

Ansaroul Islam

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

Mapping Militants Project (MMP). “Ansaroul Islam.” Last modified July 2018.

SUMMARY

Formed: December 2016

Disbanded: Group is active.

First Attack: December 16, 2016: Ansaroul Islam attacked a joint camp of the Burkinabe military and gendarmerie forces in Nassoumbou, Burkina Faso, destroying vehicles and seizing military supplies. The group received assistance from the Macina Liberation Front and Ansar Dine subgroup Katibat Serma. Shortly after the attack, the militants officially declared the establishment of Ansaroul Islam (12 killed, unknown wounded).¹

Last Attack: February 26, 2018: Ansaroul Islam murdered two elderly men close to their home in Djibo, Burkina Faso. The men, who were members of the local government, had allegedly received multiple threats from Ansaroul Islam (2 killed, 0 wounded).²

OVERVIEW

Ansaroul Islam is a militant Islamic organization and the first native jihadi group in Burkina Faso. Prior to the establishment of Ansaroul Islam, Burkina Faso had not experienced significant violence from militant jihadists. The group officially announced its establishment after launching its first attack, on a joint Burkinabe-French military camp, in December 2016. Ansaroul Islam has its origins in the religious network established by radical Djibo imam Boureima Dicko in 2012, which advocated brotherhood and equality among Burkina Faso’s various social and ethnic groups. The group purportedly seeks to rebuild the ancient Djeelgodji empire that disappeared after French colonization in the 19th century. Ansaroul Islam operates primarily in Burkina

Faso and Mali. It attacks civilian targets, Burkinabe security forces, and French counterterrorism forces.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Ansaroul Islam is a militant Islamic organization and the first native jihadi group in Burkina Faso. The group has its origins in the Al-Irchad religious network established by radical Djibo imam Boureima Dicko in 2012. Dicko delivered sermons preaching equality and brotherhood among different communities; these sermons, delivered over local radios in northern Burkina Faso, appealed greatly to Burkinabes disillusioned with the dominant authority of religious leaders and the nobility, and the social stratification within Burkina Faso's ethnic groups.³ In September 2013, Dicko was arrested in northern Mali by French military forces, who suspected him of attempting to join the militant group Ansar Dine. Released after two years, Dicko escaped Burkinabe national intelligence by hiding along the Mali-Burkinabe border. In the forests surrounding the Mondoro village, members of Dicko's religious network gathered supporters. This group formed the basis of what would eventually make up Ansaroul Islam.⁴ The group officially announced its formation after its first attack, on a joint Burkinabe-French military camp, in December 2016.⁵

Ansaroul Islam allegedly seeks to reconquer and rebuild Djeelgodji, an ancient Fulani empire that disappeared after French colonization in the late 19th century.⁶ The organization is largely made up of members of the Fulani and Rimaibe ethnic groups, but also includes members from the Mossi, Bellah, Dogons, and Songhai people; many of these militants joined Ansaroul Islam after originally supporting Dicko's religious network. Some have called Ansaroul Islam a "self-defense" group, as it previously defended communities where it had popular support.⁷

In response to Ansaroul Islam's targeting of civilians and Burkinabe troops, Burkinabe security forces cracked down harshly on the organization's activities. Security forces have displaced thousands of civilians and reportedly killed noncombatants in their extensive campaign to eradicate militants from the country's northern provinces.⁸ Ansaroul Islam's strategy has also been impacted by the activities of French counterterrorism forces operating under Operation Barkhane. An attack on Ansaroul Islam's largest base in the Foulare forest in April 2017 led to the deaths of over 20 militants. Ansaroul Islam was forced to disperse along the Mali-Burkinabe border, operating in smaller cells.

Ansaroul Islam has received significant tactical and material support from Ansar Dine subgroups, the Macina Liberation Front (MLF) and Katibat Serma. It also receives support from Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM). In 2017, JNIM claimed responsibility for six attacks in Burkina Faso, suggesting logistical and operational ties between the two organizations.⁹ Ansaroul Islam has received extensive support from Al Qaeda's north African affiliate, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Senior AQIM commander Abu Bakr al-Shinquitte played an important role in recruiting, training, and providing resources to the militants that ultimately formed Ansaroul Islam.¹⁰ The

organization's activity allegedly provides a greater opportunity for recruitment and large-scale attacks by Al Qaeda's (AQ) regional affiliates.

