

The Resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Africa through Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimen (JNIM): Unpacking the Drivers of Expansion in the Sahel

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Abstract

Security entanglements rooted radical movements have long afflicted the serenity of the Sahel region of Africa. The response of regional countries to such terrorist attack often fails due to various factors. What has also been overlooked is the sources and factors which push radicalisation in the regions. This study aims to examine the expansion dynamics of al-Qaeda in the African continent by adapting them to the push and pull theory in the context of radicalization process. Al-Qaeda, for some it was maladaptive to the Continent, has begun to establish its presence in the Sahel region, leveraging its ideology and operational experience, following its loss of ground primarily in Afghanistan, as well as in Iraq and Syria. Attempting to capitalize on both its historical roots and the structural and chronic problems plaguing the region, Al-Qaeda has initiated a process of expansion and entrenchment by engaging with local elements. During this process, JNIM, an al-Qaeda-affiliated group operating in the Sahel region, has emerged as al-Qaeda's most significant regional partner. However, despite of JNIM's affiliation with Sufi traditions such as Tijaniyya presents, the member of JNIM's sympathy and engagement to Al-Qaeda, which is a Salafî ideology that oppose Sufi line, persist a paradoxical dynamics of the issue. The research critically analyzes the motivations underlying the strategy of JNIM, as it expands its influence in the area. It also examines al-Qaeda's expansion in the Sahel region, concludes that the organization's growth has been accelerated by factors such as the border policies implemented during the colonial and neo-colonial periods, power struggles among tribes, the divergence between traditional and central authorities, climate and economic issues, and external interventions. Religious justifications, as elements of motivation, have been found to play a relatively secondary role.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Al-Qaeda, JNIM, Sahel Region, Radicalization, Sub-Saharan Africa.

Jel Code: N47, F52, H56

Afrika'da El Kaide'nin Cemaat Nasr el-İslam vel Müslimin (JNIM) Aracılığıyla Yeniden Canlanması: Sahel'de Genişleyen Terörizmin Faktörleri

Öz

Güvenlik paradoksu ve köklü radikal hareketler uzun zamandır Afrika'nın Sahel bölgesini meşgul etmektedir. Bölge ülkelerinin ortaya çıkan terörist hareketlere karşı vermede yetersiz kalması, terörün yaygınlaşmasını hızlandırmaktadır. Buna mukabil, bölgelerdeki radikalleşmeyi doğuran kaynaklar ve faktörler göz ardı edilmektedir. Bu çalışma el-Kaide'nin Afrika Kıtasında yayılma dinamiklerini radikalleşme sürecini açıklayan itme-çekme kuramına uyarlayarak incelemektedir. Küresel bağlamda operasyon kabiliyetine sahip olan el-Kaide başta Afganistan olmak üzere Irak ve Suriye topraklarında zemin kaybetmesinin ardından sahip olduğu ideoloji ve operasyonel tecrübesi ile Sahel bölgesinde yeniden varlık göstermeye başlamıştır. Tarihsel kökenlerinin yanı sıra bölgenin içinde bulunmuş olduğu yapısal ve kronik sorunları kendi lehine çevirmeye çalışan örgüt yerel unsurlara angaje olarak Sahel bölgesinde genişlemeye ve derinleşmeye başlamıştır. Bu süreçte özellikle Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin Togo ve Nijer'de etkili olan JNIM, El-Kaidenin en önemli bölgesel ortağı olmuştur. Ancak, Selefî bir ideolojiye sahip örgütün Ticanilik gibi sufi bir geleneğe sahip bir bölgede yayılma motivasyonu paradoks oluşturmıştır. Çalışma, Sahel bölgesinde faaliyet gösteren ve El-Kaideye biat eden JNIM'in bölgede yayılırken hangi motivasyonlar üzerine bir strateji kurduğunu eleştirel bir perspektifle ele almaktadır. El-Kaidenin Sahel bölgesinde yayılmasını ele alan bu çalışmanın neticesinde örgütün kolonyal ve neokolonyal dönemde uygulanan sınır politikası, kabileler arasında yaşanan güç mücadelesi, geleneksel otorite ve merkezi otorite ayrışması, iklim ve ekonomi temelli sorunlar ve dış müdahaleler gibi unsurlar temelinde bölgede genişlemesi hızlanmıştır. Motivasyonun unsurlarından dini gerekçeler ise göreceli olarak daha geri planda kaldığı anlaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: El-Kaide, JNIM, Sahel Bölgesi, Radikalleşme, Sahra-Altı Afrika.

Jel Kode: N47, F52, H56

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Introduction

The history of terrorism goes back a very long time, yet it's appearance in African landscape is relatively recent. Accordingly, the history of radicalism in Africa's scene has sparked such widespread and simultaneous reflections in global North studies in post-colonial era. In the place where tribal organisations and leaders hold power with authority residing in a chief consisted of small wandering bands governed by consensus. Such trajectory halted extreme movement likely offspring among local society. Given the very central and respective authority of local leaders, they hold unique roles and wield over their communities. This authority played an essential role, particularly in conflict resolution processes. Tribe-oriented power, over time, become instrumental in preventing ethnic or tribal conflicts in the region. However, in some part of Africa, central authority strategically decentralised the influence of these traditional leaders at the expense of their society.

Historically, bifurcated colonial system of governance divided Africans radically into citizens and subjects (Mamdani, 1996). In this system, some citizens have been treated in accordance with a universal set of right, others are subjected to customary law enforced by traditional chiefs. All efforts to contain or ban traditional authority from the governance were successful in some, not in another places. As Ekeh emphasises that African countries continued to experience a mixed polity, or a dualism of structure of power (Ekeh, 1975). As a part of ontological structure, traditional authority over the centuries constituted a genuinely African form of local governance, but this structure was irrevocably corrupted by the involvement of colonial administration (West & Kloeck-Jenson, 1999).

Most of the array of African states' underdevelopment geopolitically and economically interconnected and sociologically co-constitutive to the nature of colonialism and imperialism (Anievas & Nişancioğlu, 2015). In his book *Economics and World History*, economic historian Paul Bairoch claims that "there is no doubt that a large number of structural features of the process of economic underdevelopment have historical roots going back to European colonization" (Bairoch, 1995). Colonialism in Africa not only developed a system which fostered paternalism—as opposed to partnership—by the metropolises eventually leading to uneven and combined development (Bond vd., 2013; Brown, 2020, 2020), but also political arrangement issue that long outlasted one group's colonial rule. Walter Rodney also traced the roots of Africa's under-development in his masterpiece "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa", spotlighting the role of slave trade, expatriation of African surplus under colonialism, as well as social, political and cultural exploitation for the benefit of the metropolises (Rodney, 1972).

