



C R T G

The Islamic State in Central Africa and the Centrality of Children in its Expansion Strategy

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ABOUT CRTG WORKING GROUP

The CRTG Working Group is the world's first organization dedicated to addressing the involvement of children with terrorism and violent extremism. We help understand the nature of child involvement with terrorist and violent extremist actors, support prevention and mitigation efforts.

The CRTG Working Group recognizes that child exploitation in terrorism is an evolutionary outcome of terrorist tactics and strategy and one of the core elements enabling the long-term survival of terrorist organizations, spreading violent ideology, and fueling conflict. We acknowledge that addressing the complex and evolving nature of the terrorist threat, requires our own adaptation and therefore, we are intentionally forward-looking in our understanding of children's role - as a factor that can exacerbate existing challenges, but also one that can, when effective intervention measures are implemented and sustained, provide new solutions to current threats that we confront and help prevent new ones from materializing.

Through a multi-tiered approach, the CRTG Working Group provides unique insights and cross-cutting analysis into this area, helps shape policies that accommodate both child protection and security concerns through direct, personal advocacy, and works to address context-specific needs, facilitating meaningful and sustainable solutions.

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I. Introduction

The terrorist threat in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been on the rise in recent years. In March 2023, the north-eastern regions of the DRC, Ituri and Kivu, were once again hit by deadly attacks against civilians led by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). In two separate events, the ADF killed 50 people and burned several buildings, including a health center.¹ In June 2023, over 40 people died following the attack against a school by the ADF in Uganda, and more students were abducted. This alarming pattern echoes a disquieting trend observed across sub-Saharan Africa.²

Within the broader context of Islamic State affiliates, sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a focal point for violent extremist operations. While Islamic State provinces in Afghanistan and Syria may have experienced a decline in their capabilities and territorial influence, Islamic State affiliates in West and Central Africa have significantly expanded their operational reach.³ This article contends that the ADF is undergoing a fast and metastasizing evolution, posing serious concerns for the security of the region and beyond.⁴

An examination of the ADF, exposes firmly established ideological, financial, and operational links with the Islamic State. The group's rebranding as the Islamic State in Central Africa Province (ISCAP) also signifies this association. A salient characteristic of jihadist groups, whether affiliated with Al-Qaida or the Islamic State, is their deployment of tactics and strategies for the recruitment, use, and ideological indoctrination of children. Notably, the ADF/ISCAP adoption of violent extremist ideology, modus operandi, and expansionistic aims mirroring the Islamic State strategy coincides with the growing showcasing of children in its propaganda material as well as an increase in the involvement of children in its Katibas units and military operations.⁵

Therefore, the objectives of this article are twofold. It seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the ADF/ISCAP's trajectory, strategies, and tactics, as well as its ambitions, prospects, and potential impacts in Central Africa. Secondly, it aims to raise awareness regarding child exploitation as a means to support ADF/ISCAP

¹ "RDC : une dizaine de tués dans une attaque attribuée aux ADF ", VOA, March 12, 2023, <https://www.voafrique.com/a/une-dizaine-de-tu%C3%A9s-dans-une-attaque-attribu%C3%A9e-aux-adf/7001346.html>.

² "At least 41 have been killed in a suspected rebel attack on a Ugandan school", NPR, June 17, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/17/1182936177/at-least-25-killed-rebel-attack-ugandan-school>.

³ The author has conducted a thorough analysis of a dozen videos of ISCAP for the purpose of this article.

⁴ Aaron Y. Zelin, Gina Ligon & Thomas Hegghamer, "Mapping the Islamic State's Activity: Implications for U.S. Counterterrorism Policy", Policy Analysis, PolicyWatch 3719, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (March 2023).

⁵ "The murky links between the DR Congo ADF and the Islamic State", France 24, July 7, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210707-the-murky-link-between-dr-congo-s-adf-and-islamic-state>.

expansionistic and military aims across the region and underscore the need for concerted efforts to address security and child protection concerns.

Chapter II lays the groundwork for our exploration by elucidating the origins of the ADF and its religious underpinnings. It unveils the ADF's transformation from an armed opposition force in Uganda to its operational shift towards the Kivu region in the DRC, a violence-ridden area characterized by intercommunity tensions and historical legacies. It underscores the ADF's multifaceted approach, wherein the organization exploits existing grievances, provides protection and justice to local communities, and simultaneously propagates its radical Islamic ideology. By delving into the ADF's strategic implementation of Sharia law, its manipulation of interreligious tensions, and its targeting of the Muslim community, the chapter sheds light on the group's complex modus operandi. Furthermore, it highlights the repercussions faced by the Muslim community due to the ADF's actions, leading to their marginalization and potential recruitment by the ADF itself.

Chapter III discusses the ascent of Musa Seka Baluku, who embodies the ideological fervor and commitment to the Salafi-takfiri ideology among the ADF's leadership, his involvement in supporting jihadist activities in northern Mozambique, his influence, and the strategic connections he has forged. Furthermore, the chapter delves deeper into the ADF/ISCAP's affiliation with the Islamic State and its operational pragmatism in effectively navigating the local context and exploiting community grievances and vulnerabilities.

Chapter IV emphasizes the strategic support provided by the Islamic State to the ADF/ISCAP, including ideological guidance, strategic advice, financial support, and tactical assistance. It highlights Baluku's references to correspondences with the Islamic State and the directives he adheres to under their auspices. The chapter also points to the ADF's and ISCAP's growth and expansion being influenced by the support received from the Islamic State, not only within East Africa but also within IS' international networks.

Chapter V provides an overview of the ADF/ISCAP in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), highlighting its status as the deadliest armed group in the region. It emphasizes the group's wide-ranging financial, logistical, and recruitment networks. It provides a comprehensive overview of the ADF/ISCAP's operations, tactics, and ideological alignment with the Islamic State and sets the stage for a deeper analysis of the group's activities, their impact on civilians, and the regional security implications.

Chapter VI illustrates the operational capacities and ideological motivations of the ADF and ISCAP. The chapter highlights the group's efforts to expand its operational capacities and recruitment networks across Tanzania, Kenya, and Burundi, indicating a determination to widen their influence.

Chapter VII offers insights into the multifaceted recruitment strategies employed by the ADF/ISCAP, shedding light on the use of both online platforms and in-person interactions. It underscores the importance of understanding the socio-economic context in which recruitment occurs and the factors that drive individuals to join such extremist groups.

Chapter VIII highlights the significance of analyzing propaganda materials with the aim of understanding ISCAP's aims, particularly in terms of manipulating and indoctrinating children for military purposes and expanding their influence by targeting vulnerable segments of the population. The prevalence of violent crimes committed against children within ISCAP is emphasized, shedding light on the severity of mistreatment and abuse faced by children in ISCAP ranks.

Chapter IX identifies the roles assigned to children, ranging from surveillance and reconnaissance to active participation in military operations. It evaluates the dissemination of propaganda materials showcasing children engaging in military activities.

Chapter X expounds on the role that women play within the ADF/ISCAP apparatus as well as their portrayal in the group's propaganda. Women are depicted as combatants, preachers, and caretakers of the wounded, showcasing their diverse involvement within the organization. The chapter also addresses the ADF/ISCAP's strategy regarding involving women and girls and the ways in which it mirrors the group's ideological stance and military purposes.

The present study was conducted over a period spanning from December 2022 to April 2023, employing a comprehensive research methodology encompassing desk research and semi-structured interviews.

This study involved a heterogeneous cohort of twenty-three participants from six countries, including subject matter experts, humanitarians, journalists, and law enforcement officers. This inclusive approach bestowed the study with a multifaceted and global perspective, fostering cross-cultural exchange and enriching the breadth of insights.

