

Boko Haram will talk up links to Islamic State, but joint activity is unlikely

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The audio message has been attributed to Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau.

In an audio message posted on social media, extremist group Boko Haram appears to have [pledged allegiance](#) to Islamic State.

Boko Haram has, in the past, been linked to al-Qaeda, the organisation from which IS itself emerged. But now it says it wants to join the battle to establish a caliphate and will obey those in charge in this endeavour.

This is not the first time an African extremist organisation has openly offered support for IS. In November 2014, pledges of allegiance came from militant groups in [Egypt, Libya](#) and [Algeria](#).

The move shows that Boko Haram has seen an opportunity to expand its reach further across Africa. It has already been increasing its propaganda support for IS in recent months so this would seem a logical next step.

But it is also a tactic that betrays recent troubles. Boko Haram has had to grapple with several severe pushbacks that have taken their toll on capacity and morale. In particular, [Niger and Chad](#) recently joined the military offensive against the group, bolstering the efforts of Nigeria and Cameroon.



Boko Haram camps have been hit by raids lately. EPA

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And despite [vicious attacks](#) in Nigeria, the group has largely fallen from the international spotlight since attention turned to IS over in Syria and Iraq. Joining forces refreshes the fear factor.

What's in it for IS?

IS doesn't have quite as much to gain from joining forces with Boko Haram though. It is useful for its own propaganda purposes, since every new group that gets on board brings further legitimacy to declarations from IS that it is establishing a [caliphate](#).

The group has been slowly but steadily expanding its forces in [Libya, Egypt and Algeria](#) of late. In Egypt, for example, local terrorist outfit [Ansar Beit al-Maqdis](#) has aligned itself to IS, becoming one of the largest militant bodies to pledge its loyalty outside the IS strongholds in Iraq and Syria.

And now Boko Haram has joined, IS has even more of a platform from which it can talk up its global mission. This is exactly the sort of propaganda that the group thrives upon.

But while Boko Haram might talk up the allegiance for maximum effect, joint terrorist activity is unlikely. The real concern is that more alliances mean more

safe havens for IS – which is a top worry for the countries fighting the group, particularly the US.

IS has, in the past, accepted the affiliations of other groups that have pledged allegiance without actually engaging with them in any direct way. But a deal with Boko Haram could provide it with the opportunity to set up training camps in Africa or space to regroup if major defeats are suffered in Syria and Iraq.

Fighting IS on two main fronts in Iraq and Syria has not gone as well as had been hoped so the idea of fighting it on three or more fronts would be an unappealing prospect for the west. So while the new terrorist partnership is not necessarily a sign of a new joint force emerging, it is not to be ignored by the West either.

That said, IS is focused on the task at hand in Syria and Iraq. Realistically Africa is not at the forefront of its global campaign at this stage.