Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna: A Comparative Analysis of Insurgency Dynamics and Governance Failures[1]

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Abstract:

This paper examines the manifestation and problems relating to the Islamist insurgencies of Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria, and Ansar al-Sunna in northern Mozambique. The thrust of the paper is that Islamist movements, driven by the ideas of jihadism, exploit conditions in weak and fragile states and expand their reach in territories affected by poor or deteriorating socio-economic conditions. In Africa, Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna are two striking examples. Following the introduction, the phenomena of Islamism and jihadist insurgencies in Africa are under review, after which state fragility is theorised. The focus then moves to Boko Haram and the conflict dynamics in the north-east of Nigeria, and the political conditions and related fragility in that country. From there, the emphasis shifts to Ansar al-Sunna and the conflict dynamics in northern Mozambique, focusing on the emergence and existence of the movement, and the political conditions and related fragility in the country. The paper argues that in both insurgencies under review – Nigeria and Mozambique – fragility and violent conflict fuel each other, and thus we can argue that the state fragility–conflict dynamics nexus is key in understanding the contemporary security landscapes and conflict in these two states. Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting and reflecting on six of the most striking similarities between the Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna insurgencies, and the governance (political and military) challenges that have thus far limited or prevented successful counter-insurgency measures in both countries.

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Introduction

Since the end of the 1990s, the prevalence of insurgencies across the globe has steadily increased. Insurgencies, which can be defined as "organized subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region", now constitute the majority of conflicts globally monitored by analysts (Hankins, 2020). In Africa, one of the most striking examples in the past decade and a half is the ongoing bloodshed caused by an Islamist group in north-eastern Nigeria and the broader Lake Chad Basin region. Another example is the more recent manifestation of a ruthless Islamist insurgent movement in the northern Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique. Both these insurgencies play out against the backdrop of serious weaknesses in governance, law enforcement and military capacity (Okoro, 2014; Zenda, 2021).

More specifically, since 2002, the north-eastern territories of Nigeria suffered from acute violent conflict conducted by a radical Islamist movement that officially calls itself Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, which means People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad. This movement has eventually become known as Boko Haram, which in the language of the local Hausa ethnic group means, "Western education is unlawful" (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 53.; Besenyő and Mayer, 2014, pp. 48-50.). The impact of this movement on north-eastern Nigeria – especially since 2009 – was immensely negative with thousands of Nigerians killed and millions gripped by fear. The Nigerian government responded by establishing a special Joint Military Task Force with a view to pursuing a crackdown on members of Boko Haram and their hideouts (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 66.) – but today Boko Haram is as strong as ever before.

In Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, located on the northern border of Mozambique with Tanzania, Islamist militants, known as Ansar al-Sunna, meaning "supporters of the tradition", emerged in 2017, and by 2021 more than 2 500 people had been killed and about 700 000 displaced. President Filipe Nyusi's government labelled the insurgency as "acts of banditry" and deployed the country's security forces in the hope of quashing the militants, but it soon became evident that the security forces were unprepared and under-resourced for the task. In view of this, Ansar al-Sunna has taken root in Cabo Delgado, and not even foreign private military companies could so far end the insurgency (Zenda, 2021, pp. 20-25). Currently, several Southern African nations are contributing to a multinational regional task force while the Rwandan government also deployed a force to northern Mozambique in an effort to quell the insurgency – thus far with limited success.

Following the above, this paper examines the problems relating to the insurgencies of Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria and Ansar al-Sunna in northern Mozambique respectively. Immediately following this introduction, the phenomena of Islamism and jihadist insurgencies in Africa are under review, after which state fragility is briefly theorised. The paper then examines why the two Islamist movements exist and

furthermore analyse the respective insurgencies against the background of state fragility and related governance crises in both north-eastern Nigeria and northern Mozambique.

The Phenomena of Islamism and Jihadist Insurgencies in Africa

In Africa, jihadism is of special relevance to examine the problem of Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria and Ansar al-Sunna in northern Mozambique alike. In both cases, the existence of these two insurgent movements – and others on the African continent – should be understood in the context of jihadism and the global jihad, and the role of transnational terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 54). In both cases, violence and bloodshed in the relevant regions are tied to the notion of jihadism.

In seeking a definition for insurgency, Johnston (2018) uses the US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual's explanation of insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict". The political objectives of insurgents therefore often relate to the pursuit of political independence, self-determination or secession. Johnston further states, "the ultimate goal of insurgencies is to develop in size and capacities whilst degrading the opposing government to such a point where they may engage and defeat them in conventional combat". Like terrorists, insurgents are generally outmatched by government capacity. Given the fact that both Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna intend to establish Islamic caliphates in the respective territories where they manifest and operate (Pieri and Zenn, 2017, pp. 42-43; Mutasa and Muchemwa, 2021, p. 2.), the conflict dynamics of both movements are considered insurgencies in this paper.

> With the phenomena of horrific religiously based attacks across the globe and political rhetoric around Islam and Muslims, it is further of scholarly importance to define or clarify specific terminology. Very often Islamism surfaces prominently in the relevant literature or discourses and, together with Salafism and Jihadism, these concepts are sometimes being tossed around in a somewhat confusing way. Given the centrality of Islamism around conflict where Islam or Muslims is involved or implicated, it is of great importance to clarify Islamism as a concept (Hamid and Dar, 2016).

In view of the above, Hamid and Dar (2016) define Islamism as follows:

Islamism as a phenomenon incorporates a wide spectrum of behavior and belief. In the broadest sense, Islamist groups believe Islamic law or Islamic values should play a central role in public life. They feel Islam has things to say about how politics should be conducted, how the law should be applied, and how other people – not just themselves – should conduct themselves morally.

