016. However, in March 2019, ISWAP hardliners purged him and executed his ally, Mamman Nur, claiming IS ordered them to do so after Nur swindled money from IS and negotiated with the Nigerian government behind ISWAP’s back.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in May 2021, IS, aware that al-Barnawi had been removed from power alongside Nur, reinstated al-Barnawi at least temporarily to the leadership position.

Addressed to “Muslims who in this area and our brothers and sisters that are mujahidin in the army of the Caliphate,” al-Barnawi stated in the audio that Shekau “rejected the method of prophet and that is why we left him, and created an [IS] province with [al-Barnawi] as *wali* (governor).” Al-Barnawi then noted his

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<sup>25</sup> Ansaru, “Investigation of the Nigerian Army,” Telegram, 10 February 2015, at 16:13, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/09/ansaru-videos-before-and-after-boko-harams-shura-on-the-pledge-to-al-baghdadi-january-29-2015-and-february-10-2015/>

<sup>26</sup> Mamman Nur, “Exposé: An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau,” Soundcloud, 2 August 2016, <https://soundcloud.com/saharareporters/2016-08-04-audio-00000003-1>.

<sup>27</sup> Sahara Reporters, “Boko Haram Leader Mamman Nur ‘Killed By His Closest Lieutenants’ For Releasing Dapchi Girls,” 14 September 2018, <http://saharareporters.com/2018/09/14/boko-haram-leader-mamman-nur-killed-his-closest-lieutenants-releasing-dapchi-girls>.

two successors as leaders were Ibn Umar and Abu Hafsa, who purged him (and Nur). However, al-Barnawi asserted this was not “according to the directives of the prophet and this is what we are trying to fix now” through accepting IS’s guidance to accept al-Barnawi as leader again.



Mamman Nur<sup>28</sup>

Al-Barnawi further mentioned IS had ordered ISWAP that *ghanima* (spoils of war) “should be shared with all members of the province” and “not be sold in the province but given out freely.” Al-Barnawi, however, noted that ISWAP’s leaders, presumably Shekau and the leaders who purged him in March 2019, “cheated and performed an injustice to people” by “making followers of the province work tirelessly while the leaders rested comfortably in their shelters.” To redress this, al-Barnawi asserted “we will seek forgiveness.” It was a result of these leadership transgressions that al-Barnawi noted that IS had “dissolved the [ISWAP] waliship” and al-Barnawi himself would be anointed leader and ISWAP must “wait and see” until IS made a decision on any future leader.

This audio reflected how al-Barnawi embodied the moderate streak in ISWAP, while Shekau and those who purged al-Barnawi, Ibn Umar and Abu Hafsa, embodied the more extreme streak. At the time of this audio’s release, however, it was unknown that al-Barnawi’s resumption of leadership would coincide with ISWAP’s offensive against Shekau that led to Shekau’s death. This, in turn, represented the ultimate victory of the relative moderates against the extremists like Shekau.

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<sup>28</sup> “Mamman Nur (and Muhammed Yusuf) – Sermon on Jihad Video – Approx June 2009 (and assorted early Shekau, Nur, and Yusuf videos/audios)”, *Unmasking Boko Haram*, 6 April 2019, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/04/06/mamman-nur-speech-on-jihad-approx-2008-2/>

Shortly after this al-Barnawi *shura* audio surfaced, the Nigerian online publication *Humangle*, which is run by longtime Boko Haram insider journalist, Ahmed Salkida, reported on May 20 that Shekau self-detonated a suicide bomb just as ISWAP fighters surrounded him in Sambisa Forest during an offensive against Shekau's bases.<sup>29</sup> Given that the Nigerian government had declared Shekau dead several times since 2009 only to see him resurface in videos mocking the government, there was skepticism about the *Humangle* report.<sup>30</sup> However, a Shekau audio was leaked on May 22 in which he delivered a sermon indicating he knew he would soon die or be captured.<sup>31</sup>

Shekau claimed ISWAP “deceived” his loyalists, which, based on Shekau's videos in previous years, occurred through al-Barnawi's cutting off Shekau's communications with IS and, in Shekau's view, relaying to ISWAP false proclamations from IS, including regarding IS' siding with al-Barnawi's theology on conducting jihad over Shekau's. In addition, Shekau acknowledged that “since this war began, many of our brothers have lost their lives, and many have sustained injuries” and that al-Barnawi's loyalists have “defeated us.” However, Shekau also asserted he would never be loyal to anybody, which was reflected by his ISWAP leadership term in which he defied IS orders and, for example, abducted Muslim and Christian women as slaves, which IS did not endorse. IS had only abducted as slaves Yezidis who, unlike Muslims and Christians, were not “People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*).”

