Spectres of Black Flags in the Miombo:
The Islamic State's coverage of their Mozambique province, 2022-2023

STIG JARLE HANSEN
Norwegian University of Life Sciences
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9373-7699

IDA BARY
Researchers for Peace and Development (REPAD)
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7463-8206

Abstract

This article studies the Islamic State's only remaining periodical, *Al-Naba*, identifying the most common tropes and patterns in the periodical's Sub-Saharan Africa coverage, and on Mozambique in particular. The Islamic State's increasingly important coverage of Africa focuses on terror attacks, military campaigns and on the fight against Christianity. However, it also employs more traditional anti-colonial arguments that have been used by other, more accepted, political actors during the struggle for decolonisation. *Al-Naba* also functions as a 'shamer' of non-African Muslims, to get them to join *jihad* by pointing to the African successes of the organisation and set these successes up as examples to be followed. In this sense, the article illustrates how African jihadist branches can have global agency.

Keywords

Mozambique, insurgency, jihadism, propaganda, Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, terror

The Islamic State's last remaining weekly magazine, *Al-Naba,* has recently kept a strong focus on Africa. *Al-Naba* published more than 139 articles focusing on Africa related topics on its front-pages in the period from May 2022 to May 2023 alone. The Islamic State's media coverage on Africa has nevertheless been neglected by researchers. There are few academic articles on the topic, and this is even more so in the case of Mozambique.[1] There is also a lack of analysis of the Islamic State's publications written in Arabic, despite that the relative importance of these publications has grown drastically over the last decade. As expressed by Lokmanoglu, Winkler, Al Mahmoud, McMinimy and Kountz, 'the relative lack of focus on the Arabic components of the ISIS media campaign', 'remains a serious shortcoming for understanding the group's contemporary online messaging efforts'.[2] This article strives to overcome the above-described research gaps and is the first article to study the Arabic language Islamic State periodical *Al-Naba*'s coverage of Mozambique and Sub-Saharan Africa. For the Africanists, the article highlights potential global effects of the conflict in Mozambique. The analysis in the article illustrates a type of African agency in a global setting, transcending perspectives that see Africans as passive receivers rather than important actors on their own. In this sense it follows Brown and Harman's pledge to focus on two-way interaction rather than one-way interaction.[3] It also introduces the Africanists to a media outlet that will be read by belligerents in the current conflict in Mozambique. For researchers focusing on jihadism more generally, the article illustrates how tropes common in anti-colonial resistance discourses remains important even in jihadist rhetoric.

Bockstette divides the functions of jihadist communication strategies into three: propagation (to draw in new recruits); legitimisation (justifying violence and situating actions within a broader Islamic context); and intimidation.[4] As claimed by Winter, the last function, intimidation, enhances effects of terrorist strategies.[5] The key to the effect of terrorism is in the fear it creates; fear that subsequently can lead to violent counter-reactions targeting wider social groups not initially involved in terror. Subsequently, such reprisals can lead to larger terrorist recruitment. However, the effect goes beyond what Bockstette and Winter claim. An additional function is identity construction, a social construction of a 'we' feeling. This 'we feeling' can create bounds of loyalty transcending borders and differences in class and culture.[6] Myths contribute to the construction effect; the content do not need to be 'true' in the strict sense of the word. Information that might distort the image of the ideology in question can be left out. Real 'facts' will also be tied together by employing a

1   The exception is Extrac, 'The Islamic State in Mozambique: A Profile', *Extrac Special Report* 2021, who studied Islamic State related propaganda from 2019 to 2021. However, this article did not focus on the period after Mozambique became its own province, nor did it relate the propaganda in Mozambique to a wider African context.
2   A. D. Lokmanoglu, C. K. Winkler, M Al- Mahmoud, K. McMinimy and K Kountz, 'Textual Messaging of ISIS's al-Naba and the Context Drivers That Correspond to Strategic Changes', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 15 April 2022.
3   W. Brown and S. Harman, *African Agency in International Politics* (Routledge: London, 2013), 2.
4   C. Bockstette, *Jihadist terrorist use of strategic communication management techniques* (Garmisch-Partenkirchen: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2008), 20, 14.
5   C. Winter, *Media Jihad: The Islamic State's Doctrine for Information Warfare* (London: ICSR, 2017); C. Winter, 'Making Sense of Jihadi Stratcom: The Case of the Islamic State', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 13,1, 2017.
6   The argument is partially explored in H. J. Ingram, 'An Analysis of Inspire and Dabiq: Lessons from AQAP and Islamic State's Propaganda War', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 40, 2017.

jihadist narrative that introduces and confirms a jihadist worldview. As pioneered by the Somali-based Harakat Al-Shabab, a jihadist perspective can 'explain' already-existing grievances. Using more common, and non-jihadist, narratives about colonial oppression and/or imperial suppression, corruption, unequal distribution, as well as highlighting the faults of their enemies, creates sympathy. Dressing the above-mentioned narratives up in a 'jihadist language' means that the jihadists can tap into pre-existing sentiments amongst their targeted audience, but still draw the audience toward their ideology.[7] The jihadists will here play along with grievances already existing amongst the wider audience, as for example grievances resulting from colonial era patterns of oppression, patterns of control, from racism and from economic marginalisation. However, the jihadists also reinterpret these grievances in a religious language and present solutions in the form of jihad. Benford and Snow, for example, identify how movements first diagnose existing conditions as a problem that demands change, then offer a solution and a reason to motivate collective action.[8] In this case, ideology is both the frame through which events are interpreted and the reason for such collective action.

Publications might also attempt to create an aura of 'coolness' for the jihadist activities or a jihad campaign to attract new recruits, as claimed by Bockstette, as well as by S. Q. Jensen, J. F. Larsen and S. Sandberg.[9] Such 'coolness' can be created by publishing pictures indicating the power of the jihadists. Pictures of dead and mutilated enemies can be a tool to show power. It also becomes important to convey hope for in-group members as well as potential recruits. This can be achieved through reporting victories, thus showing that the group is active and 'well and victorious'. Combat operations could be reported intensively to demonstrate potency and resilience, and this might be intended for both in-group members and potential sympathisers.[10] In addition, Islamic State media coverage can also function as an alternative to other non-Islamic State media outlets for information about the activities of the organisation, providing narratives that contradict the global media, seemingly presenting a counter-narrative.[11] These narratives can actually be more factual than narratives presented by their enemies. Regimes fighting the Islamic State in areas such as Mali and Congo/Uganda can be totalitarian. Providing facts that totalitarian regimes attempt to suppress can grant legitimacy to the Islamic State.