Solomon and Tausch (2020, p. 11.) explain that Islamist movements are primarily political and can be linked to an ideology that emerged in the twentieth century. Islamists are divided into different factions, but are broadly associated with at least two key ideological components: the first is a commitment to the Quran as the foundation of political, legal and social systems; and the second is a devotion to return to the example of the Prophet Muhammad. According to Write (2015), Islamists are not a case of 'one size fits all'. In fact, Islamism in its contemporary form can be viewed as a spectrum or a labyrinth. In this regard, Hamid and Dar (2016) identify gradualism or a historically eschewing revolution as a distinguishing feature of what is called 'mainstream Islamism'. Mainstream Islamists accept parliamentary politics and also show a willingness to function within existing state institutions, even secular structures. Their main goal is a reconditioning of pre-modern Islamic law with the modern nation-state. A faction that sets them apart from mainstream Islamists is Salafists. The latter is less inclined to become involved in active politics. They opt instead for an approach of preaching and religious education and, unlike their mainstream counterparts, they are ultraconservatives, believing in the spirit as well as the letter of the law. As such, Salafists are fundamentalist in religious orientation and advocate a commitment and return to the authentic or original political and moral practices of Islam, something that they trace back to the lived example of the early, righteous generations of Muslims. The latter is known as the Salaf, meaning those who were closest to the Prophet Muhammad during and soon after his life on earth. Politically, they lobby for specific Sharia-based policies.

Lastly, jihadism is of special interest to this discussion. Hamid and Dar (2016) explain the notion of jihadism as follows:

> Jihadism is driven by the idea that jihad (religiously-sanctioned warfare) is an individual obligation (fard 'ayn) incumbent upon all Muslims, rather than a collective obligation carried out by legitimate representatives of the Muslim community (fard kifaya), as it was traditionally understood in the pre-modern era. They are able to do this by arguing that Muslim leaders today are illegitimate and do not command the authority to ordain justified violence. In the absence of such authority, they argue, every able-bodied Muslim should take up the mantle of jihad.

Solomon (2015, pp. 33-34.) puts matters in perspective when he points out that in several newly independent African states, Islamists and specifically jihadist insurgents exploited the conditions in weak and fragile states and expanded their reach among those affected by deteriorating conditions. This is certainly true of both north-eastern

Nigeria and northern Mozambique, which brings us to the concept of state fragility. The following section expands on this in more detail.

Theorising State Fragility

In many countries, it is taken for granted that the state is there to ensure security, uphold the rule of law, and provide service delivery, such as collecting rubbish, building roads, providing education and ensuring social security. Yet, there are many instances in the world where states do not manage to perform their core tasks. The governments of such 'fragile' states simply do not possess the capacity or the legitimacy to govern effectively, and citizens lack some of the most basic services, ranging from access to safe drinking water and primary healthcare to secure environments (European Report on Development Research Team, 2008).

There is no single, widely and commonly accepted definition of the concept. What is clear though, is that fragile states are falling short when measured in terms of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, fragile states share certain characteristics, such as underdeveloped infrastructure, widespread food insecurity and low levels of human capital (European Report on Development Research Team, 2008). According to Chuku and Onye (2019, p. 2.), fragility refers to situations where the 'social contract' is broken. This is "due to the state's incapacity or unwillingness to provide its basic functions and obligations regarding the rule of law, poverty reduction, protection of human rights and freedoms, security and safety of its population, service delivery, equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, among others".

Against this background, Chuku and Onye (2019, p. 2.) argue that all existing definitions of fragility correspond with three main themes, namely authority, service delivery, and legitimacy – or lack thereof. In this regard, Cilliers and Sisk (2013) define a fragile state as follows:

> ...one in which armed conflict and violence threaten the lives of the country's citizens and prevent them from making a decent living. It is a state where inequality and exclusion are rife, with the majority of the population remaining poor, despite its having rich natural resources in many cases. It is also a country with very poor governance, where the state is often simply absent and doesn't provide basic services such as schools, hospitals and roads.

According to Adeto (2019, p. 12.), fragile states are generally lacking the functional authority to provide basic security to their populations within their borders. They further fall short of possessing the required institutional capacity to satisfy the basic social needs of their populations. Also, fragile states are not in full political control of the internal dynamics of their territories. In some fragile states, ungoverned spaces

therefore open up in a landscape of privatised economies and security actors. Practically, such ungoverned spaces coincide with the emergence of rebel groups or insurgents, as well as multinational forces in some instances, all contesting for control of political dynamics. A striking example in Africa is Somalia in the Horn of Africa where a vacuum has been filled by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab movement since 2004.

The 2022 Fragile State Index indicates Africa as the most negatively affected region in the world. Among the states in Africa listed as fragile in the 2022 Fragile State Index are Nigeria and Mozambique. (The Fund for Peace, 2022) In both these states fragility and violent conflict fuel each other, and thus we can argue that the state fragility–conflict dynamics nexus (see Adeto, 2019) is a key factor in the dynamics of the contemporary security domains in these two states.

The Nature of the Boko Haram Insurgency

In this section, the Boko Haram phenomenon in the north-east of Nigeria is analysed, focusing on the emergence and existence of the movement and its connection to the global Jihad. Secondly, the political conditions and fragility in Nigeria are discussed, as these factors coincide with governance challenges and realities of state fragility, specifically in the conflict-ridden north-eastern parts of the country.