In May 2017, Ansaroul Islam founder Dicko died from natural causes. Leadership of the organization passed on to Dicko's younger brother and former third-in-command, Jafar Dicko.¹¹ Boureima Dicko's death and the effective military campaigns launched by French counter-terrorism forces have significantly weakened Ansaroul Islam.¹² Under the younger Dicko's leadership, the group continued to face challenges from the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a partnership between Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad.¹³ The UN Security Council's decision to allow the Stabilization Mission in Mali to provide the G5 Sahel Force with logistical support allowed them to more effectively pursue their goal of eliminating threats from militant groups. Yet this has not diminished the frequency and intensity of attacks carried out by AQ affiliates, and allies, including Ansaroul Islam in the Sahel region.¹⁴

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Boureima Dicko (December 2016 – May 2017): Dicko, also known as Malam Ibrahim Dicko, was a Djibo imam who promoted a radical interpretation of Islam. Through community meetings and sermons delivered over local radio broadcasts in northern Burkina Faso, Dicko built up a religious movement, the Al-Irchad network.¹⁵ Dicko was arrested in September 2013 by French forces, as he was suspected of attempting to join Ansar Dine. After his release, Dicko formed Ansaroul Islam in the Mondoro forests of Mali; he served as head of the group until his death in May 2017 from natural causes.¹⁶

Jafar Dicko (May 2017 - present): The younger brother of Boureima Dicko, Jafar Dicko allegedly replaced his brother as leader of Ansaroul Islam after the latter's death.¹⁷

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this group.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 2017: 200 fighters (*Le Monde*)¹⁸

D. RESOURCES

Ansaroul Islam has received significant support, both tactical and material, through its close ties with the Ansar Dine subgroups, the MLF and Katibat Serma; MLF emir Amadou Kouffa was a close ally of Boureima Dicko and assisted in the founding of Ansaroul Islam.¹⁹ Ansaroul Islam has allegedly also received arms, supplies, and recruitment assistance from AQIM. Senior AQIM commander Abu Bakr al-Shinquit played an important role in recruiting, training, and providing resources to the militants that ultimately formed Ansaroul Islam.²⁰

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

Ansaroul Islam operates in Burkina Faso, especially the northern Soum province, and provinces in Mali close to the Burkinabe border. The group allegedly has two bases around the Malian villages Boulkessi and N'Daki, allowing its militants to launch attacks in both countries.²¹ Ansaroul Islam has major bases in the Fousare forest, in the south-west of Gao province, near the Mali-Burkina Faso border, and the Fhero forest, in Burkina Faso's Soum province. After the April 2017 attack on its base in the Fousare forest, Ansaroul Islam militants allegedly scattered in smaller cells along the border.²²

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Ansaroul Islam's main goal is allegedly to reconquer and rebuild Djeelgodji, an ancient Fulani empire that disappeared after French colonization in the late 19th century.²³ While preaching on local radio stations in northern Burkina Faso, Ansaroul Islam's founder gained diverse support through sermons emphasizing equality and brotherhood among different communities. This network of supporters strongly opposed the dominant religious and social authority of the hereditary nobility.²⁴

Ansaroul Islam interacts closely with AQ front groups and affiliates in North Africa; Ansaroul Islam activity has purportedly created a front allowing AQ to achieve its primary aim—inspiring Muslims globally to attack enemies of Islam—in Burkina Faso.²⁵

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

There are no known political activities for this group.

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

Ansaroul Islam has assaulted the Burkinabe police force, the Burkinabe military, and French counter-terrorism force bases and patrols. The group also targets civilians and government infrastructure, burning schools and administrative buildings throughout the Sahel.²⁶ Ansaroul Islam has launched multiple assassination campaigns, issuing threats to civilians and killing them, execution-style. Targeted individuals are frequently collaborators with security forces or the Burkinabe government, or former supporters of the Al-Irchad religious movement who refused to support the group's evolution into militant jihadism.²⁷

While Ansaroul Islam typically uses small arms and mortar fire in its attacks, the group began to use IEDs in its militant activities beginning in 2017, after receiving the knowledge and technical capabilities from JNIM. Ansaroul Islam has also been involved in criminal activity, such as robberies and cattle rustling.²⁸