In the past, we have witnessed a tendency of focusing on the utopias and state-building of the Islamic State, presenting the Islamic State as an alternative to the 'corrupt governance' of more secular states.[12] We have also seen that *Al-Naba* and other

7   S. Hansen 'Al-Shabaab's Video Games: What is the Threat to the West?', *IPI Global Observatory*, 18 March 2015.
8   R. Benford and D. A. Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 26, 1, 2000, 611–639.
9   S. Q. Jensen, J. F. Larsen and S. Sandberg, 'Rap, Islam and Jihadi Cool: The attractions of the Western jihadi subculture', *Crime Media Culture*, 18, 3, 2022, 430–445. This can in turn be done through contextualising the messages in other cultural contexts, for example western subcultures (such as the use of rap videos).
10   C. Winter, 'Making sense of the Islamic State's post-territorial (d)evolution' in M. Ranstorp, L. Ahlerup and F. Ahlin (eds), *Salafi-Jihadism and Digital Media* (London: Routledge, 2022).
11   C. Winter, 'Framing war: visual propaganda, the Islamic State, and the battle for east Mosul', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33, 5, 2022.
12   A. Y. Zelin, 'Picture or It Didn't Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State's Official Media Output', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9, 4, 2015, 91.

Islamic State publications tend to focus on death and violence in the pictures presented in their publications, and indeed this is still the case in the period studied in this article. As expressed by Winkler, El-Damanhoury, Dicker and Lemieux, the depiction of death in the form of, for example, beheaded enemies or spies burned alive, serves the purpose of attracting attention. The researchers also highlight that depictions of death can heighten emotions and showcase authority through legitimising the Islamic State's right to punish.[13]

In this article, we study the content of a specific Islamic periodical, the *Al-Naba*, from May 2022 to May 2023. We explore the tropes, the reoccurring motifs, present in the Islamic State's coverage of Mozambique, set in its wider African context. The article explores how and why the coverage of Mozambique differs compared to other large Islamic State organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa. The article will also explore how the coverage of Mozambique is used to reinforce the Islamic State before a global audience.

Why study *Al-Naba*?

The structure of the Islamic State's media efforts has changed quite drastically since Al-Qaeda disavowed the group in 2014, and the ties between the two organisations were broken. As remarked by Winter, there has been a general decline in propaganda produced by the group, correlating with their loss of territory in 2015.[14] Older English-language magazines, such as *Dabiq* (discontinued in 2016) and *Rumiyah* (discontinued in 2017), have been stopped; in many cases only the Arabic magazines remain.[15] Today, the Arabic Islamic State media output dominates over the English-language outlets. In the past the Islamic State also distributed its material on platforms as YouTube, Twitter and even Facebook. The distribution is now taking place on platforms such as Telegram, Wickr and Pidgin, and is more limited in scope than before.[16] Jihadist propaganda is today also distributed in archival sites, as well as on online Google drives, and the periodicals collected for this article were indeed taken partly from archival sites.[17]

We aimed at selecting a representative outlet. Given the increased importance of Arabic-language propaganda it was natural to choose an Arabic outlet. Indeed, *Al-Naba* was, at the time of writing this article, the only remaining periodical published by the Islamic State. This magazine is published on a weekly basis and is thus an essential component of the Islamic State's media efforts. We could have chosen press statements and audio distributed more on an ad-hoc basis by the Islamic State's

13 C. Winkler, K. El-Damanhoury, A. Dicker, and A. F. Lemieux 'Images of death and dying in ISIS media: A comparison of English and Arabic print publications', *Media, War & Conflict*, 12, 3, 2018.
14 Winter, 'Making sense of the Islamic State's post-territorial (d)evolution'.
15 Lokmanoglu, Winkler, Al-Mahmoud, McMinimy and Kountz, 'Textual Messaging of ISIS's al-Naba'.
16 M. Conway, M. Khawaja, S. Lakhani, J. Reffin, A. Robertson and D. Weir, 'Disrupting Daesh: Measuring takedown of online terrorist material and its impacts', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 1–2, 42, 2019.
17 M. KhosraviNik and M. Amer, 'Social media and terrorism discourse: the Islamic State's (IS) social media discursive content and practices,' *Critical Discourse Studies*, 19, 2, 2022, 124-143.

many media outlets, as the Al-Hayat Media Center, the Al-Himma Library, Al-Bayan Radio', the Amaq News Agency (only semi-official), Al-I'tisam or Al-Furqan media center. However, the ad-hoc nature of distribution and the variations in editorial styles made statements from these outlets both harder to collect and challenging to compare over time, and some of the events featured by the A'maq news agency, the most important news agency covering Mozambique, are printed in *Al-Naba*.[18] The magazine is numbered, and it thus becomes easier to verify a full sample. We could have chosen to study local text-message propaganda in Mozambique, but that would have failed to study the narrative that the Islamic State presents in its globally-focused propaganda.[19] Today, the Arabic periodical *Al-Naba* is gradually becoming the only 'game in town'.

The periodical has a rich history, but information about this history is scarce. The first issue of *Al-Naba* was published in May-June 2010 (distributed by hand). It became a monthly publication in 2011 and announced as a weekly newsletter in 2015.[20] Winkler argues that the online distribution started as late as in 2014.[21] It was suspended for a period but re-emerged. In general, *Al-Naba* has a short, news-focused format, with a page-long deeper theological/philosophical/strategical analysis (that this article defines as 'editorials') on page three. The periodical has been systematically studied before and might historically have had some differences compared with other propaganda channels for the Islamic State. Winkler et al., for example, argued that *Al-Naba* used 'a higher than statistically expected display of images showing respect for the dead, the presence of regional enemies, and non-verbal features associated with power in the group's militant and martyr images in its Arabic publications'.[22] Others suggested that the Islamic State's Arabic newsletters over-emphasises certain types of state-building imagery, such as maps and media products; however, this could be related to the level of territorial control, as argued by Kaczkowski et al.[23] The Islamic State also had to deal with its indirect failed prophesies. In periodicals like *Dabiq*, allegories to end-time prophesies in the *Quran* and *Hadiths* were common; however, the caliphate in the Levant collapsed militarily, and the 'end of times' failed to arrive. Similar to other eschatological cults, the Islamic State had to refashion its narrative to fit the new situation. This might have led to a decrease in utopian coverage of the life within the Islamic State, and an increased focus on warfare, as observed by Winter.[24] Overall, the existing studies of *Al-Naba* focus on a past period when the

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18 For examples see Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018* (Brussels: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2018).
19 It should be noted that more globally targeted Islamic State propaganda is also translated into local languages and recirculated in Mozambique; Extrac, 'The Islamic State in Mozambique: A Profile', *Extrac Special Report* 2021.
20 J. Kadivar, 'Daesh and the power of media and message', *Arab Media & Society*, 30, 2020, https://www.arabmediasociety.com/daesh-and-the-power-of-media-and-message/.
21 C. Winkler 'Visual Images: Distinguishing Daesh's Internal and External Communication Strategies' in *Countering Daesh Propaganda: Action-Oriented Research for Practical Policy Outcomes* (Washington: The Carter Centre, 2016), https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/counteringdaeshpropaganda-feb2016.pdf.
22 Winkler, El-Damanhoury, Dicker and Lemieux, 'Images of death and dying in ISIS media'.
23 W. Kaczkowski, C. Winkler, K. El-Damanhoury and Y. Luu, 'Intersections of the Real and the Virtual Caliphates: The Islamic State's Territory and Media Campaign', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 6, 2, 2020, 1–15.
24 C. Winter 'Apocalypse, later: a longitudinal study of the Islamic State brand', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 35, 1, 103–121.