The establishment of a caliphate is central to an understanding of the existence of Boko Haram. This goal has been stated in speeches, sermons, writings and YouTube videos over the years (Pieri and Zenn, 2017, p. 45.). Walker (2012, p. 1.) describes Boko Haram as an Islamic sect that believes politics in Nigeria was captured by a group of corrupt, false Muslims. The movement therefore committed itself to a war against so-called false Muslims, but also the Federal Republic of Nigeria in general, driven by the goal to replace the status quo with a pure Islamic state ruled by Sharia (Islamic) law. The movement is also motivated by a desire for vengeance against Nigerian politicians, security forces and even Islamic authorities – relating to their involvement in a brutal suppression of the movement since 2009. Over several years, the movement proved itself adaptable, able to change its targets and tactics swiftly under the guidance of charismatic leadership.

The earliest emergence of Boko Haram is to be found in a group of radical Islamist youth who worshipped at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, the capital and the largest city of Borno State in the north-eastern parts of Nigeria. In 2002, an offshoot of this radical youth group, which was not yet known as Boko Haram, declared Maiduguri and the Islamic elites and institutions of the city to be intolerably corrupt and irredeemable (Walker, 2012, p. 3.).

The founding force behind Boko Haram was Mohammed Yusuf, who initiated the movement in 2002 with a view to establishing a Sharia government in Borno State

in north-eastern Nigeria. Yusuf's work gained momentum after he had established a religious complex in his hometown, comprising a mosque and a school where many poor Muslim families from various locations in Nigeria as well as neighbouring countries could educate their children. It soon transpired that the religious complex had ulterior political goals, as it started to serve as a recruiting ground for future jihadists that could take on and fight the Nigerian state. Support from Nigerian families for Yusuf's work came especially from impoverished and alienated people of the predominantly Muslim north of the country, often inspired by the movement's condemnation of the corrupt ruling elites in Nigerian politics. This included Muslims from neighbouring Chad and Niger (Agbiboa, 2013, pp. 59-60.).

Boko Haram's ideological orientation is engrained in radical Salafism, and can be traced back to the teachings of an Islamic scholar in the fourteenth-century, Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya. As explained above, the hallmark of this ideological orientation relates to an appeal to modern Muslims to commit to pure Islam as during the times of the Prophet Muhammad and the two generations that followed. Since Boko Haram became an ultra-radical group in 2009, they have been influenced by a Qur'anic phrase that proclaims, "[a]nyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors". Members of Boko Haram thus believe that the overthrow of secular governments is justified because secular rulers are deemed to be leaning toward the enemies of Islam and their orientations. In fact, members of Boko Haram regard it as their divine duty and goal to challenge the perceived enemies of Islam in a violent struggle, both locally and abroad (Agbiboa, 2013, pp. 59-60.; Mapping Militant Organizations, 2018).

Boko Haram transformed into an ultra-radical group in 2009 after confrontations with the Nigerian state security services in Bauchi State. This followed the enforcement of a newly introduced law instructing motorcyclists in Nigeria to wear safety helmets, which was resisted by Boko Haram. Members of the group were stopped by police and traffic officers, who enforced the new law on motorcycle helmets, and an argument ensued. Boko Haram members reneged on the helmet law after which the police and army opened fire, killing 17 people. This angered Mohammed Yusuf who demanded justice, but the state did not respond to any of the demands. Yusuf also released video material in which he threatened the state and its security forces with violent action (Agbiboa, 2013, pp. 60-61.; Walker, 2012, p. 4.).

In brief, the state extended its action against Boko Haram, which instigated further animosity and inspired the Boko Haram leadership to mobilise for reprisal attacks, and in July 2009, members of Boko Haram burned down a police station on the outskirts of Bauchi. Several incidents of bloodshed followed with both members of the security forces and Boko Haram losing their lives. Yusuf vowed revenge and committed himself and the movement to fight to the death in retaliation, followed by coordinated attacks across Maiduguri, especially targeting police stations and homes of

police officers, including retired officers. Churches were also torched, and the main prison was raided, killing prison guards and freeing inmates (Agbiboa, 2013, pp. 60-61.).

Mohammed Yusuf was taken into custody and reportedly killed by the Nigerian police. The ruthlessness of the Nigerian security forces and the death of Yusuf are believed to be among the major reasons behind the further radicalisation of Boko Haram. The July 2009 uprising and related violence also inspired many members of the movement to flee countries in Nigeria's neighbourhood where they came to the attention of global jihadist movements in the Sahel region (Agbiboa and Maiangwa, 2014, p. 71.).

Since 2009, there have been ongoing violent activities by Boko Haram, during which many lives were lost, while properties worth millions of dollars were destroyed. In 2012 alone, Boko Haram was responsible for almost 1 400 deaths in between 500 and 600 attacks. In 2013, the movement was involved in more than 2 000 attacks with over 1 000 deaths. In 2013, a state of emergency was declared in three north-eastern federal states of Nigeria, namely Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, but the violent campaign embarked upon by Boko Haram was not stalled. In fact, it escalated and took a heavy toll on human lives and property (Onah, 2014, p. 64.).

As much as Boko Haram is often regarded as a religious sect, Onah (2014, p. 63.) argues that the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is "a religious crisis that is flowing directly from the country's political system". He points the finger at the political system in Nigeria – a system rife with corruption, poverty and underdevelopment. These realities have ignited fierce religiously inspired violence "on account of deficiencies in the political system". This will be analysed further in the following section.

Insurgency, Fragility and Governance Failures in Nigeria

Geo-politically and socio-economically, Nigeria is commonly known as a country with a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south. The country is also known for political conflict which is linked to ongoing appeals by minority groups from the Niger Delta in the south for an equitable and fair distribution of resources as well as acute poverty in the northern federal states, especially in the north-eastern parts. Politically, this has left the country with a pattern of feuding, unending cycles of violence, and the destruction of many lives and properties (Omede, 2011, p. 93.).

