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Ansaru Logo Gives Hints to Boko Haram and Transnational Links

Blog Post by Guest Blogger for John Campbell

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This is a guest post by Jacob Zenn, an analyst of African Affairs for the Washington D.C.-based think tank, The Jamestown Foundation, and a contributor for the West Point CTC Sentinel.

Boko Haram has carried out hundreds of attacks since September 2010. But the attacks have been restricted almost exclusively to domestic targets. Therefore, when a breakaway faction, Ansaru, carried out a series of kidnappings against a British and an Italian engineer in Kebbi in May 2011; a German engineer in Kano in March 2012, (which was claimed by AQIM); a French engineer in Katsina in December 2012; seven foreign engineers in Bauchi in February 2013; and killed two Mali-bound Nigerian troops in Kogi, the insurgency took on a new

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recent article. More recently, I analyzed symbolism in Ansaru's messaging, focusing on Ansaru's logo, which features a rising sun over the Quran. This analysis further supports the notion that AQIM influenced Ansaru ideologically and operationally.

Ansaru's logo and the logo of AQIM's predecessor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), both have a rising sun over the Quran. Looking further, the 1976 national emblem of Algeria, the country where AQIM and the GSPC originate, also has a rising sun over the Quran. This sun represented the "new era" or "new dawn" for Algeria. Algeria held a referendum to revise its Constitution in 1976.

Why would Ansaru copy the logo of the GSPC—and not AQIM? One reason could be that Ansaru's leader, Khalid al-Barnawi, fought with Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Algeria and Mauritania as early as 2005, before the GSPC became AQIM. Notably, Boko Haram member Kabiru Sokoto, who is on trial for masterminding the Christmas Day, 2011, church bombings near Abuja, said that Boko Haram received funding from an Algerian group called "the group from the sunset" and that disputes over this funding contributed to Ansaru's split from Boko Haram. This has been corroborated by Nigerian intelligence reports.

In Ansaru's Arabic-language Charter [English], the group says that the guns surrounding the Quran in the logo mean "the implementation of religion by the Holy Book and Iron (weapons)," which comes from Surat al-Hadid (see footnote forty-six). Ansaru interprets Hadid, or "iron," to represent the "weapons" with which jihad is waged. Others, however, commonly interpret "iron" to mean the power of "human development and progress" or "political power" to allow Muslims to lead the world. Ansaru, like Boko Haram, adopts the jihad interpretation of the Quran. Boko Haram also surrounds the Quran with guns in its logo

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offer insights about its connections with other militant groups when viewed in context. Third, given Ansaru's relation to AQIM, how will AQIM's retreat from northern Mali, which is less than three hundred miles from Nigeria, affect Ansaru's operations in Nigeria; and if Ansaru is a transnational group, is West African regional cooperation sufficient support for Nigeria to counter Ansaru and other transnational threats?

This inquiry about Ansaru could take on additional importance if, as I suspect, the dozens of kidnappings in Borno since the Mali intervention in February 2013, are a sign that Boko Haram's "special kidnapping squad" is comprised of reintegrated Ansaru members. This may explain why when Boko Haram kidnapped a French family in Cameroon in January 2013, an Arabic-speaking militant said the operation was in response to "France's War in Mali"—a distinctly Ansaru theme.

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