Islamic State operated in a different context, while this article focuses on the present. This is why we chose to study the contents of *Al-Naba* in the period from May 2022 to May 2023. This article does not intend to study the reaction to the fall of the territories controlled by the Islamic State in the Levant, but *Al-Naba*'s African focus and its coverage of Mozambique. The indirect attempts to reinterpret the world just after the fall of the Islamic State in the Levant will not be addressed. The article studies *Al-Naba*'s coverage after several of the African Islamic State provinces were broken up into smaller entities. We study the period after the Islamic State in Mozambique became a separate province, and when the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara again got the status of an independent province. This also means that regional media offices as the Central Africa Province Media Office becomes less relevant as a source, since the Islamic State in Mozambique no longer was a part of the Islamic State's Central African Province.

This paper is based on methodology combining content and discourse analysis. The first stage of the research process consisted in identifying and counting the articles exploring events in Sub-Saharan Africa. These articles were categorised and ordered according to the Islamic State provinces covered in the articles. Subsequently, articles were coded according to the type of activities they covered. Attacks against army targets, attacks against militias, attacks against Christians, attacks against Christian infrastructures (including churches), against international intervening forces, attacks against Al-Qaeda, attacks against domestic business, or attacks against foreign business, were coded as separate categories. We also included a category covering articles focusing on humanitarian aid provision, and a last category was for other governance activities. The frequencies of the various activities provided a quantitative overview of variations in the topics covered by *Al-Naba* as well as an overview of variations between the articles covering different Islamic State provinces in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The second stage consisted in analysing the discourse in the various articles qualitatively to identify tropes, dominant leitmotifs, and contextualise these, exploring what was said, and why certain topics reoccurred. The justifications for the various types of attacks were also explored. Editorials were studied in the same manner, and these were found to go much more in depth than the common articles, for example focusing and repeating specific narratives. Narratives in this article are thus often based on editorials. The data were then combined to generate the conclusions of this article. The translations from Arabic were done by Ida Bary, while both authors worked together on the coding and analysis. We used direct Latinisation of the Arabic without going into IJMES or the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

Setting the context

This article studies the period from May 2022 to May 2023, when the Islamic State faced opportunities and limitations in both the wider Africa, as well as in Mozambique. The Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) has over the period gone onto the offensive, in Burkina Faso and Niger, both against the Al-Qaeda affiliated *Jamaa al-Nusra al-Islam wa al-Muslimin* (JNIM) and the Malian government and

its allies.[25] In March 2022, the ISGS gained formal independence from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). ISWAP grew weaker over the same period as the Nigerian army stepped up its campaigns against the former. ISWAP was also caught up in a fight with its old rival, the Boko Haram.[26] The last of the larger provinces, the province previously responsible for Mozambique, the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) has been stable in the border areas between the Congo and Uganda. The stability of ISCAP was partly due to the regional rivalries playing out, and partly due to a strategy of avoiding open combat by hiding during larger military offensives.[27]

ISCAP was originally put in charge of the Islamic States' militias in Mozambique as well as in Congo and Uganda.[28] This organisation had its origins in an odd merger of two quite different organisations, the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) and the Islamic Salafi Organisation (ISF). NALU was a rebel organisation recruiting mainly from the Christian and animist Bakonjo-Bamba population, fighting for the rights of this ethnic group. The ISF had roots in Uganda's *Tablighi* movement and was inspired by ideological currents from Saudi Arabia. This odd alliance of Muslims, Christians and Animists was created by Omar Bashir, then president of Sudan, and Mobutu Sese Seko, then president of Zaire (later Congo). Mobutu and Bashir saw the new organisation as a political tool to be used against Museveni's regime in Uganda.[29] The new organisation's name became known as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).[30]

Due to the removal of Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997, the organisation had to evacuate its bases to larger Congolese towns and move into the Rwenzori Mountain range on the border between Congo and Uganda. By 2006, Sudan ended the support for the organisation. In 2008 Uganda acknowledged the kingdom of Rwenzori as an autonomous entity within Uganda, one of the demands of the original NALU. Additionally, seven of the old top leaders in NALU surrendered to the United Nations. These events weakened the Christian component of ADF. The rhetoric of the ADF subsequently grew more jihadist.[31] ADF also faced the ebb and flow of Ugandan, United Nation's, and Congolese military offensives. During these offensives, the ADF was attacked, retreated into the mountains, and came back after the offensives had ended.

By 2017, a video of fighters in Congo declaring their allegiance to the Islamic State surfaced. In April 2019, the Islamic State took responsibility for an attack in

25 E. Chahali, 'Mali: Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) on verge of victory in Menaka', Ujasusi Blog, 6 May 2023, www.ujasusi. com.

26 B. Carter, K. Tyson, L. Karr and P. Mills 'Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, May 17, 2023', *ISW – Critical Threats Weekly Update*, 19 May 2023.

27 B. Carter, L. Karr and K. Tyson, 'Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update, March 22, 2023', *Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update*, 22 March 2023.

28 The Islamic State's Central Africa Province might in the start nominally have been led from Somalia, and some analysts claim that it is still financed and controlled through the so-called Karrar office in Somalia, although the command lines were weak and the evidence for practical control are scant, if nonexistent. See C. Weiss, R. Farrell, T. Candland and L. Poole, 'Fatal Transaction: The Funding Behind the Islamic State's Central Africa Province', *June 2023 Nexus Report*, 18.

29 S. Hansen, *Rift, Sahel and Horn: Fault-lines of the African Jihad* (London: Hurst, 2019), 127–142.

30 K. Titeca and D. Fahey, 'The many faces of a rebel group: the Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo', *International Affairs*, 92, 5, 2016.

31 However, some sub-commanders of the organisation, such as Benjamin Kisokeranio, a son of a former NALU/ADF commander, still were influenced by their historical links with the old and more secular/Christian NALU.