Okoro (2014, p. 117.) points out that the majority of Nigerian citizens are not in a position to satisfy their basic human and socio-economic needs. Of specific concern is that a large portion of the youth lacks access to food and a proper educational system. They also lack good healthcare, pipe-borne water and proper shelter. In addition, the World Bank (2021) reports that, according to data from Nigeria's most recent official

household survey and data from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics, 39,1% of the population live below the international poverty line of $1,90 per person per day. In addition, a further 31,9% of the population recorded income levels of between $1,90 and $3,20 per person per day. Of specific interest, as far as Boko Haram is concerned, is that poverty "disproportionately affected rural, northern Nigeria". Moreover, among Nigerians living below the $1,90 poverty line in 2018–2019, close to 85% lived in rural areas and almost 77% lived in the predominantly Muslim north (World Bank, 2021). The link between poverty and the conflict dynamics in north-eastern Nigeria, where Boko Haram is most active, is therefore evident. As was to be expected, poverty in the Muslim north has generated frustration and resulted in various forms of criminality and violence, such as kidnapping, armed robberies and, most importantly, insurgence and terror acts (Okoro, 2014, p. 117.).

In view of the discussion above, there is no doubt that Nigeria is a fragile state, and state fragility has major consequences for stability in the country. In the case of Nigeria, data paint a dark picture of the overall socio-economic landscape, and over many years, citizens were repulsed by the Abuja government's inability, weakness, or failure to provide for their basic human needs. This not only resulted in the militants in the southern Niger Delta utilising violence as a bargaining chip to demand concessions from government, but it also strengthened the youth's disillusionment in especially the north-eastern territories of the country and "made them ready armies in the hands of extremists like Yusuf" (Okoro, 2014, p. 119.).

Fragility relating to public institutions and the state security apparatus further contributed to Boko Haram's increasing strength since its inception. This specifically relates to sources of weapons for Boko Haram and other armed groups. Nigeria's arms market has especially two sources from which Boko Haram is benefitting. Firstly, a substantial portion of arms originates from army or police stocks. Boko Haram has proved itself sufficiently potent to raid stocks of weapons from the state security apparatus. Secondly, Boko Haram is capable of ensuring flow of arms through cross-border smuggling into Nigeria from the regional neighbourhood (Stanyard et al, 2022, p. 18.).

Due to the fragility of public institutions and the state security apparatus, Boko Haram has also been heavily involved in cattle rustling in especially the federal states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. These states closed their cattle markets in 2016 in an effort to stem the tide of cattle rustling. However, Boko Haram then smuggled cattle across the border where they sold them at markets in Jigawa. The prohibition thus did little to put a lid on revenue flows to the movement. This is a substantial source of income, considering that in 2016, an estimated figure of 20 000 cattle, valued at 3 billion naira (more than $6 million) were sold (Stanyard et al, 2022, p. 17.). Funding is further generated from criminal activities, particularly kidnapping, bank robberies and even taxes paid to Boko Haram by the local population (Campbell, 2020).

As intimated above, border security in Nigeria has also suffered from the dire consequences of state fragility. The poor management of the state's borders results in many illegal entry routes into the country, which coincide with illicit transnational arms trafficking in the country. Not surprisingly, Boko Haram took advantage of the poorly managed borders and specifically benefitted from the smuggling of sophisticated weapons into the country. Many of Boko Haram's weapons are from external sources, including AK-47s, anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades and ammunition. The origins of these weapons are mainly the key conflict zones in the regional neighbourhood, namely Mali, Libya, Chad, Niger and the Central African Republic. This explains Boko Haram's possession of sophisticated heavy firepower, including anti-aircraft weapons mounted on four-wheel drive vehicles (Stanyard et al, 2022, p. 18.).

Agbiboa (2013, p. 66.) maintains that, since independence, Nigeria has lacked a viable concept of strategic counterinsurgency (or counterterrorism), a strategy that could guide the Abuja government in its actions, facilitate the undermining of recruitment of insurgents (or terrorists), and especially change the landscape that facilitates insurgency (or terrorism). Such a counterinsurgency strategy should be far more than a simplistic security-only killing strategy, namely an overarching national security strategy that considers the broader political-economic context in which Islamist radicalisation manifests, and also pursues the altering of the landscape in a meaningful and non-violent manner. This requires the Nigerian government to find a strategy that would make Muslim societies less prone to serve as facilitating agents of radicalism, a strategy that would undercut the jihadist appeal by addressing some key fundamental human needs and the incorporation of development, security and respect for human rights (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 66.).

Whereas Nigeria adopted a strong military approach under former President Goodluck Jonathan when he declared a state of emergency in 2013 (Agbiboa, 2013, p. 65.), the Nigerian government moved to a non-military approach in 2015 under President Muhammadu Buhari in an effort to counter Boko Haram more successfully. The aim was to steer away from overused firepower in the north-eastern territories after severe criticisms of Abuja's predominantly military-based approach. Programmes were implemented specifically to address the root causes of recruitment into Boko Haram, and followed a process of rehabilitating members of Boko Haram (Onapajo, 2021).

However, Boko Haram managed to expand its footprint in West Africa and, together with ISIS West Africa (ISIS-WA), a faction of Boko Haram, which was created when ISIS-WA pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015, the movement continued its attacks on government and security force targets, as well as civilians in the north-east. The movement thus continued its bloodshed, with deaths and injuries, as well as abductions and the destruction of properties. In fact, state fragility enabled Boko Haram and ISIS-WA to enjoy nearly complete freedom of movement throughout the federal states of Borno and eastern Yobe. Available data in 2020 indicated that terrorist actions by Boko Haram and ISIS-WA have been instrumental in the internal displacement of about two

million people in the states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. This also resulted in the external displacement of more than 300 000 Nigerian refugees in the wider region of West Africa, affecting Cameroon, Chad and Niger (US Department of State, 2020).