The interviews were carried out through both virtual and in-person modalities, with the researcher maintaining anonymity. It is important to note that certain interviewees requested to speak off-the-record, thereby ensuring

the confidentiality and privacy of their contributions. Given the temporal constraints of the research, the extent of interaction with children formerly associated with the ADF/ISCAP was limited. Nonetheless, the involvement of humanitarian experts has been pivotal in facilitating data collection exercises. This investigation also relies on in-depth analyses of propaganda materials disseminated by the ADF/ISCAP with the aim of gaining insights into the group's strategy involving children.

II. Jihad in DRC: Ancient History?

In an article written in 1998, Gérard Prunier was alerting that the DRC could have a central role in the development and implantation of jihadism in Africa.⁶ The Allied Democratic Forces, established in 1995 as an armed opposition to President Yoweri Museveni, reunited several armed groups as well as members of the Congolese, Ugandan and Rwandan armed forces.⁷ Remarkably, certain key figures within its ranks, most notably Jamil Mukulu and Musa Seka Baluku, have consistently maintained ideological affiliations with the Salafi-jihadi doctrine. Consequently, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) has consistently pursued a religiously motivated agenda, although this facet of the organization was not universally recognized until more recently.

The previous commander of the ADF, Jamil Mukulu,⁸ obtained his education from the Pakistani Tabligh movement, much like numerous members of the armed group, including the current leader, Musa Seka Baluku.⁹ Mukulu's association with Saudi Arabia is noteworthy, having pursued theological studies in Riyadh during his formative years. Throughout his tenure, Mukulu consistently affirmed his adherence to the Salafi-Wahhabi religious doctrine.¹⁰ In 1991, he actively participated in the murder of several police officers, motivated by the defense of radical Islamic ideologies.¹¹ Over the years, Mukulu has recurrently delivered sermons, which have been documented on tape, encouraging ADF members to perpetrate acts of violence against both non-believers and deviant Muslims, with evidence of such exhortations dating back to at least 2005.¹²

During its initial stages, the ADF primarily operated within Uganda, but it swiftly shifted its operational focus towards the Bundibugyo area and the northern part of the Kivu region in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

⁶ Gérard Prunier, "Une poudrière au cœur du Congo-Kinshasa", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 1998, 14.

⁷ Jean-Marc Balencie et Arnaud de La Grange, *Les Nouveaux Mondes rebelles: conflits, terrorisme et contestations* (Paris : Edition Michalon, 2005), p. 215.

⁸ A Christian converted to Islam.

⁹ Kristof Titeca and Daniel Fahey, "The many faces of a rebel group: the Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *International Affairs* 92, no. 5 (September 2016).

¹⁰ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Interviews conducted with Hubert Kahazi, researcher, and former member Comité National de Coordination de Lutte contre le Terrorisme International, February to March 2023.

The Kivu region has been a longstanding epicenter of violence, characterized by the presence of various armed groups, rebellions, criminal activities, and inter-community tensions. These issues, deeply rooted in both the colonial and post-colonial history of the region, frequently intersect and intertwine, exacerbating the conflicts that have plagued the area for many years. One prominent manifestation of post-colonial legacies lies in the disparities in access to administrative, political, and economic power among different communities. Within an agricultural region like Kivu, control over land and the exploitation of natural resources holds significant importance. In the absence or inadequate presence of a functioning state, these factors have become central catalysts for recurring outbreaks of violence between local communities.¹³ The ADF/ISCAP capitalized on these existing tensions by offering or imposing protection and justice upon local communities, while also recruiting individuals from marginalized groups. While forging strong connections with the local population to address their grievances, the organization does not abandon its radical Islamic ideological core.¹⁴

The involvement of foreign nations, notably Uganda and Rwanda, operating through proxies, has significantly contributed to the destabilization of the region. While it has been reported that the ADF had temporary connections with the Ugandan regime, it is alleged that their primary support in the 2000s came from Sudan and the Islamist government led by Omar al-Bashir. During this period, Jamil Muluku, a key figure within the ADF, reportedly held meetings with prominent proponents of radical Islam in Sudan, such as Hassan al-Tourabi and Osama bin Laden.¹⁵ Numerous sources have confirmed that the ADF had exchanges and received operational guidance from Al-Shabab in Somalia since the late 1990s.¹⁶ In 2011, the arrest of four Moroccans, believed to have ties with Al-Qaeda, en route to an ADF training camp in Ituri, shed light on several similar trips that had taken place previously.¹⁷ Additionally, a United Nations (UN) report from January 2014 revealed that Arabic-speaking trainers had visited the ADF.¹⁸ Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that even before affiliating itself with the Islamic State, the ADF had connections with sponsors and potentially with entities involved in international terrorism. These ties have likely influenced the ADF's activities since its inception.¹⁹

Consequently, ever since its inception, the distinguishing characteristic of the ADF in comparison to other armed factions operating in the Eastern Congo region has been its religious orientation. As underscored by the thorough investigations conducted by the Bridgeway Foundation, the ADF has progressively adopted a stringent adherence to

¹³ Jean-Marc Balencie et Arnaud de La Grange, *Les Nouveaux Mondes rebelles : conflits, terrorisme et contestations* (Paris : Éditions Michalon, 2005), p. 215.

¹⁴ Interview with a researcher based in Eastern DRC, 30 March 2023.

¹⁵ Interview conducted by phone with a member of Congolese secret services specialized in the ADF/ISCAP, March 2023.

¹⁶ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹⁷ Interviews conducted with Hubert Kahazi, researcher, and former member Comité National de Coordination de Lutte contre le Terrorisme International, February to March 2023.

¹⁸ Midterm report of the Groupe of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNSCC (Resolution 1533), June 25, 2014.

¹⁹ Interviews conducted with Hubert Kahazi, researcher, and former member Comité National de Coordination de Lutte contre le Terrorisme International, February to March 2023.

Sharia law within its ranks, compelling both combatants and civilians residing in their encampments to observe five daily prayers and uphold strict gender segregation.²⁰ With the ascent of Baluku to a position of power, Islam assumed an increasingly prominent role within the group. Observers have discerned that the ADF not only employs Sharia as a mechanism for internal discipline and governance, but also as a means of proselytism.²¹

Furthermore, it is imperative to recognize that the ADF/ISCAP plays a strategic role in manipulating, fueling, and sometimes instigating interreligious tensions. They also foster a strong resistance towards public authorities, particularly the Congolese army, to further their own interests. Historically, the northern region of Maniema Province and later the Kivu regions have been home to a Muslim community and small sultanates governed by Zanzibarian-Arabic businessmen since the 19th century.²² Presently, reports suggest that Muslims constitute between 5% and 10% of the total population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).²³ Muslim communities are predominantly concentrated in the capital city of Kinshasa, as well as in the provinces of Maniema and Kivu. The ADF/ISCAP is known to target and assassinate Muslim leaders who advocate against violence, subsequently blaming the Congolese army for these acts.²⁴ To further propagate confusion, fear, and enhance their recruitment capacity, the ADF/ISCAP has established networks within local mosques, which serve as vital hubs for their activities²⁵ and have fostered alliances with traditional authorities and village chiefs in Ituri who have recently embraced a Salafi-jihadi creed.²⁶

The Muslim community remains significantly underrepresented in political and media spheres.²⁷ For many years, interreligious relations in the DRC have been peaceful, and influential Muslim figures such as Shaykh Ali Amini in Beni have consistently denounced terrorism.²⁸ However, due to the ADF/ISCAP's actions, particularly their targeting of churches, the army and intelligence services have resorted to violent retaliations against the Muslim community and its leaders accused of either ideological or financial links with the ADF.²⁹ Since 2021, according to the United Nations' Security Council group of experts' reports, the ADF has been affiliated with the Islamic State. However,

²⁰ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

²¹ Interview with a researcher based in Eastern DRC, 30 March 2023.