Congo and in Mozambique. In April 2019, *Al-Naba* published its first pictures from Congo.[32] Later the same year, the ADF leader Musa Baluku confirmed allegiance to the Islamic State, and on 24 July 2019 fighters in both Congo and Mozambique pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in the same video.[33] In 2020, Baluku declared that ADF no longer existed and had been replaced by the ISCAP. This development led to fragmentation. Some subgroups of the old ADF wanted to maintain a local focus, but the new ISCAP kept control over most of the ADF members.[34] The ISCAP gained a prominent role in *Al-Naba* and other Islamic State publications. The deepening of the relationship with the Islamic State resulted in a larger and more violent production of propaganda, as well as in the attraction of foreign funding.[35]

The ties with the insurgency in Mozambique at the time were hard to assess, as there were no Mozambique citizens amongst the foreign fighters identified in Congo (although there were Tanzanians).[36] However, *Al-Naba*'s coverage of Mozambique paralleled its Congo coverage; the first articles focusing on attacks in each of the countries were published the same year (2019). According to Extrac, the Islamic State published more than 85 Mozambique-focused pieces between 2019 and 2021. Most of these pieces were produced by ISCAP's own Media Office. The focus was mostly on depicting Islamic State attacks and their consequences. There were 55 claims of attacks, 18 photo reportages and three videos.[37]

The Islamic State in Mozambique was detached from ISCAP in 2022, gaining the status of a separate Islamic State province (*wilaya*t).[38] The historical trajectory of the new *wilayat* was grounded in Mozambican history and colonial and post-colonial experiences, and thus was separate from the ADF's history. Centre-periphery tensions and economic marginalisation created a context that was a fertile breeding ground for an insurgency. Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) had grown unpopular in the north of Mozambique. This unpopularity was partly due to an increasingly oligarchic Frelimo, as well as economic marginalisation.[39] Tension between many northerners and the Frelimo was also created by the lack of redistribution of the wealth generated by the natural resource extraction, booming from 2009 onwards.[40] The government's crackdown on illegal mining in 2017 was likewise highly unpopular, further alienating northerners closed out of the lucrative mining business. Importantly, both economic and political marginalisation were aligned with ethnic

32 S. Hansen, 'Tracking the DRC's Allied Democratic Forces and its links to ISIS', *The Conversation,* 8 May 2019. The article was published in *Al-Naba* 179, 25 April 2019.

33 There might have been an internal video of Musa Baluku swearing allegiance as early as in 2018. See R. O'Farell, 'Neither Local, Nor Transnational, But Both: The Islamic State in Congo', *Terrain Analysis,* 14 December 2021.

34 Some of the ADF commanders with NALU ties, such as Benjamin Kisokeranio, tried to leave; he was arrested when leaving Congo in 2022. The son of the former ADF commander, Yasin Hassan Nyanzi, also left.

35 T. Candland, R. O'Farrell, L. Poole and C. Weiss, 'The Rising Threat to Central Africa: The 2021 Transformation of the Islamic State's Congolese Branch', *CTC Sentinel*, 15, 6 2022.

36 There were allegations that both ADF insurgents and Mozambique insurgents had visited and trained at the Usafi Mosque in Kampala, led by Abdur Rahman Faisal, who was later arrested in Mozambique.

37 Extrac 'The Islamic State in Mozambique: A Profile', *Extrac Special Report 2021*, 5; J. Feijó, 'From the "Faceless Enemy" to the Hypothesis of Dialogue: Identities, Pretensions, and Channels of Communication with the Machababs', *OMR Destaque Rural*, 130, 2021.

38 A. Doctor, 'After Palma: Assessing the Islamic State's Position in Northern Mozambique', *August 2022 Nexus Report*.

39 M. T. Njelezi, 'Insurgency and subversion: An analysis of the modes of operation for understanding the attacks in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique', *African Security Review*, 31, 4, 2022, 9.

40 International Crisis Group, 'Winning Peace in Mozambique's Embattled North', *Crisis Group Africa Briefing №178*, 2022.

and religious cleavages.[41] The Makonde, both Christian and holding top positions in Frelimo, was viewed with suspicion by the more economically marginalised coastal Muslim Mwani population.[42]

Nevertheless, the insurgency itself started as a sect of Islamist reformers rebelling against local 'impure' Islamic practices and government control. This sect was branded '*mashababe*' by locals.[43] As early as 2015, a Muslim youth group enforced a ban on alcohol in Pangane, Macomia, and the nucleus of the group might have existed as a small sect-like movement even since 2007.[44] The sect was influenced ideologically by older Islamist trans-border networks along the Swahili coast – the borders of the region had been traversed by Muslim traders and religious leaders for centuries.[45] The group seems to have been underestimated at the start and was on the receiving end of jokes in other regions of Mozambique.[46]

In 2016, local sources claimed that a radical mosque belonging to the *mashababe* had been destroyed by locals, and drop-out rates had increased in some mosques, due to *mashababe* recruiting amongst students.[47] The small group's radical agenda, including encouraging non-attendance in schools, and arguing against 'non-Islamic' practices and storing arms for self-protection, alienated other groups in the north, including Muslim leaders.[48] Indeed, the problem was at the start seen as an internal Muslim problem by several Mozambican government institutions.[49] There were also local attacks directed against the group and an increasing spiral of violence between the group and its surroundings. The first violent attack by the group was registered in October 2017, in Mocímboa da Praia district (according to Hemming, a prison break because of local police arresting group members after public complaint).[50]

The brutality and inefficiency of the counterinsurgency contributed to a fertile environment for the insurgents and insurgency recruitment.[51] In 2017–2020, the violence was localised, but from 2020 and onwards it expanded geographically. In

41 See Feijó, 'From the "Faceless Enemy" to the Hypothesis of Dialogue'; J. Feijó, 'Social asymmetries: clues to understand the spread of Islamist Jihadism in Cabo Delgado' (Dakar, Senegal: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Peace and Security Competence Centre Sub-Saharan Africa, 2020); J. Feijó, *The role of women in the conflict in Cabo Delgado: understanding vicious cycles of violence* (Maputo: Observatório do Meio Rural, 2021); J. Feijó and J. Maquenzi, 'Poverty, inequality and conflict in the Northern Cabo Delgado', *Documento de Trabalho* No. 76. (Maputo: Observatório do Meio Rural, 2019).

42 D. Bekoe, S. M. Burchard and S. Daly, 'Extremism in Mozambique: Interpreting Group Tactics and the Role of the Government's Response in the Crisis in Cabo Delgado', *Institute for Defense Analyses*, 2020.

43 This phase strongly reminds about both the early history of Boko Haram, the previously mentioned ISF and the Kenyan Shabaab affiliated Muslim Youth Centre that later joined Somalia's Harakat Al Shabaab. See Hansen, *Rift, Sahel and Horn*.

44 E. Morier-Genoud, 'The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique: Origins, Nature and Beginning', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 14, 3, 2020, 396–412; T. Hemming, 'The Islamic State in Mozambique', *Lawfare News*, January 24, 2021; S. Chichava 'The First Signs of "Al Shabaab" in Cabo Delgado: Some Stories from Macomia and Ancuabe', *Informação sobre Desenvolvimento, Instituições e Análise Social*, 129e, 2020

45 Morier-Genoud, 'The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique', 396–412. Indeed, the current leader of the province, Abu Yasir Hassan, is from the Pwami region from Tanzania.

46 P. Israel, 'Violence and the Voice Note: The War for Cabo Delgado in Social Media (Mozambique, 2020), *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 50 (April 2024). Forthcoming.

47 Morier-Genoud, 'The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique'.

48 Morier-Genoud, 'The Jihadi Insurgency in Mozambique', 396–412.

49 S. Forquilha and J. Pereira 'Migration Dynamics and the Making of the Jihadi Insurgency in Northern Mozambique', *E-Journal of Portuguese History*, 20, 2, 2022, 134; L. Bonate 'Why the Mozambican Government's alliance with the Islamic Council of Mozambique might not end the insurgency in Cabo Delgado', *Zitamar Daily Briefing*, 1 July 2019.