Not even a regional plan, the 2020–2024 Action Plan, adopted by the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) in 2019 could firmly deal with the ongoing Boko Haram–ISIS-WA challenges. Initially, meetings were conducted with the relevant actors where agreement was sought on the implementation of the plan in the respective countries. However, ECOWAS soon faced problems with inadequate resources and a lack of funds. In the final analysis, a lack of addressing the root causes of the conflict dynamics, particularly in the key areas of governance and development deficits, as discussed above, continues to fuel scepticism about the chances of success (Kwarkye, 2021).

The Nature of the Ansar al-Sunna Insurgency

In this section, the Ansar al-Sunna phenomenon in northern Mozambique is analysed, focusing on the emergence and existence of the movement and its connection to the global Jihad, including its links with transnational terrorist groups. Following this, the political conditions and fragility in Mozambique are considered, as these factors refer to the governance challenges and realities of state fragility, specifically in the conflict-ridden northern parts.

The rise of Ansar al-Sunna to significance can be traced to the year 2000 when a group of young Muslims within both the Islamic Council and the Islamic Congress of Mozambique started the development of a new reading and practice of Islam. Their work culminated in the preaching of a more dogmatic and stricter form of Islam across Cabo Delgado and from this movement an even more radical and activist group emerged, popularly known as Ansar al-Sunna of Mozambique (translated as Supporters of the Tradition). These young men undertook to revolutionise the province in a religious context. In 2012 they became more active by challenging the way Islam was practiced in Mozambique, maintaining that Islam was corrupted and diverted from the true teachings of Prophet Mohammed (Mutasa and Muchemwa, 2021, p. 16.).

The group's orientation was clearly anti-Christian and opposed to Western lifestyles and values, and to pursue and enforce Sharia law or Islamic law strictly in their localities. At this point, the Mozambican government did not pay much attention to the movement or even considered it a serious security threat. Even at the local level, the movement's views were not appealing to locals, including most Muslims. The movement then started using threats and eventually turned to violence. They also started to recruit other young men and in a landscape of high unemployment, they managed to expand their numbers with promises of a better life once a caliphate was created. They also forced local worshipers in churches and mosques to follow their

radical, dogmatic beliefs and discouraged villagers from going to hospitals and schools which the movement regarded as anti-Islamic and secular (Mutasa and Muchemwa, 2021, p. 16.).

Following a growing militancy within the movement, the movement carried out its first terrorist attack of public significance in October 2017 in the Mocimboa Da Praia region of Cabo Delgado. A group of 30 members killed 17 people, including 2 policemen, and ever since Cabo Delgado has been among the world's most conflict-ridden areas. Ansar al-Sunna used the dire socio-economic challenges in the country to its advantage and managed to expand its manpower pool significantly with promises of jobs and money. The membership was even extended to citizens from Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. Apart from frequent, methodical attacks on civilian elements, the movement also caused havoc by burning down thousands of houses, as well as government buildings, workplaces, places of worship and schools, and in the process took control of some portions of Cabo Delgado. As already stated, the bloodshed left many Mozambicans dead, homeless, displaced, or in a state of starvation (Sönmez and Arslan, 2021, p. 5.). The attacks came to the attention of international role-payers in February 2019 after the insurgents attacked a convoy of employees from Anadarko, a now-defunct United States (US) multinational oil and gas company that operated in Mozambique. The attack occurred near Palma, a town on the northeast coast of Cabo Delgado and also the headquarters of the offshore natural gas project (Alden and Chichava, 2020). After a period of calm, Mocímboa da Praia was once again attacked in April 2020 (Casola and Iocchi, 2020).

The greater part of Ansar al-Sunna's violence since 2017 was focused on government officials, installations, and symbols. At the same time, the movement did not hesitate to target civilians in their attacks, especially communities or individuals that the movement deemed obstructionist. The government's response can be described as Janus-faced: on the one hand, it publicly denied the posing of an organized threat by Ansar al-Sunna but on the other hand, it waged heavy retaliation after violent attacks occurred. Some observers viewed the movement's increased brutality as a response to the government's approach of retaliation, while others speculated that Ansar-al-Sunna escalated its violence in pursuit of recognition by national and/or international actors (Bekoe et al, 2020).

Ideologically, the movement indicated its commitment to the establishment of a caliphate in Cabo Delgado, which boils down to "government from Allah" on the basis of a hard-line version of Islamic law (Gartenstein-Ross et al, 2021; Agence France Press, 2020). In other words, Ansar al-Sunna aims to impose Sharia law in Cabo Delgado and – like Boko Haram – the movement is an extension of global militant Salafist views on the African continent where radical Islamist views have been on the rise. Since its emergence, Ansar al-Sunna did not recognise the state of Mozambique and accordingly reject all state institutions. To this end, their terrorist activities are aimed at seizing control in the northern parts of the country (Sönmez and Arslan, 2021, p. 9., p. 18).

As far as Islam in Cabo Delgado is concerned, it should be understood that Indian Ocean trade networks developed by Arab traders over many centuries have played a key role in the history and communal life of the Swahili world at large and Cabo Delgado in particular. These trade networks, according to archaeological evidence, date back to the eighth century and led to the spread of Islam along the East African coast. The northern parts of Mozambique form part of the Swahili world, and in this context, northern Mozambique shares Islamic religious conceptions and practices with its Swahili neighbours (Pemba, 2007; Bonate, 2020, pp. 1-2.). Today, Cabo Delgado is still a Muslim-majority province and the population in this province constitutes the bulk of Mozambique's Muslim population. This is in contrast with the rest of the country where the majority of the population is Christian with a one-fifth Muslim minority. In Cabo Delgado 52,5% of the population is Muslim while 36% is Catholic, according to the 2017 census. At the same time, Muslims are especially concentrated in six of Cabo Delgado's 17 districts where they constitute more than 75% of the population (Estelle and Darden, 2021).

