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MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

BOKO HARAM
MAPPING AN EVOLVING ARMED CONSTELLATION

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Abbreviations

AQIM	Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
ISSP	Islamic State Sahel Province
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JASDJ[1]	Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād

Background

About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably without falling back into conflict cycles? These questions are at the core of UNIDIR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. The MEAC project benefits from generous support by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO); Global Affairs Canada (GAC); the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA); and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs; UNICEF; and is run in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM); the UN Development Programme (UNDP); UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO); the World Bank; and United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR). MEAC also benefits from a partnership with and support from OCHA in Nigeria, where the project is contributing to a stakeholder mapping.

[1] Often referred to as JAS in other MEAC publications.

About the Author

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About This Report

Even though the armed group generally designated as Boko Haram first came out in the open fifteen years ago with the July 2009 uprising in Maiduguri, it continues to be mysterious. Actual field research on the group remains a rarity, despite that it has been possible for several years to interview former associates in all four Lake Chad countries, as well as civilians who have had a direct experience with Boko Haram. Yet, so little is known about Boko Haram that conspiracy theories still abound. Even the designation of the movement is problematic: *Boko Haram* is a nickname given by critics to mock the doctrine of Mohamed Yusuf, the group's founder, and his criticism of Western education. The group was often designated as *Yusufiyya* before 2009. It adopted the *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād* (JASDJ) name after 2009, and then, in 2015, it took the designation of *Wilāyat Gharb Ifrīqīyā* or the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) when its leader, Abubakar Shekau, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). ISWAP split into two factions in 2016, with Shekau reverting to the JASDJ designation. There have thus been two different Boko Haram factions since 2016 with significantly different modus operandi, a fact that is sometimes not reflected in some of the commentaries until today.

This report attempts to "map" Boko Haram in the northeast of Nigeria – distinguishing the two main factions and their respective components, specifying their geographical deployment, describing their organization and governance, and identifying their main leaders. The report is based on interviews with former associates of JASDJ and ISWAP carried out over the last few years. Additional interviews were conducted with two dozen defectors who had very recently come out of either faction (from ten days to a month ago) during fieldwork in Maiduguri (May-

June 2024) and over the phone (July 2024). The description of the two factions in the North East of Nigeria represents what was known about them as of early July 2024 on the basis of these interviews. While some leaders may have been replaced or may have died since there is a certain stability to the organizational structure and the territorial presence of the two factions (after a period of flux in 2021-2023 described herein). Even though much remains to be learned about the groups, this mapping will hopefully help start addressing the enduring knowledge gap about the different Boko Haram factions. At the very least, it will provide a source for others to build on and add to as more information becomes available. By contributing to a better understanding of the history, leadership dynamics, and governance of the Boko Haram factions, the mapping may be useful to policy makers and practitioners in the region involved in conflict mitigation and peacemaking efforts to finally break through the cycle of conflict.

The first part of the report proposes a brief history of Boko Haram, describing its various transformations and notably its factionalisation, to shed some light on the fundamental dynamics driving its current development. The second part attempts to propose a description of Boko Haram's two factions, their geography, leadership, and organization.[2]

[2] While Ansaru, a dissident faction that appeared in 2011-2012 is discussed briefly in the first section, it is not analysed in the second section, as it has no presence in the North East of Nigeria.

Boko Haram: A History of Factionalism

Setting the Stage: Native Factionalism in the North East of Nigeria

In the early 2000s, a group of Salafi hardliners from Maiduguri, led by a young activist called Muhammad Ali, decided to break from the perceived corrupt life of the town and the Salafi establishment which they deemed compromised by collaboration with the state authorities. Unhappy with what they saw as a lack of commitment to the proper interpretation of Islam among the established scholars, Ali connected with Mohammed Yusuf, a popular preacher and activist who would eventually become notorious as the founder of Boko Haram. At the end of 2003, after a few years of working together, Ali and Yusuf parted ways over ideological differences. Several dozen of Ali's followers did their "hijra" and left Maiduguri to resettle in rural Yobe State, where they created a small commune near Tarmowa and then near Kanamma.[3] Although attracted to the ideology of Al-Qaida and the idea of jihad, the short-lived group had limited connections to the Al-Qaida network and was not initially violent. While peaceful, they wanted to separate from the broader society in order to create what they saw as a proper Islamic community. They eventually drew attention from and clashed with, the security forces, which dispersed them. Ali himself was killed soon after. Among those who survived the crackdown, some reaffiliated with Mohammed Yusuf, some dropped their activism altogether, and a few established low-intensity links to Al-Qaida-connected Algerian jihadis active in the Sahel, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, which became Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007.