50 T. Hemming, 'The Islamic State in Mozambique', *Lawfare News*, 24 January 2021.

51 W. Els and R. Chelin, 'Mozambique, Cabo Delgado Insurgency: Extraordinary mineral resources and liquid natural gas, a blessing that may be a curse or are we missing the point?' in G. Segell, S. Kostelyanets and H. Solomon (eds), *Terrorism in Africa: New Trends and Frontiers* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2021), 92.

2021, more than 3,000 troops from Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) were deployed into the north of Mozambique. Rwanda cleared the Afungi Peninsula and recaptured the important port of Mocímboa da Praia in August 2021. Palma was reconquered earlier, on 5 April 2021, by government forces and private contractors from, amongst others, the South African private military group, the Dyke Advisory group.[52]

Perhaps because of the problems, in order to bestow honour on their pressured local members, in 2021–2022, the Islamic State's Mozambique organisation gained *wilayat* status, turning into the ISIS-Mozambique province.[53] By 2022, frequencies of small-scale attacks again grew, and in 2023 the insurgents also returned to several areas that they previously lost in the countryside, and managed to launch platoon-sized attacks.[54] We also saw attempts to spread into new provinces.

The period we study is thus a period which saw the expansion of some Islamic State's affiliates in Sub-Saharan Africa, while others were stable. For Mozambique it was a period of retraction and then slow expansion.

'A "land" of Hijra and Jihad'

African Islamic State affiliates received extensive coverage in the period May 2022 to May 2023. More than 139 articles focusing on African issues appeared on the front page of *Al-Naba* alone.[55] Thirty-seven of the front-page articles focused on Mozambique. Overall, 208 articles carried African themes, and 42 of them were about Mozambique.

Most of these articles, both the articles covering Africa as a whole and the articles covering Mozambique in particular, consist of descriptions of attacks. A few of the articles also include justifications for the attacks. The editorials, usually found on page three, tend to have a stronger focus on ideological and theological issues, and tend not to be area-, continent- or country-specific. Yet, some of the editorials focused on African jihad, often drawing upon examples from Mozambique. These editorials again present the Mozambique insurgency as a part of a wider African effort, and grounds the African effort in the global strategies and ideologies of the Islamic State. Elements in these articles touch upon discussions of patterns of power in post-colonial Africa, and on the detrimental effects of colonialism, paralleling discussions by both African intellectuals and Africanists. However, the post-colonial discussion is re-framed in a language of a clash between Christianity and Islam, and between Africans and the 'crusader powers', which generally refers to the old colonial powers and the United States. We see rhetoric that stresses jihad as a tool to empower

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52   P. Fabricius, 'SA military company in insurgent combat zone, the Dyck Advisory Group, will not extend contract with Mozambique', *Daily Mavrick*, 31 March 2021.

53   Staff Writer, 'IS designates Mozambique as its own province following battle in Quiterajo', *Zitamar News*, 13 May 2022.

54   Caboligado, 'Caboligado weekly', *Cabo Ligado Weekly*, 1–21 May 2023. The Islamic State also lost its supreme leader Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi (leader 2019–2022), Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi (2022), and Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Quraishi (2022–2023).

55   *Al-Naba* came out with fifty-three issues over the same period.

Africans and to get the respect they deserve from the West. African jihadists are seen as setting up an example for other jihadists to follow, an example that can also shame Arabs to join jihad. Jihad is depicted as empowering, as enabling Africans to find respect in Europe and United States as well as the Middle East. We also see the depiction of the Islamic State as defending Africa against Western Christianisation efforts. Such efforts are often staged by former colonial powers. Foreign aid and the activities of Western humanitarian organisations are seen as serving as tools for Christianisation. The articles claim that Islam is 'under threat', a threat that subsequently is used to justify sectarian violence. Sectarian violence is described as defensive warfare, defensive jihad, to protect Islam.

We can differentiate between at least five tropes. The first is a *post-colonial* trope that sees Africans as victims of Christian colonisation and claims that Africans are being viewed as inferior by the non-Muslim world. African participation in the former and in jihad is believed to change the perception of Africans as inferior. Jihad is presented as a tool to gain respect and to block old patterns of control from Christian colonial states. An *anti-Christian* trope is related to the first trope, presenting Christians as taking over Africa, and claiming that the Islamic State is the antidote to this takeover, and is defending Islam. Islam is also claimed to be a more 'original' African religion. A third trope, directed against non-African leaders *present the successes of the African Jihadists as embarrassing for other sympathisers*. The African jihadists' successes are depicted as showing how African jihadists are taking over the 'torch' from the Levant, and thus also an example to follow for non-Africans. The trope is a recruitment tool directed at non-Africans and an encouragement for foreign fighters to travel to the Sub-Saharan Islamic State provinces. The trope is reinforced by more general articles describing the successes of the Islamic State attacks in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Mozambique. Mozambique is seen as an area of success for the jihadists. A less common fourth trope is about *the West taking advantage of the resources of Sub-Saharan Africa because of their own greed,* and the Jihadist State activities seen as a way to hinder this. The last trope presents *African leaders as greedy and selfish*, and easily manipulated by the West, while the Islamic State presents itself as an alternative.

There are several examples of these tropes. The editorial of *Al-Naba*, Issue 320, highlights the anti-colonial trope. An anonymous contributor describes the division of Africa by the colonial powers (referred to as 'crusader French, Portuguese and Spanish' and others), a reference to the now infamous Berlin Conference of 1884. The division is seen as a tool to divide the *ummah*. Jihad is seen as a tool to rectify this division. In Issue 389, the magazine argues that Africans were regarded as inferior by Europeans and Americans:

> For decades, Western society (*Jahiliya*) view of Africa was based only on documentary films about an Africa. They look at Africans with a superiority complex (*Istielaeya*). They focused on the rituals of some of its pagan tribes that lagged behind the western society (*Jahiliya*), the west (*Jahiliya*)

called themselves civilised. Time proved that the 'backwardness' in Africa is the same as in crusader Europe and America.[56]

The organization thus argues that the backwardness of the West is the same as parts of Africa; it is a product of not adhering to Islam, and being a part of *Jahiliya*, a term here used to designate the non-Islamic world, seen as lawless and unethical.[57] Jihad affiliated with the Islamic State has empowered Africans, who gained new respect, and are now taken seriously as examples that are to be followed and feared by their enemies. The anti-Christian trope is also touched upon in the editorial, 'The Illusions of Christians in Africa', in Issue 320, presenting the declaration of the Pope about a Christian takeover in Africa. The article also sketches out how the former colonial powers and humanitarian actors are a part of this plot. Islamic State ideology and its religious interpretations are presented as the antidotes to these developments. These points are, in a way, enforced by many empirical reports on 'successful' violence against Christians in the same issue.