Al-Barnawi responded in another June 21 audio addressed to “the one who calls himself imam Shekau” and Shekau's followers in Sambisa, Lake Chad, and Zamafara and Niger states, where Shekau had declared JASDJ affiliates since 2019 through videos of fighters pledging loyalty to Shekau.<sup>32</sup> In the audio, al-Barnawi called on Shekau's followers to join ISWAP and “obey the Caliphate” because Shekau himself had never renounced his loyalty to IS. He further asserted that Muslims living outside ISWAP-controlled territories were not “infidels” and even though most Muslims living in government-controlled areas were “apostates” who condoned elections, there were still good people among them. He further criticized Shekau for mass killings of Muslims, enslaving “apostate” Muslim

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<sup>29</sup> Murtala Abdullahi, “Boko Haram Strongman, Shekau, Dead As ISWAP Fighters Capture Sambisa Forest,” *HumAngle*, 20 May 2021, <https://humangle.ng/boko-haram-strongman-shekau-dead-as-iswap-fighters-capture-sambisa-forest/>.

<sup>30</sup> Jacob Zenn, “Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau: Dead, Deposed or Duplicated?,” *Militant Leadership Monitor*, 31 May 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/boko-haram-leader-abubakar-shekau-dead-deposed-or-duplicated/>.

<sup>31</sup> Abubakar Shekau, “Final Sermon,” 22 May 2021, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2021/05/23/boko-haram-abubakar-shekau-final-audio-sermon-may-22-2021/>.

<sup>32</sup> Abu Musab al-Barnawi, “Message to the One Who Calls Himself Shekawi,” 21 June 2021, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2021/06/21/iswap-abu-musab-al-barnawi-audio-to-the-one-who-calls-himself-al-shekawi-june-21-2021/>.

women who, for example, received Western education, despite IS orders against this, and, argued Shekau was too soft on al-Qaeda by Shekau's praising JASDJ's former al-Qaeda liaison. In contrast, al-Barnawi asserted al-Qaeda members were not "good Muslims" and ISWAP "opposed" both al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Lastly, al-Barnawi detailed "Arab representatives" who visited ISWAP on IS's behalf and the disputes with Shekau over communications to IS, which resulted in Shekau killing high-level ISWAP commanders in a way that al-Barnawi considered unacceptable. This audio was intended as a demonstration to Shekau's loyalists after Shekau's death that they had been wrongfully led by Shekau and should follow ISWAP's path.

IS itself followed with a June 25 audio sermon from spokesperson, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurayshi, in which he now indirectly acknowledged Shekau's fighters rejoined ISWAP and praised ISWAP's implementing sharia in its territories, including through collecting zakat taxation.<sup>33</sup> Further, a July 1 article in IS' weekly *al-Naba* newsletter discussed the events leading to Shekau's death. The article noted Shekau "deviated from the path of guidance and separated from the [Muslim] community" and described how ISWAP "searched for Shekau in the [Sambisa] forest, until they found him with a number of deputies on four vehicles" and "fierce clashes erupted between the two sides, which led to the killing and wounding of some of his followers, while the rest of them fled in one of the vehicles." The article stated Shekau "took off on foot to once again hide in the forests," but the "soldiers of the Caliphate tracked his steps and intensively searched for two days to find him on [May 19], with seven of his guards under a tall tree." According to the article, Shekau was "asked to surrender and given an hour of advice, recommendations, and warnings," which led to "six of the [deputies'] surrendering, but [Shekau] and one of his escorts refused." Finally, "as the [ISWAP] mujahidin were talking to [Shekau] and calling on him to repent and surrender, he motioned for his escort to prepare his weapon," but "the mujahidin noticed and shot him in the head, killing him. Shekau then detonated his explosive jacket, killing himself and "ending his story."

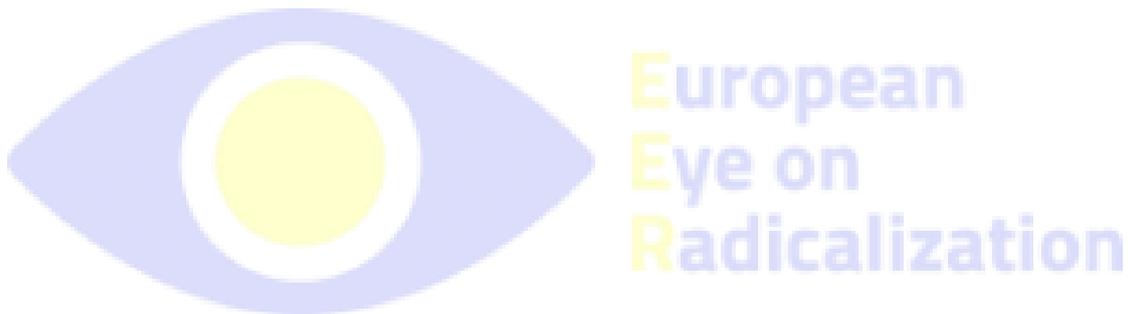
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<sup>33</sup> Aymenn J. al-Tamimi, "And You Are the Supreme Ones If You Are Believers'- New Speech by Islamic State Spokesman," *aymennjawad.org*, 27 June 2021, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2021/06/and-you-are-the-supreme-ones-if-you-are-believers#.YNh1PwMZ8CA.twitter>.

