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Organizations and Networks in Conflict

ONC-006 - Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

Official / Primary Name: Islamic State West Africa Province

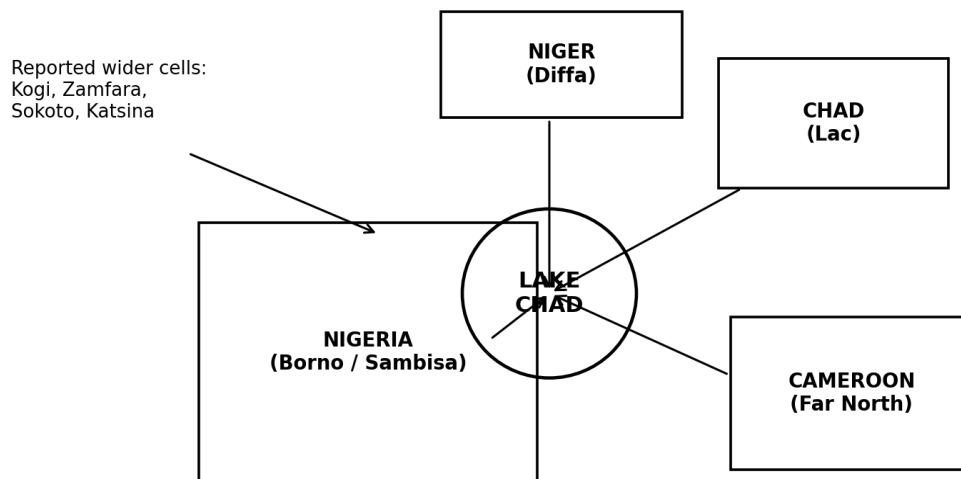
Common Names: ISWAP, ISIS-WA, ISIL-WA

Primary Area: Northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, with activity extending into Cameroon, Niger, and Chad

Updated: 30 September 2026

ATLAS profiles in this series are living intelligence documents. Facts, reported claims, and assessments are separated where possible; the concluding assessment states the analytic judgment and confidence.

ONC-006 - Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) Lake Chad operating environment



Schematic analytic map - not a tactical-control graphic.

Figure 1. Schematic locator map showing ISWAP's Lake Chad operating environment and selected wider cells. It is not a tactical-control map.

Key capabilities: Ground raids and base overruns; taxation and trade regulation; local administration; drone reconnaissance and attack; fishing and livestock revenue; Islamic State network support.

ENTITY

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) is the principal Islamic State affiliate operating in the Lake Chad Basin.

Its organizational roots lie in Boko Haram. In March 2015, Abubakar Shekau's Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad pledged allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Islamic State accepted the pledge and recognized a West Africa Province.

Internal disputes subsequently divided the movement. Islamic State supported Abu Musab al-Barnawi against Shekau, producing the organization now generally identified as ISWAP, while Shekau's faction continued separately as Boko Haram/JAS.

The distinction matters. ISWAP developed a more structured military, administrative, financial, media, taxation, and territorial system than a purely raiding insurgency. It combines armed violence with coercive taxation, local regulation, intelligence collection, control of trade and movement, and selective provision of services.

United Nations reporting in 2026 assessed that ISWAP's prominence within the broader Islamic State network had increased as other branches came under pressure and as ISWAP intensified operations across the Lake Chad Basin.

ACTIONS

ISWAP conducts attacks against military bases, patrols, security installations, local government representatives, rival armed groups, civilians, and economic targets.

United Nations reporting in 2026 recorded more than 500 attacks attributed to ISWAP during the relevant reporting period. The organization also increased its use of drones, including seven reported drone attacks compared with one in 2024.

This trend suggests growing operational sophistication rather than simple persistence.

ISWAP intensified attacks against Nigerian security positions in Borno State while also conducting violence, intimidation, taxation, and extortion in Cameroon's Far North Region, Niger's Diffa Region, and Chad's Lac Province.

United Nations reporting also identified active ISWAP cells outside its traditional northeastern Nigerian base, including in Kogi, Zamfara, Sokoto, and Katsina States.

The organization strengthened positions in central and southern Borno and elevated Sambisa to wilayah status under a wali. This suggests an effort to institutionalize local control rather than merely conduct temporary raids.