²² Ashley E. Leinweber, "The Muslim Minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo: From Historic Marginalization and Internal Division to Collective Action", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 52, no. 206/207 (2012): 517-44.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

²⁵ Hakim Maludi, "Au Congo-Kinshasa, la communauté musulmane prise entre deux feux", *Afrique XXI*, February 9, 2022, <https://afriquexxi.info/Au-Congo-Kinshasa-la-communaute-musulmane-prise-entre-deux-feux>.

²⁶ Interview with Eliora Hanzler, Baromètre Sécuritaire du Kivu, 23rd March 2023.

²⁷ "L'Islam en République Démocratique du Congo : de l'Esclavagisme au Présent", *Alohanews*, June 6, 2018, <https://alohanews.be/societe/islam-republique-democratique-congo-esclavagisme>.

²⁸ Hakim Maludi, "Au Congo-Kinshasa, la communauté musulmane prise entre deux feux", *Afrique XXI*, February 9, 2022, <https://afriquexxi.info/Au-Congo-Kinshasa-la-communaute-musulmane-prise-entre-deux-feux>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

experts suggest that the group retains its distinct methods and maintains a degree of independence regarding its relationships with local communities.³⁰

III. A New Leadership with Strong Ties to the Islamic State

Active for nearly three decades, the ADF/ISCAP has seen a new generation of leaders. Seka Musa Baluku, under whose guidance the ADF/ISCAP now operates, represents this new generation of commanders, distinguished by their radical ideological orientation and a more resolute commitment to violent extremism compared to their predecessors.³¹ Prior to assuming the overall leadership position within the Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP), Baluku held a significant "ideological/religious" role in the organization, serving as the chief qadi, or Islamic judge, of the ADF/ISCAP.³² Notably, Baluku has forged close connections with the Shabaabs, a jihadist group active in northern Mozambique, aiding in its establishment and subsequent recognition as an Islamic State province in May 2022.³³

Following the arrest of Muluku in 2015, Baluku emerged as the nominated successor and, along with his newly formed leadership, established a formal connection between the ADF and the Islamic State. In 2014, the army had discovered printed materials advocating for Salafi-takfiri ideology within ADF camps, promoting the initiation of a jihad with the aim of establishing an Islamic territory in the region to safeguard Muslims from hostile communities seeking to eliminate them.³⁴ The ADF's regional objective, encompassing the entire Central African region, was underscored by the presence of a video in the camps, purportedly directed at the Presidents of Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda, serving as both a warning and a declaration of war.³⁵ Given its highly centralized structure, the decision of the ADF leader and its allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) characterize the organization.

In October 2017, the ADF formally announced their allegiance to the Islamic State. Some researchers argue that this alignment might have taken place even earlier, and subsequently, the ADF modified their name to Madinat Tawhid wa-l-Muwahidin (The city of monotheism and holy warriors), also known as ADF-MTM.³⁶ In 2019, Amaq, the central press agency of the Islamic State, published two messages claiming two attacks of "fighters of the Islamic State"

³⁰ Phone interview with an international researcher specialized on the DRC, March 2023.

³¹ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

³² Tara Candland et al., "The Rising Threat to Central Africa: the 2021 Transformation of the Islamic State's Congolese Branch", CTC Sentinel 15, no. 6 (June 2022).

³³ Caleb Weiss, "US adds \$5 million bounty to the Islamic State's leader in the DRC," Long War Journal, March 3, 2023.

³⁴ Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNSC, June 15, 2014; Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

³⁵ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

³⁶ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2528 (2020), UNSC, June 10, 2021.

against the Congolese army, near the Uganda border.³⁷ Additionally, in the same year, the ADF released an official pledge of allegiance in a video that was disseminated by Amaq.³⁸ Since then, the Islamic State's central media has claimed and acknowledged the majority of attacks carried out by the ADF/ISCAP.

A small portion of ADF fighters reportedly diverged from this radical religious stance. Led by Benjamin Kisokeranio, who was arrested in 2022, this splinter group introduces further complexity to the analysis of the ADF.³⁹ In fact, part of the ADF leadership still do not adhere to the absolutist ideology of the Islamic State, notably those who belonged to ADF-NALU and had Christian roots.⁴⁰ The loose application of Sharia Law and Islamic State principles of action and governance in certain subgroups of the ADF/ISCAP has allegedly disappointed several jihadist recruits.⁴¹ It appears nonetheless that the ADF modus operandi is aligned with the Islamic State.

The extent of ideological indoctrination among the ranks of the ADF/ISCAP is not consistently high, and the primary motivation for most fighters within their ranks does not appear to be ideological or religious. Nevertheless, the group's leadership is driven by ideological considerations, and a significant proportion of its soldiers share this ideological commitment, and new recruits undergo religious training. In addition, it is possible that the ADF have been partly interested in a pragmatic, mainly financially benefiting, association with the Islamic State.⁴² The ADF/ISCAP operational pragmatism is likely a tactical choice, aligning with the traditional modus operandi of the Islamic State in regions where it does not have complete control. The ADF/ISCAP has been active in the Kivu region for two decades and has expanded its operations to Ituri since 2021. Over time, it has established strategic connections necessary for engaging in asymmetrical warfare, benefiting from its evolution into the ISCAP.⁴³ The group effectively leverages its knowledge of the local context, community grievances, and vulnerabilities of other armed groups to its advantage. The ADF/ISCAP is skilled at forging short-term alliances and agreements, which it can maintain or abandon as it sees fit. Moreover, it demonstrates pragmatism by welcoming individuals with significant military expertise into its ranks, even without ideological alignment. This mirrors the approach adopted by the Islamic State in Iraq, where it incorporated officers from the Iraqi army into its Shura, or leaders' council.

³⁷ "Le groupe EI revendique pour la première fois une attaque sur le sol congolais", RFI, 19 April 2019, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20190419-le-groupe-ei-revendique-premiere-fois-une-attaque-le-sol-congolais>.

³⁸ Joan Tilouine & Madjid Zerrouky, "L'Etat islamique revendique sa première attaque en République démocratique du Congo", Le Monde, 19 April 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/04/19/en-rdc-l-etat-islamique-revendique-sa-premiere-attaque-et-l-etablissement-d-une-filiale_5452690_3212.html.

³⁹ "RDC : arrestation de l'un des fondateurs du groupe islamiste ADF", Jeune Afrique, 13 January 2022, <https://congakin.blog/?p=6555>.

⁴⁰ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

⁴¹ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSCC, June 10, 2022.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Interview conducted by phone with a member of Congolese secret services specialized in the ADF/ISCAP, March 2023.

