

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

<b>Bilagsnr.:</b>	<b>822</b>
Land:	Nigeria
Kilde:	The New Humanitarian (TNH)
Titel:	Resurgent jihadist violence in northeast Nigeria part of a worrying regional trend
Udgivet:	2. juni 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	9. oktober 2025

Aid and Policy

Conflict

Environment and Disasters

Investigations

Migration

Home > West Africa > Nigeria

Conflict Analysis 2 June 2025

# Resurgent jihadist violence in northeast Nigeria part of a worrying regional trend

“They are feeding off shared grievances, limited state presence, and associated security vacuums – as well as gaps in regional security cooperation.”



Image from ISWAP's propaganda Telegram channel

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) fighters display their looted Nigerian military vehicles.



**Malik Samuel**

Senior researcher at Good Governance Africa



**Ed Stoddard**

Reader in International Security at the University of Portsmouth and an Affiliated Fellow at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa

[Republish this article](#)

ABUJA, Nigeria

**The so-called Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) insurgent group has launched its most successful military campaign to date in the Lake Chad Basin region, driving Nigeria's under-pressure military onto the backfoot.**

Throughout May, ISWAP raided a series of supposedly impenetrable army bases, forcing the military's withdrawal and the displacement of civilian communities –

some of whom had been **recently resettled** by the Borno State government following its closure of internally displaced persons camps in the capital, Maiduguri.

This renewed campaign highlights the major challenge increasingly posed by Islamic State and al-Qaeda-linked extremist groups across West Africa: Insurgents who are now better equipped and utilising new innovative tactics.



**The New  
Humanitarian**

## A renewed wave of attacks

Under the campaign name “holocaust of the camps”, ISWAP launched its latest offensive around the turn of the year. Operations have been growing in strength since.

In January, **ISWAP overran** an army base in Mallam Fatori near the Niger border, seizing weapons and killing the commanding officer. Events started to accelerate in March, **especially in southern Borno**, with attacks in Wajiroko, Kumshe, and Katafila, among others.

On 2 May, for example, ISWAP fighters **attacked the Buni Gari** military camp near Buni Yadi, ousting the security forces, torching the base and capturing weapons. The base is home to the army’s 27 Task Force Brigade, a key pillar of the army’s “Operation Hadin Kai” counter-terrorism effort in the northeast.

Perhaps the most notable set of recent attacks came on 12 May and 13 May when ISWAP launched coordinated strikes against the towns of **Marte, Dikwa, and Rann** in eastern Borno.

This commenced with a nighttime assault against Marte on 12 May, forcing the military to withdraw to Dikwa, which was itself attacked – albeit unsuccessfully – the following day.

The raids left the group temporarily in **de facto control** of Marte district – an important location given its proximity to **strategic smuggling routes** to the Lake Chad region, where ISWAP has its headquarters.

On 13 May, ISWAP also set off an **improvised explosive device (IED) near the town of Damboa** in western Borno. That presaged a coordinated assault on 22 May on a Forward Operating Base (FOB) held by 19 Brigade outside Damboa.

The attack was repelled following the timely intervention of air support, averting the overrunning of the base. According to military sources, the primary objective of the assault was 19 Brigade itself, considered one of the largest and most strategically significant formations in the entire northeast.

## **ISWAP evolves and expands**

While the **jihadist** threat in the Lake Chad Basin is often labelled as “Boko Haram”, the groups in question have been quite distinct since 2016, when a faction led by Mamman Nur and Habib Yusef **broke away** from the wider “Boko Haram” movement headed at the time by Abubakar Shekau.

ISWAP set itself apart from the rest of “Boko Haram” – known officially as Jama’tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (JAS) – by pursuing an alternative strategy. It primarily targeted military forces, adopting a **less extreme stance** towards Muslim civilians, and established a more regimented, governance-oriented administration able to control and **profit from economic resources** in the Lake Chad area.

This approach, combined with support from the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, helped ISWAP eclipse Shekau’s group. In 2021, it invaded Shekau’s headquarters in Sambisa Forest, prompting him to detonate a suicide vest to avoid capture. ISWAP went on to seize much of the territory that had been under his control.

Nevertheless, in recent years, ISWAP had seemed to be struggling. More effective military operations overseen by the five-nation Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Nigerian army, plus a Borno state-led counter-insurgency strategy that includes a large-scale **amnesty programme**, had put pressure on the group.

At the same time, ISWAP also **faced resistance** from both remnants of JAS dispersed in central and southern Borno, and a group in the northern part of Lake

Chad under a new overall leader, **Bakura Doro**.

As ISWAP's insurgency seemed to fade, it began to reprioritise guerrilla-style attacks – especially using IEDs – and became more **violent towards civilians**, typically fearing espionage and harshly punishing any perceived collaboration with the authorities.

## **ISWAP resurgent**

However, ISWAP has turned its fortunes around in recent months and is now enjoying the most successful period in its history.