In May 2026, a joint U.S.-Nigerian operation killed Abu Bilal al-Minuki, a senior Islamic State figure associated with both ISWAP and the wider Islamic State leadership. His death removed an important link between the Lake Chad branch and the movement's central provincial-management structure.

WHERE

Northeastern Nigeria. Borno State remains ISWAP's principal operating area. The organization maintains camps, logistics nodes, command structures, taxation networks, and fighting positions around Lake Chad and deeper into central and southern Borno.

Lake Chad Basin. ISWAP operates across northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon's Far North Region, Niger's Diffa Region, and Chad's Lac Province. Islands, marshes, seasonal waterways, porous borders, fishing routes, livestock movement, and uneven state presence complicate surveillance and sustained military control.

Wider Nigeria. Active ISWAP cells have been reported outside the organization's traditional northeastern base. These cells do not necessarily indicate territorial control, but they do demonstrate wider recruitment, facilitation, finance, intelligence, or attack networks.

ACTORS

Ba'a Shuwa / Abu Musa al-Mangawi. United Nations reporting in early 2026 identified Ba'a Shuwa, also known as Abu Musa al-Mangawi, as ISWAP's current leader. Because ISWAP leadership is clandestine and reporting is frequently delayed or contradictory, ATLAS treats leadership assignments as subject to continuing confirmation.

Abu Musab al-Barnawi. Al-Barnawi was the central figure in ISWAP's separation from Shekau's Boko Haram faction. Reporting on his status remains inconsistent. Some Member States reported his death in 2023, while others assessed that he remained alive and involved in media operations or coordination among Islamic State affiliates.

Abu Bilal al-Minuki. Al-Minuki headed the Islamic State's al-Furqan office and was reported by UN Member States to have risen into senior Islamic State leadership. He was killed in May 2026 in a joint U.S.-Nigerian operation in Borno State. U.S. authorities described him as the Islamic State's second-ranking official.

Shura and regional command. ISWAP maintains a consultative and command structure involving a shura, regional commanders, military emirs, tax collectors, intelligence personnel, media staff, logistics facilitators, and local administrators.

CAPABILITIES

Ground forces. ISWAP fields organized small units capable of raids, ambushes, assaults on military positions, overrunning bases, capturing weapons, and holding selected terrain.

Drones. Drone use is becoming increasingly important. The increase in reported drone attacks indicates growing experience in reconnaissance, targeting, propaganda, and low-cost strike operations.

Territorial and administrative control. In areas where state authority is weak, ISWAP imposes taxes, regulates fishing and trade, controls movement, provides dispute resolution, collects intelligence, and maintains coercive local administration.

Finance. ISWAP finances itself through taxation, extortion, livestock, fishing, trade, kidnapping, confiscation, local commerce, and external financial networks. U.S. Treasury action in June 2026 targeted a Nigeria-based facilitator and bureau-de-change companies accused of moving money for ISIS-West Africa.

Propaganda and network support. ISWAP has become one of the Islamic State movement's more prolific propaganda producers. Reporting indicates that its al-Furqan-linked structures have provided media or organizational support to Islamic State branches elsewhere in Africa.

GOALS

Build and preserve territorial influence. ISWAP seeks to weaken state authority and establish durable control over communities, trade routes, economic activity, and rural territory.

Defeat or absorb rival armed groups. Competition with Boko Haram/JAS remains significant, with periods of tactical accommodation alternating with violent clashes over fighters, territory, revenue, and legitimacy.

Weaken regional security forces. Military bases, patrols, local security units, and multinational forces remain priority targets.

Support the wider Islamic State network. ISWAP increasingly performs functions beyond its immediate theater, including propaganda production, finance, coordination, and support to other African Islamic State affiliates.

ATLAS ASSESSMENT

ISWAP in September 2026 is one of the most strategically important Islamic State affiliates in Africa.

Its significance is not measured simply by attack volume.

ATLAS assesses that ISWAP's principal strength is the combination of **armed capability, territorial persistence, local revenue extraction, and network function**.

Unlike an organization dependent mainly on spectacular attacks, ISWAP has developed a system capable of sustaining itself through taxation, trade regulation, population control, cross-border mobility, and dispersed military infrastructure.

