

BOKO HARAM AND ITS PLEDGE OF LOYALTY TO THE ISLAMIC STATE

On March 7th, in a video posted on Twitter Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau pledged alliance with the Islamic State. The statement comes at a time when Boko Haram is put under an intense pressure by Chad and Niger new cross border offensive against the insurgency, which caused it to lose ground. Although the Islamic State has not responded yet, there are no particular reason for IS to refuse one of Africa's strongest Islamist group within its Caliphate. It is not clear yet the reasons behind Shekau's decision of joining IS, but some hypothesis could be made.

Propaganda

The most evident outcome of Shekau's pledge of alliance with the Islamic State is an attempt to boost Boko Haram's propaganda campaign. Boko Haram may indeed benefit from IS's experience and technical know-how to improve its propaganda, so far incoherent in the strategy and low quality in the execution. With a higher quality communication, Boko Haram could expand its international presence, at least on digital media, hence attracting more funding and recruits.

Funding

Boko Haram may also aim at receiving funding from IS, which could finance Boko Haram through the revenues from oil smuggling. Indeed, despite the decrease in oil price, oil revenues have made IS the richest terrorist group. Therefore, a

financial cooperation between Boko Haram and IS could be a win-win situation, with both organizations opening up each others' "markets" and providing mutual logistic support.

Recruitment

An alliance with the Islamic State may attract other fighters to join Boko Haram. The new recruits may come from Nigeria itself, from neighboring countries and from North African ones. In this last case, Boko Haram may attract fighters from Egypt, Libya and Yemen who find more difficult to migrate towards Middle Eastern battlefields. Similarly, this migration could be driven in case IS would need a tactical withdrawal from the aforementioned theaters. The jihadists in North African states may indeed represent a viable source of recruitment considering the already existing trafficking routes crossing Libya, Niger and Nigeria. By joining IS, Boko Haram is somehow "bandwagoning" by aligning with a stronger organization who has already proven itself successful, and with a good reputation among radical Islamists. If IS will respond positively, Boko Haram would receive an international recognition as a "reliable partner" that may drive more followers to join its ranks. These new followers may join upon an ideological base.

Internationalization

Last but not least, by pledging alliance to the Islamic State, Boko Haram is internationalizing its scopes, by creating a new *Wilayat* within the Caliphate for the sake of the Umma. At the same time, this move may have a boomerang effect on Boko Haram, as it will be perceived as an extension of IS in Nigeria. This could facilitate the United Nation resolution authorizing the African Union military intervention, which should comprise some 10.000 troops.

In conclusion, the possible affiliation of Boko Haram to the Islamic State will certainly have a strategic importance, whose impact is still difficult to assess.

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