Morier-Genoud (2020, pp. 396-397.) observes that some scholars argue that the cause and nature of the conflict are mainly material. This relates to deprivation, poverty and feelings of marginalization among the youth of Cabo Delgado. It also relates to the fact that Cabo Delgado is one of Mozambique's poorest provinces, but also a province where mega-discoveries of natural gas and the involvement of gigantic multinationals have created unmet material expectations. Such scholars tend to view religion only as a 'rallying point' or cloak. Other scholars view Islam as the key or central factor underlying the insurgency. They also posit that young Muslims in Cabo Delgado have been radicalized by Muslim preachers from Kenya and Tanzania.

From a broader and regional perspective, it should be noted that both al-Qaeda and ISIS have increased their capacity and influence in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. It is also of interest to note that whereas some movements in Syria, Somalia, and Mali choose to operate under the banner of al-Qaeda, all other movements in West Africa, North Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East operate under the flag of ISIS. Against this background, Ansar al-Sunna can be regarded as one of the most recent additions to the ISIS "family" in Africa (Cengiz, 2022). At the same time, Ansar al-Sunna acts independently from ISIS, despite its allegiance to the larger organisation, and in recent times seemed to be in command of more or less 4 500 militants or fighters, 2 000 of which are armed (Sönmez and Arslan, 2021, p. 11.; Cengiz, 2022).

Insurgency, Fragility and Governance Failures in Mozambique

In the discussion above, it was argued that the scholarly notion of fragility is of particular relevance to the case of Boko Haram. In this section, it is argued that fragility is equally relevant to Ansar al-Sunna and the conflict dynamics in Cabo Delgado. In addition to the above, it should be understood that fragility – the lack of capacity or the legitimacy

to govern effectively – can also be explained as areas of limited statehood. In such areas the state in question is lacking the ability or capacity to carry out or enforce political decisions, or to exercise a monopoly on the use of force. In other words, areas of limited statehood are of relevance and apply to countries and specific portions thereof where the central government does not have the ability or means to implement decisions and policies. As such, limited statehood applies to a part or parts of a country – often a province far away from the state's national capital (Börzel, Risse and Draude, 2018).

In Mozambique, Cabo Delgado is the most northern province and more than 1 600 kilometres from the capital, which makes the exercising of state authority highly problematic. The distance between the capital, Maputo and Cabo Delgado has created numerous governance challenges nationally with negative regional or trans-border implications. In Cabo Delgado a lack of governmental institutional capacity and related gaps in legitimacy are clearly evident from the fact that the province is called "Cabo Esquecido" in the local language, meaning the Forgotten Cape (Sönmez and Arslan, 2021, p. 7.). Matsinhe and Valoi (2019, p. 16.) strikingly describe the lack of central authority and control in Cabo Delgado as a case of "half-mast sovereignty". This simply means that Cabo Delgado is an area that the Maputo central government in the south of the country is unable to govern effectively and falling short of exercising its authority fully across the length and breadth of the country.

State fragility and the lack of state authority across Mozambique had a very negative effect on the northern parts over many years. Today, the wellbeing of the population is badly affected with feelings of marginalisation and exclusion acutely prevalent among the population of Cabo Delgado. Social and economic indicators show that this 'forgotten' province fares very poorly in comparison with other Mozambican provinces. In this regard, Cabo Delgado is a province with an illiteracy rate of more or less sixty percent. The poorest schools are in Cabo Delgado as well as the poorest health and sanitation facilities. Unemployment is extremely high – as high as 88%. In view of this, several scholars are convinced that the roots or causes of the insurgency and conflict in Cabo Delgado cannot be divorced from the extremely high level of unemployment, especially among the youth, which was further aggravated by the devastating effects of natural disasters in recent years (Alden and Chichava, 2020; Sönmez and Arslan, 2021, p. 7.).

Following the above, it is of interest to note that many members and supporters of Ansar al-Sunna are young, uneducated people who are living in a socio-economically landscape of poverty and marginalisation. Having said this, it should be noted that the notions of fragility and limited statehood apply to countries or regions where state actors are often absent or not visible. In other words, the relevant state actors are not functional and do not exercise their responsibilities efficiently and effectively, which results in non-state actors usually starting to operate in such spaces and eventually manifesting as self-regulating private actors. These non-state actors even present themselves as de facto governments or rulers, albeit not in a constructive role of

exercising good governance. As far as northern Mozambique is concerned, the above-mentioned political and socio-economic landscape facilitated opportunities for Ansar al-Sunna to emerge and manifest as a relatively powerful non-state actor of political significance, being responsible for many killings, destruction of homes and infrastructure, and the displacement of thousands of local inhabitants (ReliefWeb, 2020).

It should further be understood that the Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado is not only driven by domestic factors but that international and regional drivers are also of relevance. Campbell (2020) points out that Ansar al-Sunna's inspiration and legitimisation are drawn from international Islamist forces who are committed to the establishment of a caliphate, especially ISIS, which is linked to the fact that the movement has pledged allegiance to ISIS. Radicalisation of young members of Ansar al-Sunna is also linked to interactions with regional jihadist networks, especially networks in nearby African states, especially Somalia, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Israel, 2020).