The strongest endorsement of African jihad in the magazine, as well as a presentation of the third trope, comes in Issue 389 where African jihad is held up as a 'shaming' example for potential Arab recruits and others. The successes and frequencies of attacks show that it is Africans who now are taking up the torch of jihad. Sub-Saharan Africa is a 'land of Hijra and Jihad'. Africa becomes an example to follow, a place that sets an example to follow. It becomes an example of active participation in jihad, a place for jihadists to travel to, a place to escape from oppression, and a place to fight:

> During the last few years, Muslims can see how the African wilayat transformed to the field of hijra and jihad. Many migrated there to escape the oppression of tyrants; they are seeking jihad for the sake of Allah and this terrified the disbelievers and the followers.[58]

However, 'tyrants in Africa' attempts to take the focus away from the Islamic State's activities in Sub-Saharan Africa, pretending that it does not exist:

> Ironically, African tyrants insisted on not recognising the existence of the Islamic State in Africa, especially in Congo and Mozambique, not calling it by name to evade some of the heavy obligations they saw as jeopardising their interests. They were forced under the impact of the blows and the horror of the tragedy to cry out for help from the Crusader alliance, but they demanded that it transfer its centre of operations to Africa to confront the growing jihad there. A new generation of sons of Islam in Africa rose on the method of Prophecy, the same teaching that they (the west) fought in Iraq and the Levant.[59]

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56 *Al-Naba 389*, 3.
57 *Jahiliya* was originally a term used to describe the pre-Islamic Arab peninsula, hailing from the word for ignorant in Arabic.
58 *Al-Naba 343*, 3.
59 *Al-Naba 389*, 3.

Mozambique and the other African affiliates here become pawns in a narrative presenting the Islamic State as a success, despite its losses in the Levant. The coverage of the African affiliates becomes a tool to shame followers who do not join jihad. African jihad thus serves as a recruitment tool as well as a tool to construct a 'we' feeling for the global followers of the magazine, enhancing the Islamic State at a global level, through the examples of the successes of the affiliates in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

The fourth trope is illustrated in the editorial of *Al-Naba*, Issue 343, which claims that attacks against Christians in Mozambique will prevent the West from taking advantage of Mozambique's natural resources. We also see this theme in *Al-Naba* before May 2022. *Extrac* reports about a 'Mozambique-focused editorial in Islamic State newspaper' *Al-Naba*, 'drawing attention to "crusader" investment in Cabo Delgado', as early as 2 July 2020.[60] The magazine claimed that the greed of the Western powers both spurred their interest in Mozambique, as well as made the Western powers disregard the other real causes of the insurgency (grievances). The focus on natural resources made the Western media neglect the abuse of Muslims at the hand of Christians and atheists.[61] According to *Extrac*, this theme also featured frequently in the online discussions of Islamic State's sympathisers commenting on Mozambique in the period of 2019–2021. The online sympathisers often highlighted the Christian–Islamic conflicts when mentioning the Christian-dominated Rwandese army's campaigns in the country, although we did not find the similar pattern for the *Al-Naba* coverage of 2022–2023.[62] Issue 389 also argues that US, Russian and other Western security engagements are attempts to export the Russian–American conflict, which again is depicted as a war over resources and as of little interest to Muslims, and once more, the Western interest is portrayed as driven by greed. The final trope is illustrated in Issue 389, describing African leaders as self-interested tyrants, who are easy to manipulate by external interests, and who are greedy for power and money.

A last function of the editorial contents on Africa seems to be a general assurance to Islamic State sympathisers that the organisation is still successful and that Western counter-strategies has had limited success. Issue 389 points out again that the West and its allies wield unending wars against jihadist without any victories. In this issue, the Islamic State argues that the West and its allies' futile economic sanctions against jihadist leaders ('who do not hold bank accounts anyway') shows the ineffectiveness of Western warfare against jihad. Sub-Saharan Africa is to be converted through two strategies: by establishing institutions for governance and through outright jihad. The governance theme in the editorial was notably absent from the non-editorial articles focusing on Mozambique only.

However, in general, the volume of coverage of Mozambique, as well as the coverage of Sub-Saharan Africa, contributes to support the above tropes, and serves as a tool to depict the Islamic State as successful. Some of the tropes align quite well with

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60 Extrac, 'The Islamic State in Mozambique: A Profile', *Extrac Special Report* 2021.
61 A. Al-Tamimi, 'Islamic State Editorial on Mozambique', *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog*, 3 July 2020.
62 Ibid..

both general discussions of grievance in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, discussions that are ongoing far outside the pool of potential sympathisers of the Islamic State. However, these grievances are reinterpreted and altered through the Islamic State's ideological prism where the world is seen as a dichotomy between good and evil, and as a battlefield for a global clash of religions. These messages are supported by gruesome pictures, some showing people beheaded or even burned alive. Ironically, given the editorials on African empowerment, most of the mutilated corpses pictured in the magazine are Africans, and the depiction of dead enemies from the Levant is less common. The pictures of mutilated enemies of the African Islamic State affiliates could also be a way to show power in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of Mozambique, such pictures also play into old traditions around decapitation, which hearken back to colonial times. *Al-Naba* depicts African martyrs less frequently than Levantine and Afghan martyrs, and the dead African jihadis seldom get their biographies in print. In many ways, this is also a contradiction in the Islamic State propaganda material, arguing for African empowerment, depicting African victims of the Islamic State more frequently, and failing to celebrate fallen African jihadists in the same way as Arab or Afghan jihadists.

Despite these contradictions, the insurgency in Mozambique serves as an enhancer of a wider African narrative presenting Sub-Saharan Africa as a new field of jihad, pointing to the Islamic State as a way to stop oppression, to protect Islam, and to prevent the influence of old colonial powers and of the United States.

Al-Naba's coverage of Mozambique

The operations of the Islamic State in Mozambique play a significant role in enhancing the image of the Islamic State as a strong and decisive force in Africa, and the coverage of Mozambique is a very important part of this effort. In fact, the coverage of Mozambique is relatively extensive compared to other Islamic State provinces in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Number of articles covering the various organisation

■ ISWAP ■ ISGS ■ ISCAP ■ ISMOZ ■ ISOM

Front-page coverage

■ ISWAP ■ ISMOZ ■ ISCAP ■ ISGS ■ ISOM

The Islamic State's Mozambique province received the second largest amount of front-page coverage of the Sub-Saharan provinces measured in the number of country specific articles appearing on the front-page of *Al-Naba* in the period.[63] If one studies the total number of articles in *Al-Naba*, the Mozambique province received the third largest coverage measured in articles focusing on the various provinces.[64] It is possible to argue that the coverage of Mozambique is out of proportions with the activities of the province compared to other Sub-Saharan provinces. The most powerful province in Sub-Saharan Africa at the time of writing, the Islamic State in Greater Sahara, ironically just comes number four in the ranking of coverage, both based on the number of articles in general and the number of articles on the front page.