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

December 16, 2016: Ansaroul Islam attacked a joint camp of the Burkinabe military and gendarmerie forces in Nassoumbou, Burkina Faso, destroying vehicles and seizing military supplies. The group received assistance from the MLF and Ansar Dine subgroup Katibat Serma. Shortly after the attack, the militants officially declared the establishment of Ansaroul Islam (12 killed, unknown wounded).²⁹

April 3, 2017: Ansaroul Islam launched its first IED attack in Mali, killing 2 shepherds near the Moungnoukana village (2 killed, unknown wounded).³⁰

August 17, 2017: Ansaroul Islam claimed responsibility for the first IED attack in Burkina Faso, which targeted a military convoy in Djibo (3 killed, 2 wounded).³¹

September 23 - October 2, 2017: Ansaroul Islam was responsible for or participated in at least 8 jihadist attacks that took place in northern Burkina Faso. Militants targeted Burkinabe troops, gendarmerie forces, military outposts and civilians using IEDs, small arms and mortar fire, and assassinations (11+ killed, unknown wounded).³²

February 26, 2018: Ansaroul Islam murdered two elderly men close to their home in Djibo, Burkina Faso. The men, who were members of the local government, had allegedly received multiple threats from Ansaroul Islam (2 killed, 0 wounded).³³

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- United States named Ansaroul Islam as a Specially Designated Foreign Terrorist (SDFT): February 20, 2018 to Present.³⁴

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Ansaroul Islam largely consists of members of the Fulani and Rimaibe ethnic groups, but also includes members from the Mossi, Bellah, Dogons, and Songhai groups. Prior to becoming a militant organization, Ansaroul Islam gained diverse support through sermons emphasizing equality and brotherhood among different communities. These sermons appealed immensely to local communities frustrated by the dominant religious and social authority of the hereditary nobility. Ansaroul Islam also attracted Burkinabes who bemoaned the lack of development and poor infrastructure as signs that the government was incapable of providing basic services in the Sahel region.³⁵ As Ansaroul Islam developed, some called it a “self-defense” group, as it defended communities in which it has popular support.³⁶

At the same time, villagers in the Sahel region have been deeply frightened by Ansaroul Islam’s targeting and execution-style killing of civilians near their homes, frequently for

collaborating with security forces or refusing to support the group's evolution into militant jihadism.³⁷ Ansaroul Islam reportedly threatened villagers not to inform Burkinabe security forces of the activities and locations of its members.³⁸

The Malian and Burkinabe military forces' harsh crackdown on Ansaroul Islam activity by has alienated and displaced many civilians. State forces allegedly killed noncombatants as part of an extensive campaign to eradicate militants, leading to reduced access to health and educational services.³⁹ Thousands of Burkinabe civilians have been forced to flee their homes due to local insecurity and abuses by security forces.⁴⁰

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Ansaroul Islam allegedly has close ties with the Macina Liberation Front; the MLF emir, Amadou Kouffa, was a close ally of Boureima Dicko and played an important role in Ansaroul Islam's founding. Ansaroul Islam has also received training and support from Ansar Dine subgroup, Katibat Serma, with whom it cooperated to launch the December 2016 attack in Nassoumbou, Burkina Faso.⁴¹

The MLF, as a unit of Ansar Dine, joined with other Islamist groups in the Sahel region in March 2017 to form Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen. While JNIM's specific relationship with Ansaroul Islam is unknown, Ansaroul Islam has ideological, logistical, and operational links with the group.⁴² Ansaroul Islam allegedly received the knowledge and technical capabilities to launch IED attacks from JNIM. Moreover, local news sources blamed Ansaroul Islam for six attacks carried out in Burkina Faso in 2017, which JNIM later claimed responsibility for.⁴³

Ansaroul Islam is also closely associated with the Al Qaeda network and other affiliates in Mali and serves as a new front for AQ to spread its influence in Burkina Faso.⁴⁴ Senior AQIM commander Abu Bakr al-Shinquitl played an important role in recruiting, training, providing resources to the militants that ultimately formed Ansaroul Islam.⁴⁵

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Ansaroul Islam does not have any known state sponsors.

MAPS

- North Africa

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