The post-colonial era, on the other hand, brought significantly different political and security dynamics to African countries. While many African nations achieved political independence one after

another, some fell into dictatorial governance at home. A new phenomenon emerged: political independence coupled with economic dependence, which became a defining feature of Africa's situation. Much of the relations outside the country alignment revolved around maintaining territorial sovereignty by any means necessary, often neglecting the underlying issue of economic dependence. Economic challenges in which all African states experienced in post-colonial period, exacerbated by the detrimental effects of climate change, mismanagement of governance and destruction of balance of local governance. This trend is deepening the sense of relative deprivation among the region's tribes and its members. Therefore, radicalisms in Africa emerged not only from externally sourced terrorist propaganda, but also domestically rooted process.

Al-Qaeda's expansion and entrenchment in the African continent become one of the noted terrorist movements threatened regional security. This organization, particularly concentrated in the Sahel region, exploits the area's chronic vulnerabilities. The growing political instability in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger provides a conducive environment for JNIM. Within the context of the Push-Pull Theory, the relationship between push factors (poverty, absence of state, security vacuum, and social exclusion) and pull factors (ideology, economic opportunities, and sense of social belonging) that cause individuals to join the organization plays a critical role in strengthening JNIM's presence in Africa. In this framework, understanding how JNIM is structured and expanded through these factors will contribute to comprehending the increasing terrorist threat in Africa. While conducting this analysis, this paper seeks answers to the following research questions: How do socio-economic and political conditions in Africa encourage recruitment to the JNIM organization? What elements do underpin the ideological, economic, and social appeal of the JNIM organization? Lastly, What kind of interaction does exist between push and pull factors in the expansion of the JNIM organization in Africa?

Answering respective questions, this study aims to analyze JNIM's presence in Africa using the push-pull theory from a critical terrorism perspective. The critical terrorism approach has become an increasingly influential field of study since its emergence. This approach, a conscious and explicitly political alternative to previous forms of terrorism research, aims both to broaden and deepen the study of political violence by questioning which acts of violence are labeled as "terrorist" and by whom (Jarvis, 2024, p. 463). In a sense, it is based on the post-structuralist theory of "How do we know what we know that we know?". This understanding, in a way, objects to the presentation of these organizations as sub-branches of a religion and the manipulation of religious terms and concepts. Therefore, the methodology of critical terrorism studies provides researchers with a

pluralistic perspective. Critical methodological perspectives maintain non-Western and non-state viewpoints.

1. Theoretical Framework: The Africanization of Radicalism

Radicalization ranks among the most significant international issues of our time. Although the concept occupies a central position in security studies, a consensus has yet to be reached on its definition (Neumann, 2013). The primary reason for this is the political connotation the concept carries and the intense state-based intervention in its definition. Notably, in most official definitions of radicalization, it is assumed that only non-state actors become radicalized, and the term is treated unilaterally (Schmid A. P., 2013, p. 19). While studies on the concept in literature have been addressed while investigating the sociological and psychological causes of terrorism, its usage became widespread primarily in the post-9/11 period (Erkmen, 2011, p. 3). This situation led to the concept being primarily approached from a Western perspective, with its boundaries determined by American-centric academic studies. Consequently, this has led to the reduction of radicalization to a discipline and, in Roy's words, its "Islamization" over time.

Discussions about radicalization have also found significant place in the academic world, leading to important differentiations in approaches to the concept. Olivier Roy, referencing Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis, put forward the thesis of "Islamization of radicalization rather than radicalization of Islam". Criticizing Huntington's thesis, Roy argued that conflicts worldwide should be associated with more complex and local dynamics rather than clashes between civilizations. While Huntington's thesis claims that Islam conflicts with Western civilization, Roy attributes the origins of radicalization more to local, political, and economic factors and calls for not viewing Islam alone as a cause of conflict. Roy's objection to Huntington is that conflicts should be explained by local and national dynamics rather than inter-civilizational ones (Roy, 2021, p. 45-67).

Another conflict is between Olivier Roy and Marc Sageman. Olivier Roy bases radicalization more on social and cultural factors. According to him, radicalization is often related to factors such as search for identity, social exclusion, or the void of meaning brought by modernity. Marc Sageman, on the other hand, attributes radicalization more to individual psychological processes and interpersonal relationships. According to him, the radicalization of individuals often occurs through personal disappointments, traumas, or social connections. Olivier Roy associates radicalization with broader social and political dynamics in addition to religious motivations. Marc Sageman, however, views radicalization more as individual decisions of people under the influence of religious ideologies (Sageman, 2004, pp. 90-92).

According to Sedgwick, the use of absolute terms when defining radicalism leads to inconsistency in the approach. He advocates for a relative perspective, one that varies according to time, space, and context. Consequently, radicalism should be considered as a process, with the identification of what is “normal” or “abnormal” fluctuating throughout this process (Sedgwick, 2010, p. 490-491). In this regard, although radicalization embodies various meanings across different points, McCauley and Moskaleiko suggest that these themes can be classified through social and psychological distinctions (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008, p. 415).

Neumann views radicalization as a process potentially culminating in terrorism and emphasizes that effective counter-terrorism approaches must address economic, social, psychological, and political dimensions. He further asserts that efforts should focus on “what happens before the bombs go off,” emphasizing the importance of the radicalization process (Neumann, 2008, p. 4). Horgan, in contrast to Neumann, explains radicalization by asking “how” rather than “why” individuals radicalize, positing that the “how” question offers a broader perspective in understanding the concept (Horgan, 2008, p. 86).

The discussions mentioned above underscore the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to explaining the presence of Al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM in the region. The primary reason for this is that no singular definition of radicalization exists. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to assert that there are as many radicalization dynamics and reasons as there are members of radical organizations worldwide. The African continent has faced numerous manifestations of radicalism over the past decades. This complex phenomenon has taken on different forms depending on the time and geography: anarchist waves, neo-imperialist movements, and, notably, religious waves post-1990s. Hence, addressing the historical development of terrorism in Africa as a linear or one-dimensional process would be misleading. The factors leading to terrorism in African countries are similarly multifaceted and should not be reduced to simplistic explanations.

The Africanization of radicalization, though it may trace back to the period of anti-imperialism, as mentioned above, is limited by its political connotations in terms of history, location, and actors. The fine line between terrorism and freedom fighters can, at times, be manipulated by scholars in the literature. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that the Al-Qaeda-linked radicalization initiative dates to Osama bin Laden's years in Sudan. Samuel M. Makinda, who has extensively studied the history of terrorism in Africa, discusses the continent’s terrorism under various historical periods, the last of which covers the Al-Qaeda-linked developments. First is Anti-Colonial Nationalist Movements that contains activities of groups fighting against colonial administrations across various African regions in the pre-independence period. Second is Post-Independence Civil Conflicts, treating the internal

wars and ethnic conflicts emerging in newly independent nations. Thrid one is The Spread of Middle Eastern Terrorism, which encompass spillover of the Israeli Palestinian conflict into African territories and its consequences. The final one is The Rise of Global Networks, as presence and influence of Al-Qaeda, which had a base in Sudan during the 1990s (Makinda, 2007).