## *After Shekau's Death*

After al-Barnawi released a *shura* audio on July 6 corroborating many of the details of the *al-Naba* article, on July 14, Shekau's loyalists around Lake Chad led by one Bakura announced that Shekau was indeed dead, but they would not follow al-Barnawi.<sup>34</sup> Rather, they considered themselves the legitimate IS province and requested IS to rule in their favor in their theological disputes with al-Barnawi. This, of course, did not happen.

On the contrary, on June 25, IS released a video of ISWAP embracing former Shekau loyalists in Sambisa who rejoined ISWAP while reaffirming their loyalty to IS, and al-Barnawi released an audio on the same day welcoming former Shekau loyalists to ISWAP and explaining ISWAP's creed to them.<sup>35</sup> Further confirming former Shekau loyalists joining ISWAP was IS' July 23 video featuring them celebrating Eid al-Adha in Sambisa. Indeed, Shekau's longstanding Sambisa stronghold was now ISWAP's.



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<sup>34</sup> Abu Musab al-Barnawi, "Explaining Abubakar Shekau's Death, 6 June 2021, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2021/06/10/iswap-abu-musab-al-barnawi-audio-explaining-abubakar-shekaus-death-june-6-2021/>; Bakura, "Response to Abubakar Shekau's Death," 14 June 2021, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2021/06/14/boko-haram-lake-chad-bakura-factions-response-after-abubakar-shekaus-death-june-14-2021/>.

<sup>35</sup> ISWAP, "The Righteous," *Telegram*, 25 June 2021, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2021/06/25/iswap-the-righteous-video-on-late-abubakar-shekaus-fighters-reintegration-and-loyalty-to-islamic-state-june-25-2021/>; Abub Musab al-Barnawi, "Welcome JASDJ Fighters' Reintegration," 25 June 2021, <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2021/06/27/iswap-abu-musab-al-barnawi-audio-welcoming-late-shekaus-fighters-reintegration-and-loyalty-to-islamic-state-june-25-2021/>

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## Conclusion: Conundrums for the Nigerian Army

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This report has shown that the “Boko Haram” movement has long exhibited tensions between more moderate and more extreme ideological streaks. However, it now appears the relative moderates have decisively won under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Barnawi and removed the “tumor” that al-Barnawi described as Shekau.<sup>36</sup> This presents a conundrum for the Nigerian government and army, however, for two main reasons.

First, ISWAP treats the civilian population, and especially ordinary Muslims, better than JASDJ did under Shekau. ISWAP, therefore, is more likely than JASDJ to win civilian support and govern its territories more effectively. This means the Nigerian army and government will have more difficulty convincing civilians to support them, especially when one way ISWAP’s violence is certain to be inflicted is toward any civilian who cooperates with the state. Ironically, however, if the more brutal Shekau had withstood ISWAP’s incursions, then civilians would have continued to face harsher raids and retribution from JASDJ that would make their lives more difficult while sullyng the reputation of the jihadists. However, this would have been “better” for the Nigerian army and government.

Second, ISWAP has consistently proven to be a more effective military force than JASDJ and has raided Nigerian military posts throughout northeastern Nigeria numerous times, often displaying such footage in videos released by IS’ centralized media apparatus. In addition, ISWAP’s roadside ambushes have prevented the army from reaching rural areas in northeastern Nigeria, and thereby has limited the amount of economic development initiatives the Borno State government has been able to implement in such areas. This means civilians in rural areas under ISWAP’s control or who are influenced by ISWAP are less likely to experience government efforts to improve their livelihoods. Again, therefore, JASDJ’s less sophisticated military and governance capabilities compared to ISWAP would have “benefited” the Nigerian army and government, but at the same time civilians living near JASDJ brigades would have been less likely to be “served” by JASDJ.

Moving forward, the main challenge facing the Nigerian government and army is that they are confronting an ascendant ISWAP that has a strategy to win over the local population as part of its long-term governance agenda, while it also relentlessly attacks the army at its outposts and on the roadways. The army will

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<sup>36</sup> Abu Musab al-Barnawi, *Slicing*.

need to withstand ISWAP's military pressure, while the government will need provide the population in and around ISWAP's areas of operations with services and opportunities more effectively than ISWAP provides them.

The elimination of the "Boko Haram" extreme streak embodied by Shekau means the Nigerian government and army are dealing with a comparatively less brutal but militarily more capable foe. This foe is in some ways "better" for the civilian population, but also "worse" for the government and army because it makes their task of regaining sovereignty over all of Nigeria's territory all the more demanding.