As mentioned in the discussion above, the notions of fragility and related limited statehood pertain to countries or regions where central governments or authorities are lacking a monopoly over the means of violence. This is certainly true of the northern parts of Mozambique where the Mozambican Defence and Security Forces (FDS) have been struggling with the consequences of decades of neglect and the serious impact of long-term underfunding. The Mozambican military (Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique) is especially left without the required capacity and competency to undertake operations that can counter or eliminate the security threat posed by Ansar al-Sunna. Furthermore, the professionalism of the military was tainted when it transpired that there were persistent leaks of information on operational matters from elements inside the military (Alden and Chichava, 2020). This was further aggravated by reports on the inability of the FDS to protect communities of Cabo Delgado and even serious human rights violations in the province by members of the FDS – all casting a dark shadow over the competency and professionalism of both police officials and army officers (Bowker, 2020).

Shortcomings in the capacity and competency of the FDS are mainly the reason why the Mozambican government contracted foreign Private Military Companies from 2019 to 2021 in its efforts to deal with Ansar al-Sunna as a security threat, namely, firstly the Russian Wagner Group and then the South African-based Dyck Advisory Group (Cilliers et al, 2021). The contracting of Private Military Companies in support of the FDS did however not bring an end to bloodshed and violent attacks from Ansar al-Sunna. Moreover, in September 2020, Amnesty International accused Mozambique's security forces of torturing suspected members of the insurgent movement. Amnesty International also pointed fingers at the Mozambican government for "possible extrajudicial executions" and "discarding a large number of corpses into apparent mass graves" in Cabo Delgado – acts that "flouts fundamental principles of humanity"

(Bowker, 2020). In the meantime, international appeals were increasingly made for regional intervention by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), specifically a SADC multinational military force to be deployed, supported by border management and intelligence sharing among SADC members (Cilliers et al, 2021). In June 2021, the SADC Heads of State and Government finally decided to opt for the route of formal military intervention by agreeing on the deployment of a multinational regional force to Cabo Delgado, while a force from the Rwandan military was also deployed in the province in July 2021, shortly before the arrival of the SADC force (Ndebele, 2022). The deployment of a SADC force was generally welcomed, but observers also rightly cautioned that the stabilisation of northern Mozambique would require a people-centric rather than security-centric strategy – a strategy that not only deals with the security situation but also addresses the humanitarian, political, economic, social and religious dimensions of the conflict (Cilliers et al, 2021).

The dilemma of fragility and related loss of governmental control over especially the northern parts of Mozambique is clearly illustrated by a high prevalence of organised crime and related criminal networks in northern Mozambique. In fact, over time the province (including nearby provinces) was turned into a regional hub for the smuggling of drugs and other contraband. Heroin trafficking has been flourishing in Cabo Delgado as far back as the end of the Mozambican civil war in 1992. In addition, in the past decade or even longer, several other illicit activities, such as the smuggling of timber, ivory, rubies, other gemstones, drugs and human trafficking, have also been prevalent (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020). These do, however, not seem to be sources of substantial income for the insurgents as Ansar al-Sunna seems to receive most of its funding from local businesspeople, as well as cash and goods seized during attacks and looting (Stanyard et al, 2022:5).

As explained above, state fragility in northern Mozambique is especially evident in the country's weak military which was underfunded and left without the capacity and competency to counter Ansar al-Sunna as a security threat. Among other things, this extends to the Mozambican Navy, which is in no position to prevent insurgents from penetrating Mozambique via the sea and exploiting opportunities relating to drug trafficking and running criminal activities along the coastal areas of the province. Moreover, there have been serious allegations that elements of the government and state, including some police, form part of networks and activities of illegal trafficking (Stanyard et al, 2022, p. 81.; Pirio et al, 2019).

Against this background, Cilliers et al (2021) correctly point out that

At the root of the conflict is a governance challenge that includes allegations of deeply entrenched corruption in the ruling party, the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO). Poor governance and state absence have antagonised the local population and left a security vacuum… While Southern African

Development Community (SADC) members and other countries can help Mozambique, they cannot fix the problem.

Inter alia, this means that the underlying motivations of the insurgents must be addressed and, if not, the roots of the conflict will remain unaddressed. In recent times, donors have stepped forward to bankroll a surge in aid, which is geared toward the rebuilding of infrastructure, restoration of public services and assistance to civilians in resuming their livelihoods. However, all of this seems to fall short of quelling specific grievances of the insurgents (Amnesty International, 2022).

Against this background, Amnesty International argues that Mozambique and the relevant regional actors should carefully think about the key requirements to obtain peace. They must also realise that counter-insurgency measures should go beyond military operations and development money as these measures, on their own, are insufficient and unlikely to bring an end the conflict. The relevant actors should also come up with incentives for insurgents who are willing to surrender or leave sleeper cells. External actors who have an interest in facilitating an end to the conflict should also exercise pressure on the government in Maputo to enter into dialogue with local or national political elites with a view to offering insurgents a stake in the resource boom, which could potentially steer Cabo Delgado into a better economic space. The Maputo government should also win the public's confidence through development assistance, while dialogue with insurgents could help to create a stable and safe environment. At the same time, the leadership of Ansar al-Sunna should be vigorously prosecuted and dealt with through law enforcement (Amnesty International, 2022).

Evaluation and Conclusion

From the above, there are clearly several striking similarities between Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna as Islamist extremist movements. In the discussion below, six of the most striking similarities are specifically highlighted.