During his time in Sudan, Bin Laden planned critical infrastructure for various terrorist operations, some of which were carried out after his departure from the country. These plans included the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, marking Al-Qaeda's first major attacks in Africa (Burke, 2004, pp. 105-106). After Bin Laden's departure from Sudan, the military structures and operational networks he established in the region remained connected to Kabul, supported financially, and helped sustain Al-Qaeda's activities in Africa. Bin Laden's Sudanese network significantly influenced other African countries, shaping operational, ideological, and financial frameworks for terrorism across the continent. This context ultimately links the origins of JNIM to earlier historical developments (Türk, 2024, p. 20).

In summary, the process of radicalization in Africa is far from a new phenomenon. However, the central question revolves around the dynamics that facilitate this process. According to Push-Pull Theory, these dynamics encompass a range of factors, including economic, ideological, psychological, and even romantic motivations. Yet, a critical perspective is necessary, as each of these elements varies depending on the individual and the region.

2. Push-Pull Theory in African Dynamics

The African continent has been subjected to imperialist intervention for many years, and the resulting chronic problems have persisted to the present day. Although the 1960s legally (de jure) concluded these interventions, the colonial period continued in practice (de facto). This situation demonstrates that the post-colonization period has not actually been implemented in practice, but rather has been updated as neo-colonization, or in noted phares "old wine in new bottle". Ferro described this period not only with the term "neocolonialism" but also as "imperialism without settlers" (Ferro, 1997, p. 19). According to Tepeciklioğlu, for a period to be described as "post," the effects of that period must also come to an end (Tepeciklioğlu, 2013, p. 81). By the same token, Yıldırım Cinar has founded a direct relationship in-between the factors that lead to radicalization in Nigeria through lenses of colonial-era policies (Cinar, 2023). Consequently, the policies implemented during the colonial and neo-colonial periods have had a significant impact on the formation of the driving causes of radicalization.

Push factors in radicalization refer to external circumstances that drive individuals toward extremist ideologies. These factors increase susceptibility to radical propaganda by creating personal or political dissatisfaction that makes people more receptive to extremist messaging (Çelik, 2024, p. 132). This includes political events and socio-economic conditions. In the analysis conducted by the U.S. Institute of Justice to explain the process from radicalization to violent extremism, these conditions are categorized as given below:

Table 1: Push Factors of Radicalization

Identity conflict
Failed state governance
Poverty, deprivation, and other economic reasons
Education
Mental health issues and extreme emotionality
Life balance problems
Sense of threat
Exposure to belief systems containing violence
Contact with pro-violence groups
Radical beliefs
Previous involvement in criminal activities
Crisis within family or social and work environments
Distinction between "us" and "them"
Identity conflict
Trauma

Source: (National Institute of Justice, 2015, p. V)

These factors categorized as push factors of radicalization cannot be said to have an absolute correlation with extremism. The impact of push factors may manifest differently in each individual or group according to the cultural and belief dynamics of the society they are in. It can be said that these reasons play a complementary, influential, and sometimes triggering role in an individual's adoption of a radical belief or action. Otherwise, it would be insufficient to explain why an individual experiencing economic problems in terms of poverty and deprivation can easily join a radical organization, while another individual may not choose extremism as a solution despite being exposed to problems such as lack of education, social pressure, and marginalization in addition to these issues. However, push factors, especially in terms of JNIM gaining ground in the Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger region, are more specifically related to economic problems and youth unemployment,

marginalization and discrimination between tribes, poor governance, kleptocracy, and long-term unresolved conflicts. These elements will be discussed in detail in the following section.

The pull factors of radicalization, on the other hand, attract individuals to join violent extremist ideologies through positive incentives. These are identified as desires for social kinship, finding identity, control and the use of violence as well as power, gaining social status, and seeking adventure. Generally, the pull factors of radicalization can be listed as:

Table-2: Pull Factors of Radicalization

The presence of groups with compelling narratives and appealing goals
The existence of radical institutions or places (such as mosques or madrassas) that may operate outside of state control
The influence of family, friends, or charismatic leaders
The satisfaction of demands
Social networks, the desire to belong to a group, and direct contact
The search for action and adventure
Romanticism
The provision of economic opportunities
Online propaganda
Video games
Extremist narratives

Source: (UNODC, 2018).

Radicalization's pull factors, like the push factors, depend on individual and regional dynamics. They can vary and have different multiplier effects. Particularly in the Sahel region, where the JNIM organization is active, economic factors are generally highlighted as significant pull factors. Although Sufism and Tijaniyyah are influential throughout the region (Türk, 2024), Salafism occasionally appears as an attractive element in terms of religious motivation.

3. Al-Qaeda's Presence in Africa and It's Historical Process

Al-Qaeda, founded in 1988 under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, rapidly attained the capacity to conduct operations on a global scale (USIP, 2017, p. 18). In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, it particularly left an indelible mark on world politics and international security studies through the concepts of global terrorism and radicalization. This led to the proliferation of terrorism studies in academic literature, as well as increased focus on concepts such as radicalization and extremism. The "Global Jihad" doctrine, propounded by Abdullah Azzam, who had a significant influence on the organization's founding

ideology, afforded the group the opportunity to establish a presence and conduct operations in any region of the world. In essence, the organization found footing in any geography where push and pull factors that constituted its point of origin and laid the groundwork for the radicalization process were present. Consequently, in the new order that emerged following the Afghanistan-Soviet Russia War, the organization began to export its military and ideological structure to different geographies. This exportation initiative resulted in the alignment of any resistance bloc formed against America and its allies anywhere in the world with the organization's own ideology, ultimately pledging allegiance to Kabul. The most significant example of this initiative is the affiliation of the Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq in 2003, with the central Al-Qaeda under Osama bin Laden's leadership in 2004. Known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the organization conducted effective operations in the region until ISIS expanded its dominance in the post-Arab Spring period, paving the way for the emergence of ISIS (Gerges, 2016, p. 1-3).