IV. An Opportunistic Allegiance?

Analysts have often considered the allegiance of ADF to the Islamic State as being non-ideological but solely opportunistic.⁴⁴ In fact, pledging allegiance to the Islamic State has granted access to financial resources and a pool of potential recruits through the extensive international support networks of the Islamic State. The ADF/ISCAP has received financial assistance from individuals residing outside the Democratic Republic of the Congo through intermediaries inside the country and in Uganda.⁴⁵ Since at least 2018, individuals located in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Ireland have been providing financial support to the ADF via mobile wallet money transfers and international wire transfers. Between July and mid-October 2021 alone, more than \$60,000 from abroad passed through the account associated with a single SIM card lost by an ADF fighter, underscoring the scale of funding.⁴⁶ The funds were then allegedly distributed to at least 40 other mobile numbers, highlighting the scale of the ADF/ISCAP support network involving key international logistics experts connected to the Islamic State, such as Waleed Ahmed Zein and Abdirizak Mohamed Abdi Jimale.⁴⁷

Opportunistic or not, connections between the Islamic State and the ADF/ISCAP are key to explaining the expansion of the group. ISCAP is benefitting from direct support from the Islamic State through its Al-Karrar office in Puntland, which helps oversee and coordinate IS' activities across Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa and which is hosted by the Islamic State in Somalia.⁴⁸ The Islamic State is therefore providing ideological guidance, strategic advice, financial and tactical support to ADF/ISCAP. In audio transmissions disseminated between the years 2021 and 2022 on discreet channels employed for propagandistic purposes, Baluku openly referred to these correspondences and explicated the specific directives he adhered to under the auspices of the Islamic State, with the aim of expanding his territorial dominion.⁴⁹

The affiliation between the ADF and the networks associated with the Islamic State has grown stronger, not only within East Africa but also within the international networks of IS. This serves as further evidence of the existing ties between the ADF and IS. In 2015, the arrest of Jamil Mukulu in Tanzania shed light on the group's recruitment activities in that region, which have been ongoing for several years. In 2018, ADF victims' testimonies collected by the Bridgeway Foundation highlighted that: "attackers spoke a variety of languages – mostly Swahili, but also

⁴⁴ Paul Nantulya, "The Ever-Adaptive Allied Democratic Forces Insurgency", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, February 8, 2019.

⁴⁵ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSC, June 10, 2022.

⁴⁶ Tara Candland et al., "The Rising Threat to Central Africa: the 2021 Transformation of the Islamic State's Congolese Branch", CTC Sentinel 15, no. 6 (June 2022).

⁴⁷ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSC, June 10, 2022.

⁴⁸ Caleb Weiss & Ryan O'Farrell, "Analysis: U.S. Military Kills key Islamic State leader in Africa", Long War Journal, January 27, 2023.

⁴⁹ Carmel Ndeo, "RDC : "Les liens de communication entre les ADF et l'Etat Islamique d'Iraq (DAECH) et du Levant (EIL) se sont renforcés", Politico, June 22, 2023.

Kinyarwanda and Lingala, languages not usually spoken by the ADF during operations”.⁵⁰ The apprehension of fighters from Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, and Burundi in recent years underscores the ADF’s ability to recruit individuals from Central and South Africa.⁵¹ Of particular significance is the heightened level of ideological radicalism observed in new recruits sourced through the IS regional network.⁵²

These connections are further exemplified by the training support provided by IS to the ADF. For instance, in September 2021, a Jordanian operative affiliated with IS was apprehended near Beni. This individual had been dispatched by the central command of IS to train the ADF/ISCAP in ideological indoctrination and the utilization of drones.⁵³ In 2022, a young trainer from Uganda was purportedly arrested as he was on the verge of joining the ADF/ISCAP to provide ideological training to their militants after having himself traveled to Afghanistan.⁵⁴

In March 2022, the ADF/ISCAP renewed their allegiance to the Islamic State following the death of Abu Ibrahim Al-Qurashi, the leader of the organization in a video entitled “The Jihad of the believers will stand on”. In this video, an ISCAP leader praises Jihadist and Islamic State’ prominent figures Abu-Mus’aab al-Zarkaoui,⁵⁵ Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi. Over the past two years, the collaboration between the ADF/ISCAP and the Islamic State has appeared to intensify, with the central faction of the Islamic State increasingly publicizing the military exploits of ISCAP.⁵⁶ Nowadays, local researchers estimate that the number of militants within ADF/ISCAP stands at around 4,800 individuals.⁵⁷ Estimating the number of children associated with the ADF/ISCAP is complex; however, video evidence showcasing the military training of dozens of children and reports of children being abducted by the ADF suggest that their presence might be significant. Between January 2019 and June 2020 alone, 59 children were recruited into their ranks.⁵⁸

To adapt to changing circumstances, the ADF/ISCAP has restructured itself into smaller cells and independently managed camps, enforcing stringent communication protocols both between and within each cell.⁵⁹ The methods employed by the ADF/ISCAP to facilitate this organizational shift underscore the influence of the Islamic State and, conceivably, the guidance of external advisors. In other regions, the Islamic State encourages its operatives to

⁵⁰ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

⁵¹ Paul Nantulya, “The Ever-Adaptive Allied Democratic Forces Insurgency”, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, February 8, 2019.

⁵² Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

⁵³ “RD Congo : qui sont les rebelles ougandais ADF, liés à l’organisation Etat islamique ?”, TV5 Monde, October 29, 2021.

⁵⁴ Interviews conducted with Hubert Kahozi, researcher and former member Comité National de Coordination de Lutte contre le Terrorisme International, February to March 2023.

⁵⁵ He is considered to be the real founder of the Islamic state in Irak. His main aim at the time was “to fight against the American crusade in the lands of Islam” and he accordingly founded Jam’aat Al-Tawh’iid wa al-Jihad, which can be considered as the structural ancestor of Islamic State.

⁵⁶ Aaron Y. Zelin, Gina Ligon & Thomas Hegghamer, “Mapping the Islamic State’s Activity: Implications for U.S. Counterrorism Policy”, Policy Analysis, PolicyWatch 3719, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (March 2023).

⁵⁷ Interview conducted by phone with a member of Congolese secret services specialized in the ADF/ISCAP, 23 March 2023.

⁵⁸ “DRC: Attacks by ADF armed group may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes”, UNHRC News and Press Release, July 6, 2020.

⁵⁹ Interview with a Ugandan prosecutor, Kampala, 4 April 2023.

restrict the strategic and operative knowledge solely to commanders and to compartmentalize information. The influence of IS is finally noticeable in the financing sources ADF/ISCAP use, which include various small-scale illicit activities such as trafficking in natural resources and motorcycles.

The latest authoritative recognition of the affiliation between the ADF and the Islamic State (IS) has transpired in recent reports and analyses by the United States Department of State.⁶⁰ In March 2023, the United States began to offer a 5-million-dollar reward for any intelligence that could lead to the arrest of ADF/ISCAP' leader Seka Musa Baluku,⁶¹ highlighting ISCAP as an integral part of the Islamic State in Africa.

V. Modus Operandi of ADF/ISCAP

The ADF/ISCAP is currently the deadliest armed group in the DRC.⁶² With wide financial, logistical and recruiting networks, ISCAP poses a significant regional threat.⁶³ The ADF/ISCAP has been responsible for the death of thousands of civilians and military personnel since its inception.⁶⁴ Since 2019, the evolution of the group's tactics and strategies, and escalating levels of violence, have been consistently emphasized.⁶⁵ Detailed examination of the ADF/ISCAP's operational methods and internal organization further demonstrates the influence exerted by the Islamic State and simultaneously reflects on the techniques implemented to recruit, use and indoctrinate children.⁶⁶

Throughout October and November 2021, the ADF/ISCAP carried out several suicide-bombings in Uganda, and most recently, it conducted a violent attack against a school.⁶⁷ An investigation conducted by the United Nations Security Council has verified that the leader of the ADF/ISCAP, Baluku, had specifically instructed his fighters to carry out suicide attacks in 2021, and praised those who would commit to these acts.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Caleb Weiss, "US adds \$5 million bounty to the Islamic State's leader in the DRC," Long War Journal, March 3, 2023.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSCC, June 10, 2022.

⁶³ The Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamic State Affiliate in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congressional Research Service, September 1, 2022, accessed at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12206/2>.

⁶⁴ "RD Congo : une nouvelle attaque armée attribuée aux ADF fait des dizaines de morts", France 24, March 9, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20230309-rd-congo-une-nouvelle-attaque-arm%C3%A9e-attribu%C3%A9e-aux-adf-fait-des-dizaines-de-morts>.