Front-page articles/total number of articles covering Mozambique per month
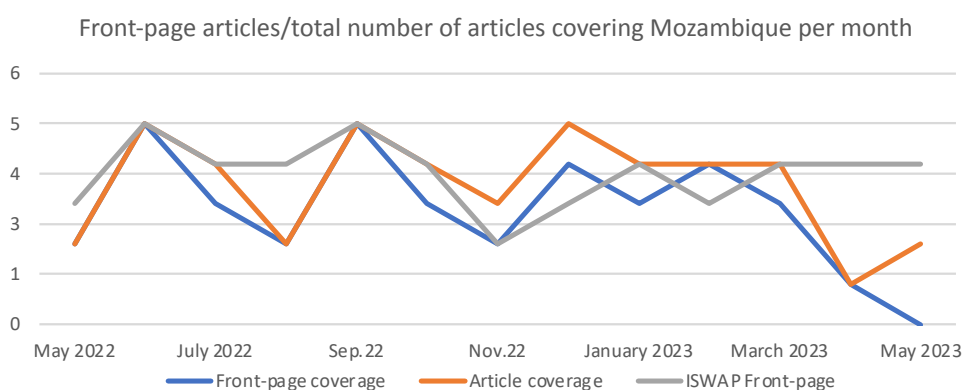
There is also a difference in what kind of topics the coverage of the various provinces depicts. The difference is partly related to the diverse threats the provinces face. The Somali and Saharan provinces face strong Al-Qaeda affiliates in their home fronts. The fight against Al-Qaeda thus becomes a more important part of the coverage of these provinces in *Al-Naba*. The fight against Al-Qaeda affiliates is not present in the coverage of the Islamic State's West African province, nor in the coverage of the Islamic State in Mozambique and Central Africa. These three provinces operate in areas where Al-Qaeda affiliates never emerged. Similarly, the Christian minority in Somalia is almost non-existing, and Christians in the northern part of Mali, and the western part of Niger, are present in small numbers only (although there are more Christians in the Mopti region of Mali and in Burkina Faso). It thus seems easy to understand that *Al-Naba*'s coverage of violence against Christians is limited in these provinces. The coverage in *Al-Naba* on violence against Christians in Mozambique, the Central African province (which operates in Congo and Uganda)

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63   Although just barely defeating the coverage of the Islamic State's Central African Province (by one article).
64   Again, just by one article. The Islamic State's West African province in Nigeria (and parts of Cameroon, Chad and Niger), the oldest of the Islamic State provinces, received most coverage, perhaps because of its seniority amongst the Sub-Saharan affiliates.

and the West African Province operating in north-eastern Nigeria and the border areas of Cameroon, Niger and Chad, should be larger because of the Christian population numbers in these areas.

Types of attacks depicted in articles covering the vaious Islamic State provinces
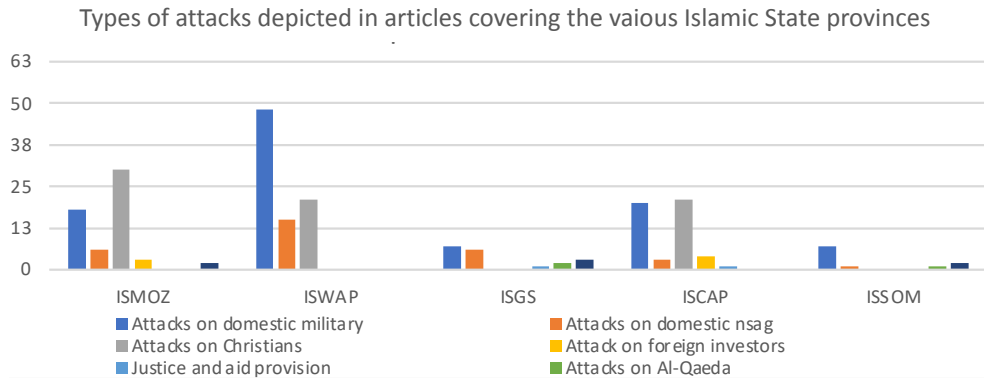
Yet, the variations in coverage of sectarian violence are too large to be explained only by these differences. Firstly, the articles describing attacks on Christians are much more frequent in the coverage of the Mozambique province, even compared to other affiliates also operating in areas with many Christians. Secondly, attacks against Christians receive a larger proportion of coverage compared to other types of attacks, for example, attacks against military targets in Mozambique, than other affiliates. Articles covering Mozambique simply have the most sectarian focus of the Sub-Saharan Islamic State affiliates. It might be argued that attacks against Christian civilians also pays off propaganda-wise for the Mozambique province. Coverage of sectarian attacks brings attention to the province without the cost that attacks against military targets might lead to. Military targets often fire back, while civilians do not, making attacking Christians a 'cheap' strategy to get attention.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the province's attacks might be less sectarian in real life. Several researchers suggest that attacks on mixed faith villages are taking place. In 2019, João Feijó and Jerry Maquenzi suggested that 'evidence help determine that the villages are attacked indiscriminately, regardless of the religious beliefs of the inhabitants, and Christians and Muslims have been beheaded and killed'.[65] Similarly João Feijó suggests that females are targeted for kidnappings regardless of their religion.[66] Additionally, the Muslim- on-Muslim conflict, in the form of rivalries between the nascent *mashababe* and more traditional Islamic leaders, was an important part of the early history of the Islamic State in Mozambique. Nevertheless, the

65   Feijó and Maquenzi, 'Poverty, inequality and conflict in the Northern Cabo Delgado', 14.
66   J. Feijó, 'Characterization and social organization of Machababos from the discourses of kidnapped women', *Observador Rural* Nº 109, April 2021.