Although Afghanistan and the Middle East are prominent among the regions where the organization's structure is effective, the organization also possesses an extensive network in Africa. The most significant component of this structure is the affiliation of the Al-Shabaab organization, which emerged in Somalia in the region known as the Horn of Africa, with Al-Qaeda in 2012. This allegiance marked a crucial turning point in the group's evolution, officially connecting Al-Shabaab's local insurgency against the Somali government and foreign powers to Al-Qaeda's broader global network (UNODC, 2018). Another representative of the organization in Africa is Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM's origins can be traced back to the Algerian civil war (1992-1998). The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) (1998), established under the coordination of Hassan Hattab in the post-war period, laid the foundation for AQIM. By 2007, GSPC changed its name to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and officially declared its allegiance to Al-Qaeda. This transformation represented not just a change in name, but also a strategic repositioning (Laub & Masters, 2014, pp. 1-2). Lastly, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) operates on behalf of Al-Qaeda in the region. JNIM is a terrorist organization operating in the Sahel region, with roots dating back to the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. It is directly affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which is based in Algeria.

There are two fundamental reasons behind the allegiance of these locally emerging groups to large-scale organizations capable of global operations. The first is the attempts by foreign terrorist fighters returning to their countries from Afghanistan to establish local and regional organizations under the directives of Al-Qaeda leadership. This essentially means that Al-Qaeda is directly involved in the establishment process of these organizations and supports them militarily and economically. The

other reason for allegiance is a step taken by organizations built on local dynamics to benefit from the extensive network and popularity of a global organization they feel ideologically close to, to receive financial support, and to obtain weapons and military assistance.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, many local groups operating in Africa began to pledge allegiance to Kabul. Almost all these formations consisted of local actors built on regional dynamics prior to this allegiance (Clayton, 2018, p. 2). As discussed in the previous section, the process that led these local formations to align with Al-Qaeda is fundamentally based on the regional operational model established by Bin Laden during his years in Sudan from 1991 to 1996. However, the local actors in the region trace their origins well before Al-Qaeda's establishment. This process, as Samuel Makinda noted, is rooted in the post-independence civil conflicts and ethnic strife emerging in newly independent countries. Rapoport also explained this process through the wave theory, asserting that the rise of religion-based radicalization after the 1990s represents the last wave of this process. According to Rapoport, the processes that laid the groundwork for the rise of organizations in the international system include the Anarchist Wave from the 1880s to the 1920s, the Anti-Colonial Wave peaking between the 1920s and 1960s, the New Left Wave in the 1960s to 1990s, and the Radical Religious Wave extending to the present (Rapoport, 2004). In Africa, particularly the last wave is rooted in the problems experienced during the struggle against imperialism.

The most fundamental example of this situation is the gradual genocide policies implemented by France during Algeria's independence struggle, which later laid the groundwork for the Algerian Civil War. During its independence struggle from 1954 to 1962, Algeria faced intense pressure from France. These pressures culminated in the Setif and Guelma incidents in 1945, where thousands of locals were killed by the French army (Evans, 2012, p. 98). Upon gaining independence, Algeria, like other Francophone countries, entered a neocolonial period and continued to experience pressure and administrative interventions from France. This situation disrupted the state-building process in Algeria and left the country vulnerable to radical formations. This fragile process triggered a civil war between the government and religiously motivated groups in the 1990s. During this period, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) was established and pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2007, subsequently adopting the name Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Kepel, 2002, p. 150). The emergence of AQIM is viewed as a legacy of the colonial inheritance left by France in Algeria and the local actors involved in the Algerian Civil War.

4. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)

The overthrow of Gaddafi on October 20, 2011, in Sirte led to uncontrolled arming in North African and Sahel countries, such as Libya, Mali, Niger, and Algeria. This situation provided radical organizations with operational capabilities in the region (Afriyie, 2024, p. 3). As a result of this process, numerous Non-State Armed Actors (NSAA) emerged in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Sergei Boeke (2016), many of these groups took advantage of regional instability and, by 2016, had established their presence in countries like Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad (Boeke, 2016, pp. 1-14). These organizations began to operate under the coordination of two global organizations: one being ISIS, which sought to expand into Africa after losing ground in Iraq and Syria, and the other being Al-Qaeda, which had long been in the process of establishing itself in the region. ISIS carries out this expansion through the establishment of six provinces across the continent. Some of these groups were locally established before subsequently pledging allegiance to ISIS. The most notable of these groups is the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), which was formed after separating from Boko Haram in the Sahel region (Türk, 2023, p. 35). Al-Qaeda primarily carries out this structure through AQIM.

The operational structure and military capacity of AQIM have significantly influenced other radical groups forming in the Sahel region and West Africa. Especially in the early stages of formation, AQIM expanded its influence in the region by providing military training and financial support to local actors aligned with Al-Qaeda. At the forefront of these groups is JNIM. JNIM has a central position in countries like Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo, while also operating in Niger and Mali as an Al-Qaeda-affiliated radical organization. JNIM is based on a twenty-year period leading up to the establishment of AQIM and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) (Jaffe, 2023, p. 1). In other words, the organization is an umbrella structure that includes Ansar al-Din, Macina Liberation Front (FLM), Al-Murabitun, and the Saharan Emirate subgroup of AQIM. By officially announcing this merger on March 2, 2017, JNIM capitalized on the political crisis within countries throughout the region to accelerate Al-Qaeda's expansion into Africa (Eizenga & Williams, 2020, pp. 1-3). JNIM's merger formalized the aforementioned groups under the slogan of "one flag, one group, one emir" (ACLED, 2023, p. 10).

The establishment of JNIM is a result of the decision to unite the powers of these groups and to act in coordination. The organization has declared its allegiance to Al-Qaeda and appointed Iyad Ag Ghaly as its leader (Zenn, 2019). One of the main reasons for appointing Ag Ghaly as the leader was to localize the organizational structure and to gain the support of the local populace. This stems from Al-Qaeda's desire to cultivate a more localized profile in the Sahel region. In essence, this

appointment sought to leverage the Tuareg, Fulani, and Arab communities (ACLED, 2023, p. 10-11). Ag Ghaly's close relatives and tribal members have played a key role in facilitating the establishment of a regular operational network to accelerate AQIM's structure in Mali. The integration of Al-Murabitun, Ansar Dine, and AQIM under the JNIM umbrella has enabled the inclusion of experienced jihadist fighters from AQIM's Some of the sitrategic groups in Algeria holds representatives from other significant ethnic groups in northern Mali. In this context, JNIM has developed its operational focus primarily against the military of the country it is in or Western forces rather than civilians, aiming to increase and consolidate local support. This has also contributed to the growing popularity of the organization in the region. Consequently, differences in regions such as Kidal, Timbuktu, Gao, Menaka, and Koulikoro led JNIM to issue instructions to minimize the use of violence against civilians. In 2022 and 2023, JNIM avoided targeting civilians in its actions in Mali's Kidal and Timbuktu regions and established a modus vivendi with other armed groups operating in the region. Therefore, the attacks organized by JNIM were primarily directed at MINUSMA or the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) (ACLED, 2023, p. 14).

Map-1: Area of Activity of JNIM



Source:(ACLED, 2023).