⁶⁵ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSCC, June 10, 2022.

⁶⁶ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

⁶⁷ Max Bearak, "Coordinated suicide attacks in Ugandan capital kill at least 3 and injure dozens", The Washington Post, November 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/16/uganda-kampala-explosions/>; "At least 41 have been killed in a suspected rebel attack on a Ugandan school", NPR, June 17, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/17/1182936177/at-least-25-killed-rebel-attack-ugandan-school>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Through the assistance of foreign trainers dispatched by Islamic State' support networks, ADF/ISCAP has also advanced its skills in the fabrication of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), increasingly relying on "the use of integrated cell phones as electronic time-delay triggers or radio-controlled triggers, similar to those observed in other countries, including Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq". The precision and lethality of IEDs used by the ADF/ISCAP have consequently considerably improved. In April 2022, DRC officials expressed suspicions that the ADF was involved in a suicide bombing near Goma, an act that also holds symbolic significance due to Goma being a vital center for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. One noteworthy attack by the ADF/ISCAP exemplifies their adoption of the tactics employed by jihadist organizations. On December 25th, 2021, the ADF/ISCAP executed an IED attack in Beni, resulting in the death of at least 9 people and injuring 18 others. The choice of the date, Christmas Eve, naturally holds symbolic significance in a predominantly Christian region.⁶⁹ The target of the attack was a bar called Inbox, which, from the perspective of the Islamic State, represents the deviant nature of non-Muslim societies and their allegedly corrupt values. Furthermore, the majority of the bar's patrons were members of Beni's elites and armed forces, thereby allowing the ADF/ISCAP to highlight the alleged moral decay of local leaders through their targeting.

Another significant development worth noting pertains to the extent of violence witnessed in the attacks conducted by the ADF/ISCAP, which serve the dual purpose of instilling terror among their adversaries and the general civilian population.⁷⁰ Beginning in June 2021, ADF/ISCAP has released videos showcasing the execution of alleged traitors⁷¹ and hostages and civilians recalcitrant of ADF/ISCAP's governance are also reportedly being killed on a regular basis.⁷² The ADF/ISCAP also perpetrates massacres and summary executions against civilians. Means and the modus operandi of ADF/ISCAP' attacks indicate a clear intention to leave no survivors. In early 2022, in less than two months, ADF/ISCAP militants decimated nearly 10 villages, killing over a hundred civilians.⁷³ In January and March 2023, the ADF/ISCAP attacked numerous villages and killed civilians in Ituri.⁷⁴ A study from the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO) analyzes the effects of ADF/ISCAP violence on civilians and the savagery and systematicity of these attacks.⁷⁵ Assaultants used heavy weaponry including AK47s, mortars, machetes and knives, burned entire villages, healthcare facilities and schools, abducted and forcibly recruited men, women, and children.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Tara Candland et al., "The Rising Threat to Central Africa: the 2021 Transformation of the Islamic State's Congolese Branch", CTC Sentinel 15, no. 6 (June 2022).

⁷⁰ "RDC : au moins six civils tués et un millier de déplacés lors d'une attaque des ADF à Beni", UN Info, 14 July 2022, <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2022/07/1123812>.

⁷¹ "RDC : les liens de communication entre les ADF et l'Etat Islamique d'Iraq (Daech) et du Levant (EIL) se sont renforcés (rapport)", Politico, June 22, 2022.

⁷² "République démocratique du Congo : pourquoi parle-t-on des rebelles et des milices M23, ADF, Codeco ?", Euronews, May 27, 2022, <https://fr.euronews.com/2022/05/27/republique-democratique-du-congo-pourquoi-parle-t-on-des-rebelles-et-des-milices-m23-adf-c>.

⁷³ "En RDC, l'Ituri à nouveau endeuillée par des attaques des ADF qui tuent au moins 52 civils", AFP and Le Monde, March 15, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/03/15/en-rdc-l-ituri-a-nouveau-endeuillee-par-des-attaques-des-adf-qui-tuent-au-moins-52-civils_6117572_3212.html.

⁷⁴ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

⁷⁵ Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNSCC, 20 December 2019.

⁷⁶ "DRC: Attacks by ADF armed group may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes", UNHRC News and Press Release, July 6, 2020.

The choice of victims and targets by the ADF/ISCAP also serve as markers of the Islamic State modus operandi. In fact, in line with the Islamic State's global directives, the ADF/ISCAP have conducted several attacks against prisons, near Beni and Butembo in October 2020⁷⁷ and in August 2022, respectively.⁷⁸ While the precise organizational role of the ADF/ISCAP in these attacks remains unclear, their involvement in both incidents and the subsequent capitalization of the liberation of numerous prisoners is apparent.⁷⁹ It is worth noting that other Islamic State branches have also carried out comparable assaults on correctional facilities to augment their ranks by releasing detainees. Similarly, the decision of the ADF/ISCAP to target humanitarian forces aligns with the modus operandi of other Islamic State branches,⁸⁰ such as those in Nigeria.⁸¹ In a recent video titled "The Jihad of the believers will stand on," ISCAP presents visual imagery of United Nations peacekeeping forces stationed in Congo, while the speaker asserts that the Islamic State shall prevail, pitting the forces of good against evil, and proclaiming that IS will rule the world.

VI. Justifications for Jihad by ADF/ISCAP

According to the majority of interviewed analysts, the ADF/ISCAP is currently engaged in efforts to expand its operational capacities as well as its recruitment networks across the region.⁸² Recent reports have identified the presence of ADF/ISCAP recruiters in Tanzania, Kenya, and Burundi.⁸³ In their propaganda campaigns, both offline and online, ISCAP recruiters actively promote Jihad. However, several testimonies have indicated that the ideological motivations driving the ADF/ISCAP's fight were not always effectively communicated to fighters outside of the leadership circle.⁸⁴ It appears that there has been an increase in the transmission of ideological beliefs and greater ideological coherence within the group, in recent years.

Ideologically, the primary objective of the ADF/ISCAP is to establish a "Dar al-Islam," an Islamic territory, in Central Africa to enable Salafi-takfiri believers (sadeqeen), to thrive in a region that they perceive as otherwise ruled by alleged enemies of Islam. To achieve this goal, ADF/ISCAP focus is on targeting the Congolese armed forces. The protection of Muslim communities against the killings, looting, extortion and torture by the Congolese armed forces and police, labeled as "oppressors", constitutes one of the core justifications for violent action.

⁷⁷ Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala, "RDC : l'Etat islamique revendique l'évasion spectaculaire à la prison de Beni", *Jeune Afrique*, October 20, 2020.

⁷⁸ "RDC : plus de 800 évadés dans l'attaque d'une prison attribuée aux ADF", *Africanews*, August 10, 2022, <https://fr.africanews.com/embed/2027656>.

⁷⁹ Interview conducted with Eliora Hanzler, *Baromètre Sécuritaire du Kivu*, 23 March 2023.

⁸⁰ "Islamist militants in northeast Nigeria execute four aid workers", *Reuters*, July 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-security-insurgency/islamist-militants-in-northeast-nigeria-execute-four-aid-workers-idUKKCN24N2SJ>.

⁸¹ "Islamist militants in northeast Nigeria execute four aid workers", *Reuters*, July 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-security-insurgency/islamist-militants-in-northeast-nigeria-execute-four-aid-workers-idUKKCN24N2SJ>.

⁸² Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

⁸³ "RDC : les liens de communication entre les ADF et l'Etat Islamique d'Iraq (Daech) et du Levant (EIL) se sont renforcés (rapport)", *Politico*, June 22, 2022.

