

A Review of: “Islamic State in Africa: The Emergence, Evolution, and Future of the Next Jihadist Battlefield” by Jason Warner, Ryan O’Farrell, Héni Nsaibia, and Ryan Cummings¹

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The Islamic State in Africa is a significant piece of work. Jason Warner and his co-authors provide a profound analysis of ISIS (also known as ISIL, IS or IS Central as used in the book) in Africa. The book is guided by two critical and interwoven questions: how did the Islamic State’s African official provinces and non-province affiliate groups emerge and evolve, and why have these affiliates continued to show loyalty and strength – by re-pledging allegiance, continuing to conduct and publicize attacks in the Islamic State name, and developing new branches – even as the IS Central itself was in seeming decline following its annus horribilis of 2019 (p.4)?

Using a simple but effective tripartite periodic structural framework that focuses on the pre-Bayah, Bayah and post-Bayah periods, Warner et al show the emergence, evolution, and transformation of nine ISIS affiliate groups in Africa. The pre-Bayah period defines the years before 2014 when several jihadist groups in Africa began to pledge allegiance to IS Central. Here, Warner et al provide the conditions that made the would-be ISIS franchises ripe for such move. The Bayah period focuses on the time when the groups pledged allegiance (between 2014 and 2019) to IS Central and the processes of acceptance of the pledges. The authors show that the pattern of the pledges, process of acceptance and/or elevation to wilayat or province status, and material support received from IS Central varied across the ISIS franchises in Africa. Particularly, they use the phrase ‘affiliate utility validation’ to describe the process that prospective ISIS franchise must undergo to gain acceptance. Lastly, the post-Bayah period captures the phase after the death of al-Baghdadi in late 2019 and the repledging of allegiance to ISIS. Between the introductory and concluding chapters are nine chapters that focuses on the different Islamic States in Libya, Algeria, Sinai, Tunisia, West Africa Province (that is Boko Haram), West Africa Province-Greater Sahara, Somalia, Central Africa Province-DRC, and Central Africa Province-Mozambique respectively.

In 2014, at the height of its successful campaign in Iraq and Syria where it commanded control of large swathes of territories under the leadership of the self-declared Caliph al-Baghdadi, ISIS became a symbol of Islamic victory or Islamic renaissance and hope for the global entrenchment of Islamic worldview. The symbolism of ISIS’ success and its impact on the global umma-that is, the worldwide community of Muslims are reflected in the horde of

¹ Warner, Jason, O’Farrell, Ryan, Nsaibia, Héni, Cummings, Ryan, Islamic State in Africa: The Emergence, Evolution, and Future of the Next Jihadist Battlefield. Hurst & Company, London, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-7873-8390-6 (hc).

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African jihadists that jumped on the popular ISIS bandwagon. The authors of *The Islamic State in Africa* describe the chain effect of the victories recorded by IS Central as the 'democratisation of jihad' on the African continent. In essence, ISIS presented itself as a supra-national and powerful force with great ideological and material benefits to its African affiliates. Before ISIS, al-Qaeda served as the transnational jihadist hub and provided global patronage to local jihadist groups. Warner and his co-authors show the subtle and sometimes not-too-subtle tension between ISIS and al-Qaeda as some of the new ISIS' franchises oscillated in their loyalty to both supra-structures. The groups as well as ISIS and al-Qaeda exploited the powerplay in some instances.

The Islamic State in Africa is particularly relevant as Africa becomes the new theatre of jihadism. Although IS Central has been badly weakened following the successful counterterrorism campaign by the Western-led coalition force against ISIS that led to the killing of al-Baghdadi and loss of ISIS-controlled territories, ISIS affiliates in Africa have surprisingly remained loyal to IS Central. The unflinching loyalty to a greatly diminished supra-power is, according to Warner et al, due to the symbolic benefit that ISIS African affiliates continue to enjoy from the ISIS brand. According to the authors, IS Central and the plethora of ISIS provinces and non-provinces that emerge in Africa enjoy mutual benefits. Although, some of the African ISIS' affiliates gained material support from the parent Jihadist body, which was once the richest terrorist groups in the world, the core benefit to the ISIS affiliates was symbolic. The ISIS affiliates retained their operational independence and remained largely driven by local politics and conditions. The symbolic currency of ISIS brand has not ceased despite the death of al-Baghdadi and the weakening of IS Central. This, in Warner et al's opinion, explains why ISIS African affiliates re-pledged allegiance to IS Central after the death of al-Baghdadi.

The Islamic State in Africa has great policy and intellectual usefulness. Intellectually, Warner et al offers a simplified yet effective analytical model for explaining the trajectory of extremist organisations. Policy-wise, the book provides a deep insight into the material and existential conditions that inspire the rise of Jihadist groups in Africa and how nefarious organisations such as ISIS can capitalise on these conditions to perpetuate and 'democratise' (using the author's terms), -that is, expand their evil agenda. Removing those conditions or elements that allow the conditions to fester can go a long way in denying ambitious extremist organisations such as ISIS the opportunity to entrench themselves. As Africa becomes the new frontier for jihadism and other forms of extremism, *The Islamic State in Africa* provides readers with the correct tool for understanding and addressing the threats that this creates.

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