JNIM' has deepened from northern and central Mali to include western and southern Mali, a large area of Burkina Faso including many tribes, the southwestern region of Niger and the northernmost regions of coastal states such as Benin, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. Together with other groups,

the JNIM has adopted a strategy of presenting itself as a “big tent” alliance that seeks to attract different local communities and ethnic groups. Particularly in the Sahel belt, it has implemented policies aimed at various tribes such as the Tuareg, Arabs, Fulani, Songhai and Bambara which have problems with central authority. In Burkina Faso, it expanded its propaganda activities to include the “Dogon Country” and the Minyanka community and other ethnic groups speaking Moore and Bissa languages (Nsaibia & Raleigh, 2021). In part, this allowed JNIM to present itself as an inclusive armed group seeking broad public support by including the languages of these ethnic groups in its media products.

Table-3: JNIM Organizational Structure and Command Level

Region	Leader(s)	Subregions / Military Zones	Media Subsidiary
Kidal	Iyad Ag Ghaly, Sedan Ag Hitta, Abdallah Ag Albaka, Zinedine Ag Biga	Kidal, Tessalit, Tin-Essako	Minbar al-Tahwid
Gao	Abdallah Ag Albakaye, Hicham Ag Ehya, Himama Ould Lekhweir (Hamza al-Tabankorti), Zakaria (Abu Nour), Hamdi Lamdi	Gao-Anchawadj, Talataye, Tilemsi	Minbar al-Tahwid
Menaka	Faknan Ag Taki, Inkarota Ag Nokh, Mohamed Ali Ag Taouka, Mohamed Ag Hama	Menaka, Tidarmene	Minbar al-Tahwid
Timbuktu	Talha al-Barbouchi, Abu Oumar al-Shinqiti, Abu Moussa al-Ansari	Ber, Goundam, Timbuktu	Minbar al-Murabitin
Macina	Hamadoun Kouffa, Mahmoud Barry, Bobola, Abdul Hamid, Cheick Oumar, Abu Tourabi, Redouwane	Bandiagara, Bankass, Bla, Djenne, Diafarabe, Dialloubé, Guimbala, Kayes, Niono, San, Timissa	Minbar al-Fursan
Burkina	Jafar Dicko (Abu Mahamadou), Ousmane Dicko, Idrissa Dicko (Mouslimou), Abdul Bachirou, Abderrahmane Sidibe (Hamza)	Djibo, Fada, Kaya, Mangodara, Mossi, Ouahigouya, Samori, Sebba, Torodi, Benin, Togo	Minbar al-Fursan
Sikasso	Abdul Hamid, Hamza al-Shinqiti	Koutiala, Sikasso, Tominian, Yorosso	Minbar al-Fursan
Aribanda	Hamza al-Shinqiti, Abu Khalid, Moussa Hima (Abu Hamza), Oumar Barry (Farouk)	Douentza, Gourma, Koro	Minbar al-Fursan
Koulikoro	Redouwane	Southern Koulikoro	Minbar al-Fursan

Source: (ACLED, 2023).

JNIM's organizational structure is established on a vertical hierarchy that effectively facilitates the transmission of strategic decisions from the highest levels down to the lowest units. This structure allows the organization to operate in a coordinated manner across different levels. The leadership structure primarily consists of three tiers:

- At the top level is the "majlis al-shura," also known as the shura council. This central leadership group determines the overall strategy of the organization and makes critical decisions.

- In the middle tier are the regional commanders, referred to as "manatiq emirs." These commanders are responsible for executing and overseeing operations within designated geographical areas.
- At the lowest level are the area commanders known as "markaz emirs." These leaders manage units that operate directly in the field and coordinate local-level operations.

Héni Nsaibia's schematic representation of JNIM's organizational structure is useful in explaining the organization's decision-making mechanism. According to Nsaibia, JNIM's organizational structure (ACLED, 2023, p. 18) includes:

Upper Tier:

- Central Leadership (Shura Council): Determines the strategic direction of JNIM, ensures coordination among various factions, and coordinates with AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and other Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups.
- Governors (Wulat): Serve as the highest authority in each region or subgroup.

Middle Tier:

- Regional Shura Council (Mintika, Katiba, and Markaz Emirs, Religious Authorities): An advisory board that discusses regional decisions.
- Regional Commanders (Mintika and Katiba Emirs): Manage operations within their respective regions or sub-regions.
- Katiba (Multiple Kataib): Subgroups managed by regional emirs.
- Mintika (Multiple Mintika): Administrative regions consisting of multiple Markaz.

Lower Tier:

- Area Commanders (Markaz Emirs): Manage operations within their regions.
- Informal Council: Composed of Markaz leaders, local commanders, and experienced fighters. These councils discuss decisions at the local level.
- Markaz (Multiple Marakiz): Regional units present in each mintika, which can number from several dozen to hundreds.
- Sarya (Multiple Saraya): Units located within each markaz.

- **Khalya (Multiple Khalaya):** The smallest operational units, typically important for commando, support units, and covert cells.

The central leadership group is responsible not only for determining the organization's overall strategic direction but also for ensuring coordination and cooperation among the various factions within JNIM. This plays a critical role in managing the internal dynamics of the organization. Additionally, the central leadership is tasked with managing relationships and coordinating with AQIM and other Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. These external relations help strengthen JNIM's position within regional and global jihadist networks and expand its resources. This structure enables JNIM to adopt a strategic approach in both its internal operations and external relations. Communication and coordination between different leadership tiers enhance the organization's operational effectiveness while maintaining ideological and strategic consistency.

JNIM ideologically follows the Al-Qaeda line. Therefore, the views adopted by the organization are radical Salafism. Consequently, the organization's primary goal is to establish a state structure compatible with their ideology. However, this structure is more aligned with a large-scale emirate consistent with the Global Jihad Doctrine espoused by Al-Qaeda rather than a local state. In this new state-building process, the organization has initially conducted operations against France and the Western alliance. In response to France's Operation Serval, it has positioned itself in Mali, targeting both the Malian army and the UN forces present in the region. In this context, JNIM's ideology aligns with the Salafi legacy that interprets the world through a friend-enemy distinction, declaring as infidels all who oppose their worldview. This tradition represents an effort to unite Muslims in North and West Africa, overthrow existing authorities in the region, and establish a state that aligns with their understanding (Afriyie, 2024, p. 9).

However, paradoxically, similar to other organizations, JNIM's sources of funding prominently include human trafficking, ransom, drug trafficking, and other illicit revenue streams. With increasing demand in Europe, cocaine trafficking has become a primary focus. Essentially, a significant portion of JNIM's financial resources has been inherited from AQIM and other member organizations. Additionally, smugglers and human traffickers paying 'taxes' for safe passage through areas controlled by JNIM form another part of the organization's financial sources (Afriyie, 2024, p. 9-10). JNIM has occasionally attacked gold and diamond mines in the areas it seeks to dominate, and when it fails to secure the required tribute, it resorts to aggression. The most notable example is the massacre of 160 individuals in 2021 at a gold mine in the Solhan region of Burkina Faso, where JNIM had demanded payments (Hunter, 2022).