⁸⁴ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

The ADF/ISCAP's narrative identifies various groups as the "allies of the oppressors" and divides them in broad categories such as "Christianity", "non-believers (Kafiri), and "foreign troops" who consequently, also become legitimate targets.

Indeed, within a particular segment of a video released in 2022 titled "Chronicles of Jihad" and produced by the Islamic State's Center for Analysis and Planning (ISCAP), a combatant provides an exposition on verses ten and eleven from Surat al-Saf.⁸⁵ This specific passage can be construed as an exhortation to devout followers of Islam to partake in an endeavor that safeguards them from divine retribution, namely, by pledging their unwavering commitment to Allah and their mission of disseminating the teachings of Islam. This, in turn, translates into carrying out jihad in the ideological realm as espoused by the preachers affiliated with ISCAP.

The video contains also archival audio recordings of Abu-bakr al-Baghdadi, wherein he incites Mujahedeen to keep fighting against the enemies of Allah (Taghût) and another recording featuring an Islamic State leader named «Abu Omar al-Muhajir» inciting the «Sons of Islam» to promulgate Sharia Law through force and by aligning with the Islamic state. The video concludes by depicting a group of Mujahedeen capturing a civilian, whom they label as a «spy of the Salibi (Christian) army». The Mujahedeen issue threats against their «Kuffar» enemies, affirm that their destiny will be met with death, emphasize the ascendancy of Allah's word and perpetuates a starkly adversarial Manichean worldview propagated by the Islamic State, characterized by an entrenched culture of violence, animosity, and enmity.

In a video entitled "And Allah will surely support those who support Him" the ISCAP depicts the importance of Jihad and al Bai'aah (oath of allegiance) by showcasing children.⁸⁶ Abu-Abderrahman-al Ughandi, a local leader of ISCAP, emphasizes the importance of al Bai'aah to the new Caliphate leader, "Abu-al-Hussain al-Korachi," which enables us to place the video's timeframe at the conclusion of 2019. The video's objective is to elucidate various verses from the Quran that address concepts such as al-Taghût, a term frequently employed by extremist preachers to depict "oppressive" leaders or political systems purportedly oppressing Muslims and attempting to supplant Allah's law with their own. According to Jihadist teachings, it is the duty of Muslims to resist and reject such systems, striving to overthrow them through jihad.

⁸⁵ "To you who have believed, shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment? It is that you believe in Allah and His Messenger and strive in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That is best for you, if you should know".

⁸⁶ Also spelled bay'ah or bay'at- is an Islamic term that refers to the act of pledging allegiance to a leader or ruler.

In a recent video entitled "The Jihad of the believers will stand on", Abu-Abderrahman-al Ughandi, also known as Abu-Abderrahman al-Muhajir, emphasizes the significance of Jihad in a Muslim's life, by portraying jihad as the fundamental means to support Islam and implement Sharia, and praising Allah for revealing the true path to grace. The speaker asserts that the only way to be a true Mujahid is by aligning oneself under the banner of the Khilafa state and the leadership of the Khalifa.

Similarly, in the video "Chronicles of Jihad," ISCAP's Al-Ughandi further expounds upon the term Kuffar, which he associates with Western armies including American, French, German and Congolese soldiers, whom he also characterizes as servants of "Shayt'an" (the devil) due to their oppression of Muslims. The presence of Taghût and Kuffar implies that the only means for Muslims in the region to regain their dignity is by pledging allegiance to the Islamic State and aligning themselves with their Jihadist project.

The video presented showcases the dissemination of Islamic knowledge by a particular group, along with its endeavor to educate local Muslim communities. Abu-Abderrahman-al Ughandi, the speaker, cites several verses from the Quran including verse 76 from Surat al-Niss'aa, verse 217 from Surat al-Baqarah, Verse 103 from Surat al-Imran and verse 36 from Surat al-Anfal. The interpretation and explanation of these verses aims to reinforce feelings of inferiority and oppression, while assigning blame to Western countries and local security and armed forces.

As he quotes verse 169 from Surat Al-Imran: "and never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision", the speaker glorifies martyrdom (al-Shahada). Finally, the speaker tries to persuade the audience that international counter-terrorism efforts are a part of a continued war against Islam, with similar adversaries, dating back to the origins of Islam, as he quotes verse 217 from Surat al-Baqarah: "and they will not stop fighting you until they turn you away from your faith."

In two written statements released in May 2022, rebel fighters employed typical jihadi rhetoric, expressing their intention to target "crusaders", an illustration of the aforementioned "foreign allies" of Congolese armed forces targeted by the ADF/ISCAP.⁸⁷ Within ADF/ISCAP narratives, "crusaders" encompass various groups, such as UN and Christian NGO staff, who are believed to be associated with a "foreign ideology/force" imposed upon Muslim communities. Churches have been particularly targeted in recent years by the ADF/ISCAP.⁸⁸ In January 2023, a

⁸⁷ "RD Congo: qui sont les rebelles ougandais ADF, liés à l'organisation Etat islamique ?", TV5 Monde, October 29, 2021.

⁸⁸ "Dans l'est de la RDC, les islamistes ADF multiplient les attaques meurtrières", Jeune Afrique, January 30, 2023.

bombing attack during a Sunday sermon in a Pentecost church in North Kivu killed 13 people and injured 60 others.⁸⁹

VII. Recruitment Patterns: A comparative Analysis of Minors and Adults

Recruitment by the ADF/ISCAP occur through both online and in person interactions. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram play a significant role in the recruitment efforts of ADF/ISCAP, particularly in areas where the population has regular internet access.⁹⁰ Online groups and key figures such as Meddie Nkalubo and Abwakasi are instrumental in spreading violent messaging and in fostering the participation of new members in ADF/ISCAP efforts.⁹¹

The regional and ideological perspectives of ADF/ISCAP recruitment campaigns are encapsulated in a statement attributed to one of its leaders: "Regardless of your current location, whether it be Burundi, Tanzania, or elsewhere, migrate and join the struggle in the name of Allah. Together, we can combat the prevailing polytheism propagated by the Infidels. Our movement, MTM, is the sole solution, and we remain undeterred by any threats."⁹²

The ADF/ISCAP is renowned for the ability of its recruiters.⁹³ Recruitment through in-person interactions is facilitated by recruitment specialists, who operate within or outside the group, and who are active throughout the Great Lakes region. A prominent example is Ghislaine Kavira Sikakulya, also known as Shengazi, a citizen of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. Shengazi was apprehended in Bunia in October 2021 and, in collaboration with ADF/ISCAP deputy commander Lukwago Rashid Swaibu Hood, alias "Mzee Meya Pierro," had established a regional recruitment network. Shengazi was responsible for securing routes for new recruits, particularly from Uganda.⁹⁴

Recruiters have reportedly enticed children and young individuals by making various false promises, such as securing employment and a salary, often in gold mines or small shops, or opportunities for religious training and potential future appointments as Imams.⁹⁵ For instance, a segment from a 2022 video named Chronicles of Jihad

⁸⁹ "Congo (RDC) : au moins 13 morts lors d'un attentat à la bombe dans une église", PortesOuvertes, 26 January 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.portesouvertes.fr/informer/actualite/congo-rdc-au-moins-13-morts-lors-d-un-attentat-a-la-bombe-dans-une-eglise>.

⁹⁰ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

⁹¹ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSCC, June 10, 2022.

⁹² Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

⁹³ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, journalists, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

⁹⁴ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSCC, June 10, 2022.

⁹⁵ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

produced by ISCAP showcases the active involvement of children in religious rituals and practices within the ADF/ISCAP ranks. This segment is deliberately circulated to promote the notion that children not only receive religious education but are also encouraged to participate in the group's activities upon joining.