First, there are similarities in the appearances of the two relevant movements since they emerged as militant Islamist movements. Currently, both are committed to the establishment of Islamic caliphates in their respective territories. In Nigeria, Boko Haram emerged when the movement tried to pursue a separation from secular society and draw students from poor Muslim families to an Islamic school in Maiduguri in Borno State. However, shortly afterward there was an increase in violent conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government and eventually, the overthrow of the Nigerian government and the subsequent establishment of a caliphate became the public objective of the movement. Ansar al-Sunna is quite similar to Boko Haram in the sense that the movement was not primarily politically active when it first drew public attention. Initially, Ansar al-Sunna's emergence coincided with a rejection of the state's educational, health and legal systems on religious grounds. They demanded their

followers to support alternative services offered within their mosques; thus, offering and developing a 'counter-society'. This sparked much tension and eventually generated political violence and bloodshed in the province after they had attacked state institutions and even managed a takeover of the port town of Mocímboa da Praia. Against this background, Mutasa and Muchemwa (2021, p. 15-) rightly point out that Ansar al-Sunna "is most certainly influenced by Salafism which make it very similar to Boko Haram". Furthermore, Ansar al-Sunna has a clear end goal, namely that of "establishing a Caliphate which was the same scenario with Boko Haram". The two movements therefore clearly share the same ideological foundations and end goals.

Second, and related to the above, both movements are associated with Islamic extremism and militancy, which sparked heavy-handed security responses from the respective governments. In Nigeria, Boko Haram turned into an ultra-radical movement in 2009 following confrontations in Bauchi between the movement and the government's security agency. Since 2009, there have been ongoing reports of violent activities by Boko Haram, causing many lives to be lost in Nigeria, while properties worth millions of dollars were also destroyed. In 2013, a state of emergency was declared in three north-eastern states of Nigeria, but the violent campaign embarked upon by Boko Haram continued and, in fact, escalated and took a heavy toll on human lives and property.

In Mozambique, the emergence of Ansar al-Sunna was likewise followed by a heavy-handed response to the insurgents from the Mozambican security forces in 2020, later assisted by foreign private military companies. In fact, the government of Mozambique made a concerted effort to fight and subdue the terrorist insurgency through its FDS in dealing with the insurgents, but decades of neglect and the grave consequences of long-term underfunding left them incapacitated to stamp out the insurgency. Moreover, the government's response sparked increased radicalisation and militancy, and to this end – as in north-eastern Nigeria – bloodshed, loss of many lives and destruction of property marked the political and security landscape of Cabo Delgado in recent years.

Third, in none of the two cases under review do we see any real documented evidence of foreign direct jihadist control of either Boko Haram or Ansar Al-Sunna. However, there are clear ideological linkages or sentiments, and possibly communication in both cases with regional and/or international jihadist groups. In both cases, the United States officially alleges ISIS connections to the two movements, as well as al-Qaeda connections in the case of Boko Haram. The observation of Mutasa and Muchemwa (2021:13) that foreign and ISIS ideological influence is of relevance to both movements is therefore accurate. It can also be stated that in both cases, the two movements succeeded in extending their links to regional and international jihadist networks. Moreover, poor management of the borders of the two states resulted in many illegal entry routes into the countries over the years, which coincide with illicit transnational arms trafficking and external support.

Fourth, from the above discussion, it can be stated that both Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna are sourcing funds largely from dubious and illegal sources. In the case of Boko Haram, the smuggling of cattle across borders is a substantial source of income, as well as ransom payment for kidnapping, bank robberies and tax collections. Ansar al-Sunna receives its funding primarily locally from businesspeople, as well as cash and goods seized during attacks and looting. In both cases, we can state that the fragility of public institutions and the limitations of the respective state security apparatuses play an important role in explaining the funding channelled to the two movements and the fact that these movements possess highly potent and large-calibre weaponry.

Five, poor and even desperate socio-economic conditions facilitated opportunities for Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna to emerge as non-state actors and to enter the political landscape in the two respective countries effectively. In this regard, both Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna operate in the less governed, poverty-stricken parts of their respective countries where they emerged as some kind of pure or alternative Islamic movements. Political and socio-economic conditions in both Nigeria and Mozambique correspond with definitions of state fragility and areas of limited statehood. In this regard, there is a most striking parallel between the two cases under review pertaining to the very negative consequences of state fragility and related limited statehood, especially in relation to inequality and socio-economic exclusion in the north-western territories of Nigeria and the most northern province of Mozambique respectively. In both instances, the central government and relevant state institutions are simply absent or incapacitated to address the basic human needs and provide infrastructure relating to schools, hospitals and roads. In both instances, corruption, poverty and underdevelopment are the order of the day as well as a lack of educational opportunities and employment opportunities for the youth. Okoro's (2014, p. 119.) observation that the youth's disillusionment in especially the north-eastern regions of Nigeria "made them ready armies in the hands of extremists" remains relevant and is equally of relevance to Ansar al-Sunna. This is playing out in a landscape where the Nigerian armed forces – as in Mozambique – are struggling to exercise control over the relevant rural areas or even to protect urbanised centres from attacks. Over and above, Mutasa and Muchemwa (2021, p. 15.) correctly argue that the socio-economic landscapes where Boko Haram and Ansar al-Sunna operate are fertile areas for an expansion of extremist paradigms.

Lastly, linked to the above-mentioned issue relating to state violence as being instrumental in feeding radicalisation and more killings, it is crystal clear from the above that, in both cases, a militaristic counter-insurgency approach had been followed with negative outcomes. In both countries, the insurgency dynamics and problems were initially treated as problems of a security nature, requiring strong military responses, but actually requiring much deeper political and economic solutions – thus strategies that go beyond military responses and address the root causes of the conflict dynamics. Eventually, in both cases, regional responses and involvement were mandated, namely

interventions from ECOWAS in the case of Nigeria and SADC and Rwanda in the case of Mozambique. Both interventions are however hampered by inadequate resources and insufficient funding. In other words, fragility and governance limitations have not only been instrumental in causing the insurgencies, but also prevent the relevant state institutions in both Nigeria and Mozambique from effectively addressing the challenges posed by militant Islamic jihadism effectively, and this is why counter-insurgency efforts in both instances have been largely of limited impact thus far.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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