type of coverage shows what the province wants to convey to the rest of the Islamic State that they are fighting Christianity. Moreover, this type of coverage enhances the anti-Christian trope of the Islamic State.
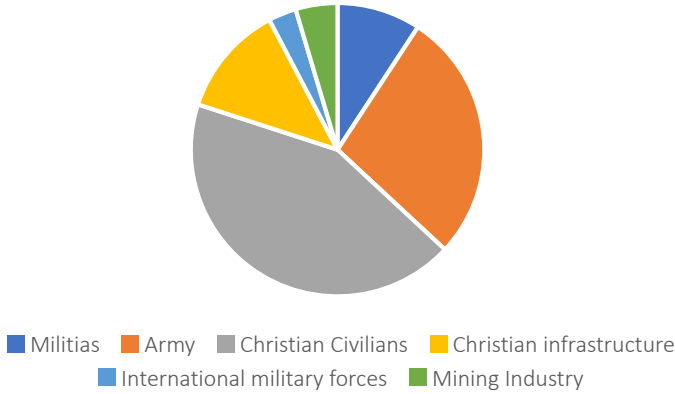
Another, interesting, but rather small activity that separates the Mozambique province from the other provinces are the coverages of attacks against foreign mining operations, as for example, the attack against the Australian owned (according to *Al-Naba*) Triton Mineral graphite mine. The three recorded articles on attacks against foreign mineral extraction companies might be interpreted as paralleling some of the academic discussions around the causes of the insurgency in Mozambique. Some approaches focus on natural resource extraction, and the grievances caused by it, as a major factor contributing to the insurgency itself.[67] Notably, these attacks also allow *Al-Naba* to focus on both their anti-colonial trope, as well as the trope that focuses on African leaders as greedy and tyrannical. The attacks allow the Islamic State to present itself as a 'force that can stop Western abuse of African resources to satisfy its greed'. The Islamic State Mozambique province's attacks against mineral extraction are the only attacks in the whole of the Sub-Saharan Africa that can be used to argue this narrative. The only other province to launch similar attacks (at least according to *Al-Naba*) is the Central African province. In general, the focus is on attacks on re-gionally owned, non-Congolese export businesses transporting goods across Congo's eastern borders. The province does not, according to the *Al-Naba* coverage, attack Western investment in Uganda and Eastern Congo. The coverage of the Mozambique province also differs from most Islamic State's provinces in Sub-Saharan Africa by not covering governance activities as *Sharia* courts and justice (based on *Sharia*) pro-vision. There are no examples of coverage of the creation of *Sharia* courts, police services and aid distribution.[68] The fact that the Mozambique province fails to at least have one article on this topic can mean several things. One interpretation might be that it could be too weak, like the Somali province, to attempt to venture into *Sharia* and humanitarianism. A second interpretation might be that the province lacks in-terest in these fields because of a lack of deeper ideological motivation, but the data are too inadequate to make any clear conclusion. The insurgents in Mozambique have focused on such themes locally before, in local propaganda distributed via mobile phone videos. After the attack on Mocímboa da Praia in August 2020, a video with *mashababe* leader Ibn Omar was circulated in the region. In the video, Ibn Omar tells locals that 'his group will implement more justice than the government when in power and praises the virtues of Islamic law'. At the same time, he criticizes the Mozambique government which only takes care of their small elite and threatens the

67 See for example, J. J. Macuane, L. Buur and C. M. Monjane, 'Power, conflict and natural resources: The Mozambican crisis revisited', *African Affairs*, 117, 468, 2018; S. Habibe, S. Forquilha and J. Pereira, 'Islamic Radicalization in Northern Mozambique The Case of Mocímboa da Praia', *Cadernos IESE* Nº 17, 2019; F. A Dos-Santos, 'War in resource-rich northern Mozambique – Six scenarios', *CMI Insight*, 2020, 2; F. Makonye, 'The Cabo Delgado Insurgency in Mozambique: Origin, Ideology, Recruitment Strategies and, Social, Political and Economic Implications for Natural Gas and Oil Exploration', *African Journal of Terrorism and Insurgency Research*, 1, 3, 2020.
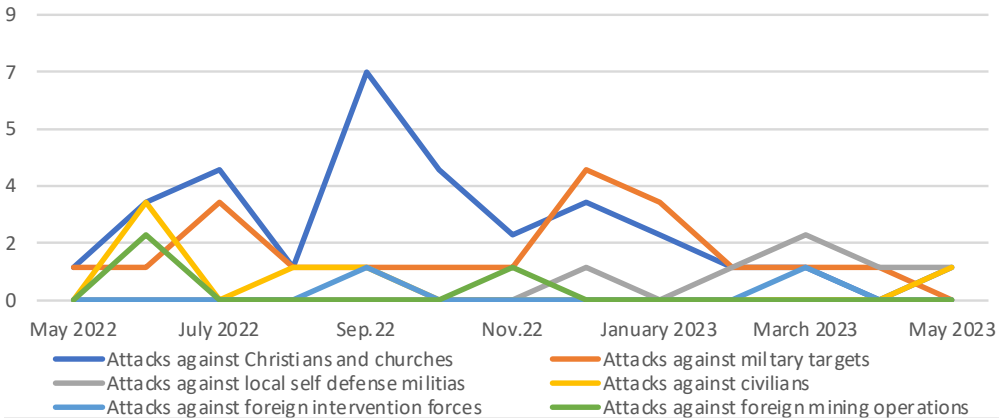68 Although not receiving such coverage from *Al-Naba* in May 2022 to May 2023, the western African province has also hosted such activities in the past.

populations if they help the government.[69] Yet for *Al-Naba*, the issue of governance seemingly remains unimportant in the case of Mozambique.

Who/what do the Islamic State's Mozambique province attack, according to *Al-Naba*

- Militias ■ Army ■ Christian Civilians ■ Christian infrastructure
- International military forces ■ Mining Industry

Variations of the themes in the coverage of Mozambique: May 2022 to May 2023

Attacks against Christians and churches — Attacks against military targets
Attacks against local self defense militias — Attacks against civilians
Attacks against foreign intervention forces — Attacks against foreign mining operations

All in all, we see that the Mozambique province receives more attention in *Al-Naba* than the frequency of activities justifies. We see that it receives this coverage due to its violence against Christians, but also that there are special features of the coverage of the alleged Islamic State's activities in Mozambique. The features consist of an infrequent but nevertheless important tendency to focus on Western investors as well as the lack of a single article on forms of Islamic governance in the province.

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69 B. M. Githing'u, and T. Hamming, "'The Arc of Jihad": The Ecosystem of Militancy in East, Central and Southern Africa', *ICSR Report 2021*, 47. The conquest of Mocímboa da Praia was however celebrated by *Al-Naba* in one of their August 2020 issues, issue number 249.

Snapshot of *Al-Naba*'s comparison of Central Africa and Mozambique, a rare use of English in the Magazine

Conclusions

The coverage in *Al-Naba* shows that Mozambique is an essential element in the Islamic State's media strategy, perhaps more than it deserves if judged by the scale of alleged Islamic State operations in the country. The attacks in Mozambique are used to illustrate that the Islamic State in general is fit and is expanding into new areas. For *Al-Naba*, Mozambique's jihadists also become important to illustrate the five common tropes presented in the Sub-Saharan Africa coverage. The tropes include the anti-colonial trope; the anti-Christian trope; the empowerment/shaming trope intended to make Africans feel empowered by jihad, and to put pressure on non-Africans to join jihad; the Western greed trope; and the greedy African leader's trope. Mozambique seems to be especially important for underlining the sectarian anti-Christian trope and the Western greed trope. All these tropes either have some roots in events in recent history, or they draw upon discussions that are common far outside jihadist circles. The tropes thus are perfect tools to attract followers amongst individuals wanting to address very real grievances in Mozambique and who are searching for wider ideological models to explain them. The coverage of Mozambique, and indeed the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, is more violent relative to the coverage of the rest of the world. *Al-Naba*'s coverage also serves to enhance both

the feeling of success, hopes for success, and 'we' feeling amongst the readers who sympathise with the Islamic State.

The conflict in Mozambique was in many ways created and influenced by local dynamics. However, this should not encourage researchers to claim that it is without global effects. The coverage of Mozambique in *Al-Naba* serves to justify the general activities of the Islamic State, and to give the Islamic State sympathisers hope for the future of the organisation in a period where the Islamic State faces severe international challenges, including the frequent killings of its top leaders. The insurgency in Mozambique thus has global consequences, not through being commanded by a strongly centralised jihadist organisation, but by providing 'spectres' – images that can be used to illustrate the vitality of the Islamic State in general.