5. Dynamics of JNIM's Regional Expansion: Push and Pull Factors

As discussed in the previous section, the push factors enabling the organization to gain ground in the region are largely reflections of the chronic issues the area has faced for many years. Colonial legacies of border disputes, borders drawn without consideration for the ethnic makeup of the region, the neglect of traditional authorities, along with climate and food crises, youth unemployment, and economic issues leave the region vulnerable to the organization. The region where JNIM operates is the Central Sahel and neighboring countries. Therefore, the chronic vulnerability of the Sahel region is also experienced in the other areas where the organization conducts its activities. In this context, the factors driving radicalization in the region are categorized and explained as follows:

5.1. Colonial Legacy and French Intervention

Since gaining independence in the 1960s, the Sahel region and Sub-Saharan Africa have become symbols of endemic poverty and crisis. The region's resource diversity and labor potential possess the capacity to change this situation rapidly. However, the ongoing colonial processes involving various elements, including local actors of black imperialism, have further deepened the region's issues. Frequent conflicts, uprisings, coups, or civil wars in the post-colonial era have contributed to strengthening this perception. Since the early 21st century, the region has continued to be the focus of international interest due to the increase in terrorism, ethnic violence, demographic conflict, and clandestine migration (Trnovec, 2020, p. 284). At the forefront of this chronic vulnerability is France's economic, political, social, and cultural colonial policies toward Francophone countries where JNIM is currently active. The French intervention strategy in the Sahel adopts a multifaceted approach. This strategy is based on a comprehensive framework that includes political, economic, cultural, and military dimensions. However, this multidimensional approach fundamentally serves France's own interests. As Kaddafi noted, "France has no friends in Africa, only colonial relationships" (Turhan, 2020, p. 54). Financial control mechanisms have played a critical role in reinforcing France's influence in the region. By intervening in the central banks and currencies of regional countries, France has strengthened its dominance over the Sahel. This financial control has allowed France to shape the political and economic structures of the region. Before the colonial era, the Sahel economy largely relied on a barter system.

The current currencies had limited usage and practicality. France introduced the CFA franc to integrate the region into the global economy. Although this move appeared to modernize the region, it functioned as a tool to solidify France's economic control. Through this currency, France manipulated the prices of the region's raw materials and agricultural products, keeping them at very

low levels. In contrast, it raised the prices of the goods it produced. This situation forced the Sahel people to work long hours even to meet their basic needs. As a result, while the region's population became impoverished, France's profits continued to rise. France's control over the currency served not only as an economic control mechanism but also as a political control tool. This allowed France to shape the economic and political development processes of Sahel countries in line with its own interests. Consequently, this situation hindered the region's ability to realize its potential and follow an independent development path (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012, p. 50).

5.2. Governance Gap and Poor Governance

JNIM is increasing its supporter capacity by developing propaganda targeting impoverished areas in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly those where security is practically uncontrollable. The fundamental aspect here is to demonstrate the weakness of state authority and provide an opportunity to establish a state-like structure. In Sub-Saharan Africa's Sahel region, the kleptocratic governance model is particularly prevalent. This results in privileges being granted to individuals belonging to specific families or tribes. Consequently, these actors, who are shrouded in a natural protective shield, are sometimes exempt from crimes that would ordinarily warrant punishment. Moreover, the lack of accountability for crimes such as harassment, murder, and looting, as well as arbitrary arrests, showcases the poor governance in the region. These issues are exacerbated by poor management and governments' inability to meet local and national needs. This situation creates an ideal ground for radical groups where violent beliefs can take root. Additionally, according to Seung-Whan Choi's (2022) study, the abuse of authority by high-ranking officials to create divisions between 'us' and 'them' along ethnic lines also lays the groundwork for the spread of radicalization (Choi, 2022). Choi further suggests that the political exclusion of ethnic minority groups in regional countries has significantly contributed to participation in JNIM.

This governance gap, along with ethnic conflicts in the region and the separation of traditional and central authority, has provided JNIM with the potential to form alliances with actors challenging central governance, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso. The Western intervention in Libya and the subsequent civil war have created a window of opportunity for JNIM regarding regional security. The overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 paved the way for arms proliferation in the region, including heavy weapons such as anti-aircraft missiles used by Tuareg rebels against the Malian government (Çiçek, 2023, p. 145). Tuaregs who had fled to Libya during Gaddafi's rule and joined a mercenary army named the Islamic Legion were forced to return to their countries due to the turmoil in 2011. In the final period of Gaddafi's rule, nearly 1500 armed and trained Tuareg fighters, once they known to fight within the system of Gaddafi's Islamic Legion returned to Mali (Caparini,

2015). In other words, Gaddafi's fall meant that thousands of armed youths who had previously played roles in earlier rebellions returned to their homeland after undergoing military training. Ultimately, this situation resulted in these groups, which the Malian government sought to refuse, joining the ranks of JNIM.

5.3. Climate-Related Issues and the Economy

Environmental degradation and climate change constitute a significant dimension of security issues in the Sahel region. According to UNOWAS's 2019 report, the worsening environmental conditions have become one of the factors triggering tensions and conflicts in countries such as Mali, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria (UNOWAS, 2019, p. 4-5). The demographic structure of the Sahel further exacerbates the impact of these environmental issues. The vast majority of the population lives in rural areas and sustains their livelihoods through agriculture (UNEP, 2011, pp. 16-17). This situation leaves the region's population highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Approximately 50 million people in the region rely on livestock for their livelihoods, while farmers are trying to expand their planting areas due to decreasing productivity. This increases competition over limited resources and escalates tensions among different groups (Haan, Dubern, & Garancher, 2014, p. vi). Disputes over sharing essential resources like water and land have long been a source of tension among the region's vulnerable communities. Recently, desertification and resource scarcity caused by climate change, along with increasing population pressure, have intensified these tensions. This process undermines the sensitive relationships communities have with their environments leading to violent conflicts that threaten regional stability.