Meanwhile, Yusuf was organizing followers throughout the North East of Nigeria and in the neighbouring border areas of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. He adopted increasingly harsh doctrinal principles and denounced the Nigerian state more explicitly, playing into the social, economic, political, and generational frustrations of his followers. Insiders are clear that Yusuf saw jihad as a horizon, but for a long time, he did not discuss this publicly. He maintained an explicit critique of the Nigerian State and its elites, and the Western type of education which had formed these elites. He and his followers had repeated run-ins with the State in the 2000s, and Yusuf was called in several times by the security services for "interviews." On the streets of

[3] In the Islamic tradition, the term "hijra" refers to Muhammad's exile from Mecca, where he was not well-accepted, to Medina, where he was able to develop a community of believers. This episode stands as a powerful precedent for Muslims who decide to remove themselves from a society deemed irreligious.

Maiduguri, Yusuf's followers and the police clashed on a few occasions. The situation escalated in 2009, with Yusuf mobilizing hundreds of his followers, procuring a few automatic weapons in Chad, organizing training, and having teams prepare basic explosives as part of a plan for an uprising across several localities. The resulting uprising eventually focused mostly on Maiduguri, and it was brutally repressed. Yusuf himself was arrested and executed by the police while in custody.

Avenging 2009: Revival and Division under Shekau

After the brutal repression of the 2009 uprising, Yusufiyya members dispersed, leaving Maiduguri to find refuge in secondary towns or in the border areas of neighbouring Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Some Nigerian militants connected to AQIM stepped in, hoping to take control of the Yusufiyya movement. They evacuated Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's putative heir, who had been wounded in the uprising, bringing him to Kano for treatment. The movement progressively reorganized, adopting the designation Jama'at Ahl al Sunna li Da'wa wal Jihad (JASDJ).[4] Under Shekau, who took the title of *imam* of JASDJ, it engaged in a campaign of targeted killings against state and religious elites deemed hostile to the group's objectives, and of attacks against Christian communities. JASDJ began financing itself through racketeering.

What started as targeted attacks soon became more and more indiscriminate. This aggravated tensions between Shekau and the AQIM-connected Nigerian militants who had stepped in after Yusuf's death. Eventually, most of the latter, in consultation with AQIM, seceded and created their own organization, Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (the Group of Defenders of Muslims in the Lands of the Blacks), generally referred to as Ansaru. Ansaru, which has operated outside of the North East of Nigeria, has never attained the weight of JASDJ. Several of its top leaders have been killed or arrested over the years, and a number of its members have gone back to JASDJ or, eventually, to the other and later established Northeastern jihadi faction, ISWAP.

Ansaru's split did not stop the ascent of JASDJ, which began to develop a territorial presence in rural enclaves in Borno State, notably on some islands of Lake Chad and in the Sambisa Forest.[5] At some point, Shekau himself left Kano State to rebase in Damaturu town (Yobe State), closer to Borno State. Later, he resettled in the Sambisa Forest. From 2013 onwards, as the Nigerian security services intensified repression against suspected JASDJ associates in

[4] That designation was very probably inspired by that of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), whose name in Arabic was Jama'at es-Salafiyya li Da'wa wal Qital. In the Nigerian context, the Salafiyya refers to the moderates that Boko Haram was reacting to, and "jihad" was more understandable that the Arabic word "Qital", which means fight."

[5] Beyond the official Sambisa Forest reserve per se, this designates a much larger area of forested savannah laying to the south of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State.

urban centres, including by encouraging the formation of militia units, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), Shekau ordered his followers to gather in rural enclaves like the Sambisa and the shores and islands of Lake Chad. From there, JASDJ began to launch large-scale attacks on secondary towns in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.

Under the Islamic State's Flag: Pledge and Secession

In 2014, online contacts were established between JASDJ and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), then on the ascent in the Levant. Eventually, a small team of ISIL advisers came to meet Shekau. During a stay that lasted several months, the ISIL delegation provided training to JASDJ on a variety of issues, from military tactics to computers and video editing, and tried to convince Shekau to pledge allegiance to the ISIL Caliph. Shekau's internal critics pushed for that, hoping the pledge would see Shekau's power curbed. Some of these critics – notably Aliyu al-Gombewi, then the top military leader (*amir ul jaysh*) of JASDJ – had strong links with these Arab trainers. Shekau felt threatened by his leadership and was reticent but in March 2015, he caved in and pledged allegiance to the ISIL Caliph, then Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. JASDJ was beginning to be pushed back by the military of Nigeria and the other Lake Chad countries, and Shekau probably hoped that an allegiance to ISIL would help address the group's predicament. JASDJ thus became Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Shekau became ISWAP's *wali* (literally governor, meaning top leader).