Reportedly, significant recruitment campaigns are purportedly being carried out by operatives affiliated with the ADF/ISCAP within mosques and Quranic learning centers in Goma, Beni, and Bujumbura.⁹⁶ These locations not only serve as hubs for recruiting potential members⁹⁷ but also allegedly function as transit points for the transportation of funds, goods, and weapons by the ADF/ISCAP.⁹⁸

The recognition and standing of an armed group can either facilitate or impede its ability to attract new members. The ADF, through allegiance to the Islamic State and alignment with its ideology and agenda, have garnered increased notoriety within Salafist circles. This enhanced reputation has enabled the ADF/ISCAP to appeal to highly radicalized individuals seeking to join the Islamic State, presenting itself as a viable option alongside other provinces such as Mozambique, Somalia, and Libya.⁹⁹ However, it is crucial to note that a significant portion of the ADF/ISCAP's recruitment strategy relies on the abduction of individuals, including both children and adults regardless from gender.¹⁰⁰ Through forceful means, the ADF/ISCAP militants not only recruits but also endeavors to convert Christians to their cause.

It is imperative to acknowledge the implications of the escalating prominence, authority, and territorial reach of the ADF/ISCAP, as it will concurrently influence the patterns of recruitment. Within a severely impoverished region burdened by violence and the enduring repercussions of protracted warfare, the most prominent armed groups offer a means of survival and the potential for marginal improvement in exceedingly challenging living conditions. The decision to align oneself with the ADF/ISCAP often equates to immediate protection for both the individual and their family, regular access to sustenance, and the possibility of acquiring an education.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, affiliation with these groups provides an opportunity for the attainment of a higher social standing. Recent reports suggest that recruits frequently consist of acquaintances of existing members, who voluntarily join the ranks of the ADF/ISCAP.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSCC, June 10, 2022.

⁹⁷ In 2023, several reports of ADF/ISCAP fighters trained in Islamic State-connected mosques and Quranic centers in South Africa and in Zambia have been signaled.

⁹⁸ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Rapport final du Groupe d'experts conformément au paragraphe 4 de la résolution 2582 (2021), UNSCC, June 10, 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Phone interview with an international researcher specialized on the DRC, March 2023.

¹⁰¹ Interview with investigative journalist Elodie Toto based on information she collected from UN experts and from children who used to be a part of ADF/ISCAP, Dakar, 24 March 2023.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Finally, there seems to be a lack of discernible disparity in the nationality of children and adults and both groups exhibit a comparable geographical distribution. The primary source of recruits presently appears to be the Democratic Republic of the Congo (specifically Butembo, Boulango, Beni, and Goma), Tanzania (specifically Oubira), Burundi (specifically Bujumbura), Uganda, and, to a lesser extent, Kenya and South Africa.¹⁰³

However, differently from adults, children are oftentimes abducted by the ADF. This serves the ADF/ISCAP's long-term objective of bolstering their ranks and raising "perfect jihadists."¹⁰⁴ Propaganda videos targeting East African audiences showcase fighters hailing from various regions, utilizing languages such as Kiswahili, Luganda, Arabic, French, and Kinyarwanda dialects. The Ugandan authorities warn of a marked surge in child abductions and recruitment by ADF/ISCAP networks across all communities.¹⁰⁵ Once recruiters reach child recruitment targets set by the ADF/ISCAP, whether through abduction or other means, children are transferred to the DRC in small groups.¹⁰⁶

VIII. Child Indoctrination

ADF/ISCAP's propaganda purports that children may hold a position of relevance within the group's wider strategy. The manner in which ADF/ISCAP portrays children in its communication serves as a strong indication of the organization's ambitions regarding child recruitment and use, and further shed light on violence against children at the hands of the group.

It is crucial to recognize that children in ADF/ISCAP ranks are often abducted or forcefully recruited and subjected to severe mistreatment.¹⁰⁷ Children who experience violence or threats of violence are forced to comply with the demands and directives of ADF/ISCAP leaders in an effort to show their worth and advance to a higher status that would provide them with a form of protection from harm during association.¹⁰⁸

The ADF/ISCAP offer a resemblance of order to children and youth. Following its alignment with the Islamic State, the ADF/ISCAP has intensified its implementation of Sharia Law in its day-to-day operations and within its

¹⁰³ "RDC : l'armée annonce avoir perdu au moins 2.000 soldats depuis 2014 à Béni (est)", Radio Okapi, 6 August 2021, <https://www.radiookapi.net/2021/08/06/actualite/securite/rdc-larmee-annonce-avoir-perdu-au-moins-2000-soldats-depuis-2014-beni>.

¹⁰⁴ Phone interview with an international researcher specialized on the DRC, March 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with a Ugandan prosecutor, Kampala, 4 April 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with investigative journalist Elodie Toto based on information she collected from UN experts and from children who used to be a part of ADF/ISCAP, Dakar, 24 March 2023.

encampments, lauding the purported "moral order" it allegedly establishes.¹⁰⁹ Testimonies from former ADF/ISCAP captives indicate that stringent regulations govern their interactions, including the mandatory wearing of veils for women and girls, prayers, a prohibition of dancing and singing,¹¹⁰ and a requirement to call on Allah prior to engaging in military operations.¹¹¹ Acts such as adultery, verbal offenses and insults against Islam, corruption, and theft are vehemently condemned and met with violent retribution. In the event of even minor deviations, senior members of the ADF/ISCAP subject children to beatings, while other transgressions, such as theft or attempts to escape, may result in more severe punishments, oftentimes carried out by their peers.¹¹²

Based on the testimonies gathered for this study, while it appears that the indoctrination of children is not always conducted separately from adults,¹¹³ in Uganda, recruited children are frequently sent to specific locations before joining the ADF/ISCAP, where they are held in confinement and instructed dogma by an Imam or a Sheikh.¹¹⁴

Interviewees confirmed that the "school system for children",¹¹⁵ is typically managed by senior members of the group, frequently comprising charismatic foreign individuals with a background as Islamic scholars. These individuals, serving as police commissioners and Qadis, assume educational responsibilities within ADF/ISCAP and originate from various countries such as Uganda, South Africa, Burundi, and the Maniema province in the DRC. Nonetheless, the majority of ADF/ISCAP officers in charge of children's indoctrination within the ADF/ISCAP ranks appear to be Ugandans.¹¹⁶

Within this "school system", ISCAP/ADF leaders subject children to forceful coercion. Similarly to other Islamic State provinces, such as Mozambique, children are meticulously selected and retained according to their ability to endure violent training and harsh living conditions.¹¹⁷ Children who are deemed unfit to join ISCAP/ADF ranks are either abandoned or released.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁹ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹¹⁰ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

¹¹¹ "RD Congo : qui sont les rebelles ougandais ADF, liés à l'organisation Etat islamique ? ", TV5 Monde, 29 October 2021.

¹¹² Interview with a Ugandan prosecutor, Kampala, 4 April 2023.

¹¹³ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹¹⁴ Interview with a Ugandan prosecutor, Kampala, 4 April 2023.

¹¹⁵ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Interview with a Ugandan prosecutor, Kampala, 4 April 2023.

¹¹⁷ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, journalists and researchers based in DRC, Mozambique and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

IX. The Role of Children in ADF/ISCAP

According to estimations, children from tender age to adolescence, comprise a significant portion of ADF/ISCAP apparatus.¹¹⁹ Although their involvement involves camp maintenance,¹²⁰ boys and girls are also employed as spies and porters,¹²¹ and partake in military operations by tracking and identifying secure pathways for transit routes and offensive maneuvers.¹²² Children are dispatched to monitor and trail Congolese armed forces and/or local residents, observing their movement patterns and promptly relaying this information to the group prior to initiating an attack.¹²³ On occasion, children are abducted and, owing to their familiarity with a particular area, utilized solely as guides for a brief period in order to plan attacks against military installations and other targets.