According to Conkar's analysis, this conflict environment creates a favorable ground for radical groups' activities. Therefore, JNIM is exploiting the existing economic hardships and social dissatisfaction to gather supporters and legitimize violent actions. Consequently, environmental issues and resource scarcity further deepen security problems in the region (Conkar, 2020, p. 3). The areas where JNIM operates are particularly vulnerable to the devastating effects of climate change. This environmental crisis exacerbates a series of existing issues in the region. Widespread hunger and poverty, ineffective governance practices, and socioeconomic inequalities create a complex web of problems when combined with the effects of climate change. Research indicates that climate change interacts with these existing issues, producing results far greater than its standalone effects. The Sahel economy's excessive reliance on agriculture makes the region particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Climate-related phenomena such as desertification and extreme weather events significantly affect agricultural production, further increasing food insecurity. As a result, the local

population faces serious issues such as hunger and malnutrition. The complex interactions between climate change, state fragility, and food insecurity deeply undermine the social and economic structures in the areas JNIM seeks to control. This situation creates a vicious cycle that threatens regional stability and hampers long-term development efforts (Afriyie, 2024, p. 7).

Countries at high risk of violence due to climate change generally exhibit three fundamental characteristics: they have experienced conflict in the past, a significant portion of the population (at least 40%) relies on agriculture for their livelihoods, and a substantial segment of the population (20% or more) is politically marginalized. Sahel countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger meet all these criteria. This situation makes these countries particularly vulnerable to JNIM's activities (Malle, 2020, p. 2-3). Extremist groups are attempting to exploit these conditions for their own benefit.

5.4. Counter Propaganda and Attractive Elements

JNIM essentially transforms the aforementioned elements into propaganda tools, making them attractive factors for joining the organization. Attractive elements are fundamentally motivational resources presented to encourage individuals or groups to voluntarily join an organization. These motivational elements are generally based on economy, status, belonging, and the desire for revenge in the regions where JNIM operates. Furthermore, the marginalization of tribes by the central authority is utilized by JNIM as a pull factor. According to Alexander Thurston, young people who are subjected to this marginalization may join the organization either to seek revenge or to increase their sense of power and belonging. This situation represents an attempt to gain status (Thurston, 2020). In Sub-Saharan countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali, status is often proportional to the strength of the tribe to which one belongs. For individuals who cannot find opportunities to gain this status through tribal affiliation, JNIM acts as a mechanism for gaining social status. Moreover, the sense of belonging within the group and the meaning of fighting for a "cause" serve as significant attraction factors for young people.

Additionally, the organization operates as a humanitarian aid entity in areas where the state apparatus is ineffective, playing a role in meeting urgent needs for food and shelter in the community (Thurston, 2020). This situation is essentially an initiative occasionally implemented by other organizations to gain social support. Particularly for young, dynamic, and unemployed populations, job opportunities are provided to encourage their participation in the organization. As previously mentioned, regional countries struggle with chronic economic problems. This situation leaves the community more vulnerable to the organization's propaganda.

Another of the organization's attractive elements is its religion and ideology. However, contrary to expectations, this aspect has not evoked the desired effect among the local population (Türk, 2024). The ideology embraced by the organization is Salafism. Religious motivation and Salafism create a paradox when considering the region's belief structure. The overwhelming majority of countries in the region adhere to the Maliki School and embrace Tijanism. The Tijani tradition is dialectically related to Salafism. The Tijani order holds a significant place in the religious and cultural fabric of the Sahel region. This doctrine aligns with the general Sufi understanding and is known as the most widespread order in the region. Tijanism competes ideologically with the Salafi movement in the Sahel. This competition is one of the significant factors shaping the region's religious dynamics. The prevailing belief is that the existence and influence of Tijanism have slowed the infiltration of Salafi thought into the region. This situation illustrates the role Tijanism plays in preserving the traditional understanding of Islam in the region.

The phrase "We are Fulani, we are Tijani, we are Maliki," used by people in the Sahel region to define their religious identities, reveals the multilayered nature of religious identity in the region (Türk, 2024, pp. 92-94). For example, "Fulani" represents ethnic identity; "Tijani" indicates allegiance to the order; and "Maliki" specifies the legal school preference. This tripartite definition reflects the intertwined nature of religious, ethnic, and cultural identities in Sahel societies. The acceptance of Tijanism as an almost official school in most Sahel countries demonstrates the depth of this order's influence in the region. This situation indicates that Tijanism has become an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of the region.

In this context, Tijanism plays a significant role in preserving traditional Islamic understanding, balancing the spread of Salafi movements, shaping social identity, and contributing to regional stability. Therefore, understanding Tijanism's position and influence is crucial for comprehending the religious and social dynamics in the Sahel region. Furthermore, particularly the spread of Nigeria-centered Salafism and the adoption of Salafi views among the Fulani and Hausa tribes facilitate JNIM's recruitment efforts. Consequently, there are Boko Haram-based elements in the region that prepare the ground for Salafism. However, the extent to which Salafism influences Boko Haram itself is still debatable.

In summary, JNIM applies an economy- and status-based model by leveraging the ongoing conflict in the region within the framework of the pull theory. In other words, the organization follows an open-door policy, promising necessary resources to any individual with problems with the central authority to recruit them into its ranks.

6. Conclusion

The Sahel Region and the Sub-Saharan African countries where JNIM seeks to expand have a long colonial history, leading to a fragmented structure in these countries. This situation has brought about numerous dynamics, such as structural issues that trigger radicalization, inter-tribal divisions and marginalization, unemployment, inequality, poverty, and injustice. The fault lines underlying the region's countries, which are prone to rupture, are being monitored and exploited by many radical organizations, particularly Al-Qaeda, which develops strategies based on them.

Al-Qaeda is attempting to rejuvenate its partially weakened structure in the regions of Afghanistan and Iraq within the African continent. Thanks to historical ties, it can easily access the ground and human resources that it needs in the Sahel region. During this process, it infiltrates regional countries through local organizations like JNIM and expands and deepens using the porous structure of the region. Essentially, Al-Qaeda does not need attractive reasons to develop this strategy through JNIM. The slippery conditions of the region push potential candidates toward JNIM in groups. As the organization seeks to expand in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo, one of the biggest threats it faces is the spread of ISIS through ISWAP in the same regions. In short, the radicalization efforts that began in the geographical contexts of Iraq and Syria have triggered the transition of organizations into new competitive arenas on the African continent.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Afrika kıtası paradoksal bir şekilde sahip olduğu zengin doğal kaynakları, iklim çeşitliliği ve dinamik insan gücüne rağmen hali hazırda siyasi ve ekonomik kırılganlık, toplumsal çatışmalar, açlık ve yoksulluk gibi problemlerle başa çıkmaya çalışmaktadır. Kolonyal ve neokolonyal müdahaleler neticesinde sınır çatışmaları, kabile ayrışmaları, devlet inşa sürecindeki aksaklıklar gibi yapısal sorunları miras alan birçok Afrika ülkesi radikalleşme ve terörizm gibi bölgesel ve küresel tehditlere karşı savunmasız kalmıştır. Esasen bu durumun temellerinde her ne kadar da kalsik sömürge dönemine kadar dayansa da özellikle 19. yüzyıl sonlarında Avrupa güçlerinin gerçekleştirdiği Berlin Konferansı sonrasında kıtanın doğal sınırlarına aykırı şekilde çizilen yapay devlet sınırları ve bu sınırların günümüze kadar süren etkileri yer almaktadır. Fransa, İngiltere ve Belçika gibi sömürgeci güçlerin etnik ve geleneksel yapıları göz ardı ederek kurduğu bu sınırlar, birçok ülkede hem iç çatışmaları körüklemiş hem de devlet inşası süreçlerini zora sokmuştur. Örneğin Nijerya'da kuzeyde Hausa-Fulani Müslümanları, güneyde Hristiyan İgbolar ve güneybatıda Yoruba halkı arasında sömürge döneminde başlayan dengesizlikler, bağımsızlık sonrasında siyasi ve toplumsal kutuplaşmaya dönüşmüştür. Benzer şekilde Mali, Burkina Faso ve Nijer gibi ülkelerde merkezi

