



ISIS WEST AFRICA AFFILIAT'ES CAMPAIGN OF TERROR IN NIGERIA

20/5/21, Casa África/online

Murtala Abdullahi, reportero y analista de HumanAngle

In April, thousands of women, children and male adults were forced to flee their homes and communities in northeastern Nigeria following persistent raids by the jihadist group, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

ISWAP, one of the most active jihadist groups in sub-Saharan Africa and the Islamic State's affiliate outside of the middle east, is a splinter faction of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) also known as Boko Haram, which means "Western education is forbidden" in the local Hausa language.

Boko Haram under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau unleashed a violent insurgency and terror campaign after an uprising in 2009 that led to the death of members and the founder, Muhammad Yusuf, as well as the killing of unarmed civilians.

In 2014, Boko Haram drew global attention after the mass abduction of schoolgirls from their dormitory in Chibok, a town in the southern region of Borno state. Over a hundred girls have so far regained freedom while many others are still unaccounted for.

The group became an ISIS province after Shekau pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2015. However, internal differences and dissent partly based on doctrine influenced the breakaway in 2016, with Abu Musab al-Barnawi (Habib Yusuf), a son of Boko Haram's founder Mohammed Yusuf, taking the reins as the splinter group's leader.

ISWAP's rise to dominance in Lake Chad Basin

Over the past few years, ISWAP has turned into the most deadly and dominant jihadist group in the Lake Chad Basin. The group has sought to build relations with local Muslim civilians unlike the older Boko Haram faction while at the same time using brutal force against Muslims with or perceived to have links to the government, security forces and aid organisations. It has in the past accused aid workers of spying for foreign governments and spreading blasphemous beliefs.



Four years after the Chibok kidnapping, another mass abduction of school girls took place in the town of Dapchi, also in northeast Nigeria. But this time the culprits were ISWAP fighters. The group later on freed 107 of the young victims but five were reported to have tragically died and another girl, Leah Sharibu, remains in captivity till today.

The Nigerian military and other national forces of the regional military outfit, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), have adopted counterinsurgency strategies and conducted several offensives against both ISWAP and Boko Haram in an attempt to crush the insurgency and restore peace.

These military campaigns have yielded results including the decimation of Boko Haram’s military capacity and recapturing of territories formerly under the control of insurgents. In some instances, the government has even encouraged the return of civilians back to their home communities.

But lasting victory is not within easy reach yet. Boko Haram and ISWAP have carried out attacks in recent months in spite of military successes and a significant offensive by the Nigerian military in the first quarter of 2020 targeting the groups’ enclaves in Borno and neighbouring Yobe State.

Boko Haram on May 11 launched a daring attack on Maiduguri which was quickly subdued by security forces. This was two months after the deadliest attack on the state capital during which its fighters indiscriminately fired volleys of mortars and fabricated rockets leading to the death of at least 16 civilians including children who were playing in a field.

Also, ISWAP raids in recent months targeting aid facilities, military bases and relatively fortified garrison towns have led to the displacement of residents as well as the disruption of badly needed humanitarian interventions.

The violence plaguing the region is estimated to have already caused more than 37,000 deaths, displaced about 2.5 million people, and left over seven million in need of humanitarian assistance.

According to the United Nations, the region would require \$1 billion in funding this year to respond to humanitarian needs, a \$200 million increase from the \$839 million required in 2020.



Responding to resurgence of jihadist violence

The renewed fighting, setbacks and deteriorating humanitarian crises underscore the complex and multidimensional nature of the problem confronting Nigeria and the region.

As such, stabilisation and security interventions in the Lake Chad Basin will require a combination of an effective military campaign, counter-terrorism measures and developmental interventions to address socio-economic fragility and improve the state's presence and perception in communities.

"By filling gaps in governance and service delivery, it (ISWAP) has cultivated a level of support among local civilians that Boko Haram never enjoyed and has turned neglected communities in the area and islands in Lake Chad into a source of economic support," said Brussels-based International Crisis Group in a report published in 2019.

Nigeria's super camp strategy, introduced in response to the dislodging of smaller military bases in the hinterlands between 2018 and 2019, alongside an earlier civilian version of forming garrison towns are largely blamed for facilitating ISWAP's inroads in the hinterlands and exploitation of resources as well as the local population.

Improvements in governance and non-military campaigns will significantly boost efforts to counter extremism in the hinterlands and weaken ISWAP's position as the lead provider of basic social services. Such an approach will also curtail recruitments and reduce the terror group's access to resources needed to prolong the conflict.

While humanitarian actors seek more funding and assistance to sustain aid operations, it is also paramount to work towards creating safe corridors for aid supplies and a conducive environment for workers supporting displaced and vulnerable populations.

At the same time, locals need assistance to adapt to the impact of erratic climatic conditions on livelihoods and lack of access to resources like land and water due to security restrictions and safety concerns.

Robust international support from critical partners like the European Union (EU) is essential for building the effectiveness of the MNJTF and non-offensive actions, which when combined can better tackle the threat posed by jihadist groups in the Lake Chad Basin and beyond.



Jornadas de Seguridad #ÁfricaEsNoticia:
CICLO DE 4 WEBINARIOS SOBRE EL SAHEL Y ÁFRICA OCCIDENTAL
 6, 13, 20 y 27/5/21, Casa África/online



The EU is expected to overhaul the financing mechanism for peace and security efforts in Africa through the adoption of a flexible arrangement that involves directly supporting national and sub-regional military initiatives like the MNJTF. This will provide opportunities for greater oversight and direct participation of the intergovernmental body in monitoring and shaping the use of security assistance, particularly the integration of development and human rights.

The ability of the regional and national governments to crush the jihadists threat and underlying factors would have a profound impact on the security of Sahel.



Murtala Abdullahi is a reporter and analyst for Humangle Media. She writes on climate, human security, military operations and conflict trends in Nigeria and Lake Chad. Abdullahi has contributed to publications and think tank reports on climate change and human security risks and dynamics.