The group has successfully overrun 15 military bases so far this year – with one being sacked twice. This eclipses in intensity and ambition their previously most-successful campaign against the Nigerian and partner militaries from 2018 to 2020.

The group has consolidated and overcome the threat of the original JAS group and – directed to expand by the Islamic State – has grown in geographical scope. ISWAP now has the ability to attack any location across the state, including garrison towns, and militarily has become Islamic State's most potent franchise.

For some time, security analysts wondered if this expansion strategy had stretched ISWAP too thinly, weakening the group and contributing to a decline in influence. However, the operations since the beginning of the year seem to suggest that the plan, while taking time, has borne fruit.

ISWAP has also undertaken a significant reorganisation, restructuring itself into three primary qilayat (provinces), namely Buhaira (covering the fringes of Lake Chad), Faruq (southern Borno, southern Yobe and northern Adamawa states), and Krenowa (encompassing parts of northern and central Borno).

This has also allowed the group to expand attacks into the bordering Far North region of Cameroon, and into Nigeria's northern Adamawa state, where it has historically had less presence. The recent spate of attacks are thus a marked difference from the campaigns of 2018 to 2020, which were principally confined to Borno's north.

## **New tactics and new tech**

A key distinction between ISWAP's 2018 to 2020 campaign and the recent escalation has been the use of new tactics and new technologies.

ISWAP has demonstrated the ability to launch near-simultaneous attacks on disparate sites – the Marte/Dikwa/Rann attacks being the prime example. The group also seems to be conducting **more night attacks** – which suggests night-

vision equipment – and relying more on motorbikes for better mobility. They have also developed a significant drone ability – which are now increasingly armed.

This wider strategy is also the result of growing expertise and support from the Islamic State. Sources with knowledge of ISWAP's operations say **ISIS instructors** were in Lake Chad in 2024 – and are still present in frontline combat roles.

At least two of them appeared in a December 2024 propaganda video entitled “Empowerment generation 2” – infamous for demonstrating children **undergoing combat training** and executing captives.

ISWAP has used drones for reconnaissance and propaganda for many years, but armed drones are a worrying innovation. Common in Iraq and Syria during the Islamic State's high point – and also used now by other groups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger – armed drones are cheap commercially-available weapons that can be used to fly explosives directly into targets.

After undergoing years of **trial and error**, ISWAP appeared to have developed the operational expertise to employ them effectively by the end of 2024.

## **A local example of a wider problem**

These dynamics highlight the wider insecurity situation in the West Africa region.

In the Sahel, the al-Qaeda-linked Jamaat Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) group has expanded significantly beyond its main area of operations in central Mali. It has launched waves of attacks across southern Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Benin, and **reportedly even into western Nigeria**.

At the same time, ISWAP's sister group, the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), continues to hold significant influence in western Mali and southwestern Niger, with an offshoot – **commonly referred to as Lakurawa** – operating in Nigeria's northwest. Habib Yusef, one of the founders of ISWAP, is believed to sit on the governing council of Islamic State, and has been promoted to overall commander of both ISWAP and ISSP.

These developments underscore the increasingly interconnected, cross-border nature of West African jihadist groups. They are feeding off shared grievances, limited state presence, and associated security vacuums – as well as gaps in regional security cooperation.

ISWAP's resurgence in Nigeria, therefore, cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, it represents a worrying part of a broader trend of regional insurgency that increasingly challenges state authority across West Africa.

Share this article



## Related stories



**Aid and Policy** News feature 1 May 2025

### As Boko Haram threat grows, USAID cuts cripple the economy and the response



**Conflict** News feature 23 April 2024

### In northeast Nigeria, those who fled conflict are being returned to conflict



**Solutions and Innovations** Photo feature 23 January 2024

### Money clubs help displaced Nigerians create their own safety nets



**Conflict** News feature 3 July 2023

### Living trapped between Boko Haram and Nigeria's military



**Conflict** Investigations 3 July 2023

**EXCLUSIVE | 'They just shoot and burn': Civilians targeted in Nigeria's war on Boko Haram**

**Our ability to deliver compelling, field-based reporting on humanitarian crises rests on a few key principles: deep expertise, an unwavering commitment to amplifying affected voices, and a belief in the power of independent journalism to drive real change.**

We need your help to sustain and expand our work. Your donation will support our unique approach to journalism, helping fund everything from field-based investigations to the innovative storytelling that ensures marginalised voices are heard.

Please consider [joining our membership programme](#). Together, we can continue to make a meaningful impact on how the world responds to crises.

## Get the latest humanitarian news, direct to your inbox

Sign up to receive our original, on-the-ground coverage that informs policymakers, practitioners, donors, and others who want to make the world more humane.

[Sign up](#)

## Become a member of The New Humanitarian

[Join](#)

Support our journalism and become more involved in our community. Help us deliver informative, accessible, independent journalism that you can trust and provides accountability to the millions of people affected by crises worldwide.

### Journalism from the heart of crises

- [About us](#)
- [Careers](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Pitch us a story](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Syndication](#)

**The New  
Humanitarian** |



© All rights reserved 2025