This makes ISWAP increasingly resemble a **territorial-financial insurgent system** rather than a conventional terrorist network operating from isolated cells.

The organization's high attack tempo and expanding drone use demonstrate sustained military capability. Its reinforcement of positions in Borno and the elevation of Sambisa to wilayah status suggest continued efforts to institutionalize control rather than simply survive counterterrorism pressure.

The death of Abu Bilal al-Minuki was important but does not represent organizational decapitation. His rise into Islamic State central leadership demonstrated how influential ISWAP had become. His removal may disrupt coordination temporarily, but the organizational structures that produced and supported him remain.

ISWAP's relationship with local populations is also strategically important. The organization combines coercion with selective regulation and economic accommodation. Where government security is intermittent, absent, or viewed locally as predatory, ISWAP can position itself as an alternative authority while continuing to rely on violence and intimidation.

The principal warning indicator is whether ISWAP moves from **persistent rural influence toward durable territorial administration across larger portions of Borno and the Lake Chad Basin**.

A second indicator is technological. Sustained expansion of drone reconnaissance and attack operations would improve battlefield awareness and increase the cost of counterinsurgency.

A third indicator is organizational. If ISWAP increasingly provides finance, propaganda, training, leadership, or coordination to other Islamic State branches, its role may evolve from regional province to one of the principal institutional centers of the wider movement.

ATLAS therefore assesses ISWAP as both a **Lake Chad insurgent organization and an increasingly important institutional node within the global Islamic State system**.

CONFIDENCE

OVERALL CONFIDENCE: HIGH

High confidence that ISWAP retains substantial military, financial, administrative, and territorial capabilities in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin.

High confidence that ISWAP increased operational activity and expanded drone use during the latest reporting period.

High confidence that the organization remains integrated into the wider Islamic State financial, propaganda, and organizational network.

Moderate-to-high confidence that Ba'a Shuwa / Abu Musa al-Mangawi remains the current senior ISWAP leader.

Moderate confidence regarding the current status and role of Abu Musab al-Barnawi because Member State reporting remains contradictory.

Moderate confidence regarding total fighter strength. Published estimates may include support personnel, auxiliaries, and fighters of differing readiness.

Moderate confidence regarding the durability of recent territorial gains. Control in the Lake Chad Basin can vary significantly by location, time of day, and proximity to major security-force positions.

Collection Priorities

- Confirmation of Ba'a Shuwa / Abu Musa al-Mangawi's status and authority.
- Current status and role of Abu Musab al-Barnawi.
- Leadership succession following the death of Abu Bilal al-Minuki.
- Current shura composition and regional command structure.
- Fighter strength and recruitment rates.
- Territorial control and taxation zones in Borno State.
- Status and function of Sambisa as an ISWAP wilayah.
- Expansion beyond the Lake Chad Basin into northwestern and central Nigeria.
- Drone inventories, operators, training, and attack frequency.
- Captured or locally manufactured weapons.
- Fishing, livestock, trade, and taxation revenue.
- Bureau-de-change, hawala, cash, and external financing networks.
- Relationships with Boko Haram/JAS factions.
- Support to Islamic State Sahel and other African affiliates.
- Propaganda-production capacity.
- Evidence that ISWAP is assuming wider command or coordination functions within the Islamic State network.
- Effectiveness of Nigerian and Multinational Joint Task Force operations.
- Civilian displacement and the durability of ISWAP local governance structures.

SELECTED OPEN-SOURCE REFERENCES

1. United Nations Security Council, Monitoring Team reporting on Islamic State West Africa Province and Lake Chad Basin activity, 2026.
2. United Nations Security Council, reporting on ISWAP leadership, Sambisa wilayah status, and wider Nigerian cells, 2026.
3. U.S. Department of the Treasury, June 2026 sanctions targeting ISIS-West Africa financial facilitators and bureau-de-change companies.
4. Reuters, May 2026, joint U.S.-Nigerian operation killing Abu Bilal al-Minuki.
5. United Nations reporting on Islamic State propaganda and support structures in Africa, 2026.

Analytic note: ATLAS uses open-source information only. Where evidence is incomplete, contested, or rapidly changing, the profile distinguishes reported information from ATLAS assessment and states the level of confidence.