The analysis of propaganda videos and photographs captured in an ADF/ISCAP camp reveals a deliberate portrayal of children engaged in military activities, including military demonstrations, training, and operations.¹²⁴ This is particularly evident in a video showcasing the Eringeti attacks in November 2015 and the Parkingi attacks in August 2017.¹²⁵ These videos are disseminated with the purpose of demonstrating to potential recruits that the ADF/ISCAP provides a supervised and inclusive environment for children.¹²⁶

The propaganda video titled "Chronicles of Jihad" exhibits certain segments aimed at manipulating the minds of young individuals and enticing them to join the ranks of the ADF/ISCAP for participation in military operations. These sequences depict children engaging in activities alongside adults, reciting the Quran, and brandishing the flag of the Islamic State. The intention behind these sequences is to instill in children the belief that by joining the ADF/ISCAP, they can gain empowerment, as the group is depicted as dynamic and capable of teaching them how to defend themselves and their relatives. Additionally, children are led to believe that they will be entrusted with responsibilities within the group.

In the initial segment of the video teenagers can be observed wearing combat uniforms and posing weapons before them. Subsequently, the video portrays four young children donning turbans, engaged in the act of reciting verse four from Surat Muhammad, a Surah recognized by Islamic traditional scholars as the "Surah of war",¹²⁷ while

¹¹⁹ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Interview conducted with a UN expert formerly based in Kivu, 3rd April 2023.

¹²² Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, journalists, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹²³ Interview conducted with a UN expert formerly based in Kivu, 3rd April 2023.

¹²⁴ UN Security Council, Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 December 2019.

¹²⁵ Interview conducted with a UN expert formerly based in Kivu, 3rd April 2023.

¹²⁶ Interview conducted with a UN expert formerly based in Kivu, 3rd April 2023.

¹²⁷ "So when you meet the unbelievers strike their necks, then, when you have killed many of them, tie the bonds" (Chronicles of Jihad min 00:57).

another sequence depicts a competition wherein children and adults partake in a rapid assembly and disassembly of weaponry. In the background, a chant is being sung in local language with clear mention of “Congo”, “Mujahedeen” and “Muhajereen”.

The video proceeds to depict children engaging in combat operations, emphasizing their military expertise and the caliber of their training. The involvement of children in military operations and propaganda materials is a matter of great concern, particularly due to its correlation with the escalating violence perpetrated by ADF/ISCAP in recent months. The presence of women and children has allegedly hindered the FARDC and MONUSCO military response while under ADF/ISCAP attacks.¹²⁸ In these scenarios, children are used as human shields to protect senior ADF/ISCAP fighters.¹²⁹ In addition, the agility of children and capacity to act without raising suspicion aligns with ADF/ISCAP asymmetric warfare techniques, such as the “touch and go”¹³⁰ adopted by the Islamic State since its defeat in Syria and Iraq.¹³¹

The propaganda disseminated by ADF/ISCAP highlights the prospective involvement of children in military operations. These children wear military clothing and are taught to recite Quranic verses frequently employed by the Islamic State, with the intention of promoting prejudice and aggression against individuals and social groups based on their beliefs and identities. This orchestrated arrangement is not a mere happenstance, as leaders within ISCAP engage in the indoctrination of children, instilling in them the belief that resorting to violent actions is the sole path to earn the favor of Allah. An interviewee indicates that: “They indoctrinate young children for years within their camps, who grow up with their ideology. These young men and women do believe now that the situation in the country needs to evolve in the radical direction their elders promote, it has become their fight for life.”¹³²

X. Gender Dynamics within ADF/ISCAP

Women play a significant role within the ADF/ISCAP apparatus and feature prominently in its propaganda in the role of combatants, preachers or tending the wounded.¹³³ Within the ADF, women are involved in diverse positions such as guards, cooks, teachers, nurses, messengers or in intelligence gathering operations.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Interview conducted by phone with a member of Congolese secret services specialized in the ADF/ISCAP, March 2023.

¹²⁹ Interviews conducted with law enforcement experts, journalists, former ADF members and researchers based in DRC and Uganda, February to April 2023.

¹³⁰ A few soldiers harassing soldiers and causing a recurrent number of small casualties.

¹³¹ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

¹³² Interview conducted by phone with a member of Congolese secret services specialized in the ADF/ISCAP, March 2023.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ This preference arises due to their discretion and efficiency as messengers compared to young boys, as well as their avoidance of telephonic communication.

It remains uncertain whether ADF/ISCAP, similar to other Islamic State provinces, possesses a specific strategy concerning the involvement of women and girls within their ranks. Nevertheless, it is exemplary of the group ideological stance and military purposes. The wives of high-ranking commanders enjoy privileges and may hold positions of relevance in the role of educators, medical professionals, and supervisors within women's camps. Women are often trained in weapon usage and accompany men into battle. Other women afford limited autonomy, undergo indoctrination, and are exploited for forced labor. Women and girls are also forcefully recruited, and in many instances abducted,¹³⁵ to care for recruited children and for the purposes of domestic and sexual violence and sexual exploitation. These victims of trafficking are forced to marry ADF/ISCAP fighters and to bear children, who are then dispatched to the DRC and enrolled in the group's ranks. In the context described, women were intentionally separated from their children on the grounds that the children did not rightfully belong to them but were instead considered possessions of the group.

At the bottom of ADF hierarchy are the bazana, a Luganda term denoting the mistress or wife of a prince.¹³⁶

XI. Conclusion

The ADF/ISCAP poses a rapidly emerging security threat in North-Eastern Congo and the wider region. While jihadist groups across Africa are generally perceived as having localized and regional focuses, they are not typically regarded as significant threats to Western security despite the ongoing expansion. These groups have exploited permissive security environments to widen their influence and may seek to expand operations. The ADF/ISCAP has already sought to present itself as an option for jihadist groups and financiers beyond the DRC and Uganda. It maintains direct communication with other IS affiliates, including those in Mozambique and Somalia, while receiving financial, logistical, and other forms of assistance from the broader IS network.

An increase in the rate of child recruitment and use at the hands of ADF/ISCAP has significant implications. It coincides with the group's adoption of a Salafi-jihadi ideological stance, methods, and purposes of territorial expansionism and poses serious threats to the safety and rights of children. The public designation of the ADF/ISCAP as a terrorist organization has inadvertently hindered the reintegration of children in their communities.¹³⁷ Irrespective of the circumstances surrounding a child's involvement with the ADF/ISCAP, communities and decision-makers tend to perceive them as a security threat, permanent members and supporters of the group.

¹³⁵ Inside the ADF, Bridgeway Foundation, November 2018, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Interview conducted with a UN expert formerly based in Kivu, 3rd April 2023.

This perception, exacerbated by the designation of ADF/ISCAP as a terrorist organization, has impeded opportunities for effective rehabilitation and reintegration. The lack of viable pathways for prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration of children exploited by ADF/ISCAP, in addition to experiences of marginalization and discrimination, may be further leveraged by ADF/ISCAP to advance its child recruitment and use scheme.

It is critical to recognize the need to prevent child abduction and other forms of child recruitment and use and violence against children by ADF/ISCAP, while also devising and implementing intervention measures that address the reintegration challenges faced by children. Failure to do so not only perpetuates cycles of violence but also reinforces ADF/ISCAP's expansion and capabilities, with far-reaching implications for the well-being of children, security and stability.

C R T G

C R T G W O R K I N G G R O U P