otoritenin kuzeydeki Tuareg ve Arap azınlıklarla yaşadığı gerilim, silahlı yapıların doğuşunu ve yayılmasını kolaylaştırmıştır.

Bu süreç özellikle Suriye ve Irak coğrafyalarında göreceli olarak zemin kaybeden El-Kaide ve DEAŞ gibi küresel terör ağlarının rotayı Afrika'ya çevirmelerine olanak tanımıştır. Zira Afrika, özellikle El-Kaide için kuruluş aşamasından günümüze gerek aktif insan gücü gerek ise finans kaynağı olarak faydalanılan bir kıta konumunda olmuştur. Özellikle Üsame Bin Ladin'in El-Kaide'yi kurduğu yıllarda Sudan'da kurmuş olduğu yapılanma (1992-1996), devam eden süreçte hem El-Kaide için hemde DEAŞ ile birlikte yerel örgütler için bir yol haritası olmuştur. Bu süre zarfında El-Kaide Afrika yapılanmasına başlamış ve yerelleşme sürecine girmiştir. Bu süreç esasen fiziki kapasite arttırımı, hücre modeli örgütlenme yapısının inşası ile birlikte ideolojik ve teolojik bir eğitim modelini de kapsamıştır. Bu durum her ne kadar Ticanilik gibi sufi geleneğe daha yakın olan Afrikalılar arasında bir diyalektik oluştursa da özellikle El-Kaide'nin küresel çaptaki operasyonel gücü ve ekonomik imkanları bu ideolojinin yayılmasına imkân tanımıştır. Bununla birlikte El-Kaidenin kurucu liderlerinden ve teologları arasında bulunan Eymen Ez Zevahiri'nin Afrikalı kimliği de bu yayılda kolaylaştırıcı bir unsur olmuştur. El-Kaide bu yayılma sırasında yerelleşme stratejisi benimsemiş ve bu stratejiyi iki ayrı dinamik üzerinden şekillendirmiştir. Bunlardan ilki bizatihi El-Kaide'nin talimatıyla kurulan ve yöneticilerin ve askeri liderlerin merkezden atandığı örgütler olmuştur. Bir diğer dinamik ise benzer amaç taşıyan ve merkezi otoriteler ile çatışan yerel aktörlere angaje olarak ve onları askeri ve iktisadi destekleyerek süreç içerisinde kendisine biat ettirme yolu ile olmuştur. Bu aşamada özellikle JNIM, El-Kaide'nin benimsemiş olduğu bu iki basamaklı yol haritasının somutlaşmış bir ürünü olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Ansar-Dine, Muratibun ve El-Kaide'nin sahra kolu ile birleşme yolu ile şemsiye bir yapılanma kuran JNIM, bir bakıma El-Kaidenin Afrika kıtasında yeniden dirilmesinde bir basamak görevi üstlenmiştir. Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo gibi Sahel ve Sahra Altı Afırka'da derinleşen ve genişleyen JNIM, yukarıda ifade edilen yapısal sorunlar üzerine bir propaganda ve kapasite arttırım stratejisi geliştirmiştir. Sınır sorunları, merkezi otorite ve geleneksel otorite arasındaki karmaşık ilişki, gıda ve iklim krizleri ile birlikte derinden hissedilen ekonomik sorunlar ve kabile mücadeleleri JNIM için kullanılmaya müsait bir zemin sunmuştur.

Bununla birlikte indirgemeci Batı müdahalesi ve yerel yöneticilerin bu müdahaleleri destekleyici politikaları özellikle merkez tarafından ötekileştirilen dışlanan kabilelerin -her ne kadar birçoğunun farklı dini ve ideolojik geleneğe sahip olsalar da- JNIM saflarına katılımının yolunu açmıştır. Özellikle etnik temelde yaşanan ayrımcılık ve toplumsal dışlanmışlık, JNIM'in “adalet”, “direniş” ve “meşruiyet” söylemleri ile birleşerek örgütün bölgedeki cazibesini artırmış; böylece JNIM, sadece

bir terör örgütü olarak değil, aynı zamanda alternatif bir yönetim ve toplumsal düzen vaadiyle hareket eden hibrit bir aktöre dönüşmüştür.

Bu bağlamda, JNIM'in büyüme stratejisi yalnızca silahlı çatışmalarla sınırlı kalmamış, aynı zamanda sosyo-politik boşlukları dolduracak şekilde yerel halkla kurduğu ilişkilerle de şekillenmiştir. JNIM, özellikle devletin ulaşamadığı kırsal bölgelerde adalet dağıtma, güvenlik sağlama ve sosyal hizmet sunma iddiasıyla meşruiyet inşa etmeye çalışmıştır. Bu durum, halkın gözünde merkezi otoritenin yetersizliğini daha da görünür kılmış, JNIM'in alternatif bir yönetim yapısı olarak algılanmasına neden olmuştur. Bu şekilde hareket eden örgüt, sadece bir terör yapılanması değil aynı zamanda siyasi, toplumsal ve ideolojik bir aktör olarak bölgesel güç dengelerinde etkili bir konum elde etmeye başlamıştır.

Özellikle uluslararası sistem içerisinde yaşanan güç mücadelesi, JNIM için bölge özelinde bir fırsat penceresi açmıştır. Özellikle Çin ve Amerika arasında yaşanan adeta ikinci bir Soğuk Savaş döneminin ortaya çıkardığı boşlukları doldurarak ilerleyen JNIM, her geçen gün kapasite arttırımına gitmektedir. Bu gelişmeler doğrultusunda, DEAŞ'ın Arap Baharı sonrası dönemde Irak ve Suriye'deki otorite boşluğundan yararlanarak kurduğu devlet benzeri yapılanma modelinin bir benzerinin, JNIM tarafından Sahel bölgesinde hayata geçirilme ihtimali giderek güçlenmektedir.