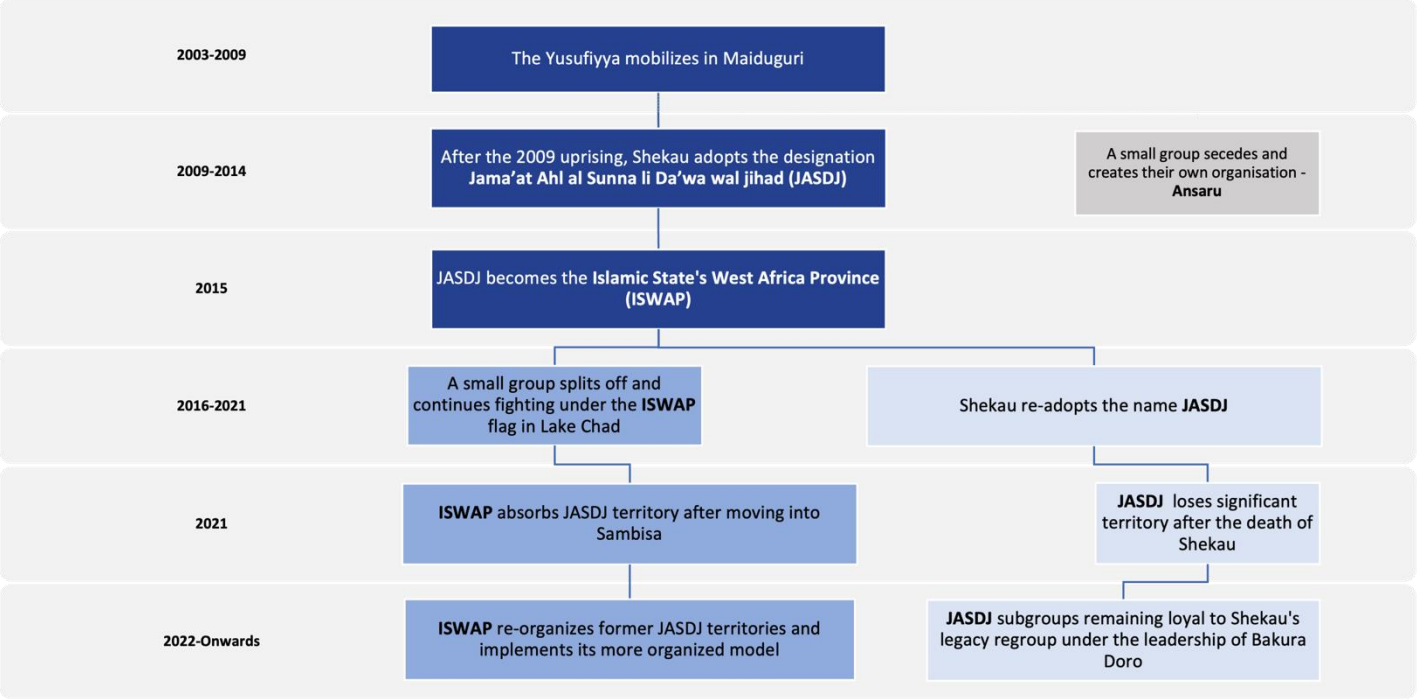
Shekau, however, was a reluctant *wali*, refusing to follow the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant''s guidance on a variety of issues and clashing with his senior commanders over the group's tactics. He had the leader of the team of ISIL trainers flogged and he executed Aliyu al-Gombewi. Sometime in early 2016, surviving critics of Shekau, notably Habib[6] and Abba Yusuf, two sons of Muhammad Yusuf, and Mamman Nur, an influential cleric, fled from the Sambisa Forest. The small but notable group of dissidents found refuge with a JASDJ subgroup established in the southern part of Lake Chad, then led by Abubakar Mainok. Almost all the jihadi leaders concentrated in the area around Lake Chad rallied around them – only the chief judge,[7] Bakura Sahalaba, and Ibrahim Bakura Doro, a junior military commander, refused to follow. Sahalaba and Doro, remaining loyal to Shekau, left and created a small subgroup in the

[6] Habib Yusuf is also known under his nom de guerre Abu Musab al Barnawi, and often simply referred to as "Habib."

[7] In JASDJ's titular at the time, Sahalaba was called a wali, which designated the leader in charge of all non-military civilian affairs, not to be confused with the wali in ISWAP who has a much larger role, overseeing both military and non-military affairs.

northern part of Lake Chad, at the border between Niger and Chad.[8] The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) tried to mediate between Shekau and the dissenters but eventually sided with the latter. In August 2016, the ISIL magazine *al-Naba* published an interview with Habib Yusuf, which mentioned him as the new *wali* of ISWAP. Shekau immediately reacted, insisting that ISIL had been duped, and pledged to keep fighting under the JASDJ name. As a result, the dissenters located around the Lake Chad area continued to refer to themselves as the ISWAP faction, while Shekau reclaimed the JASDJ designation for his faction.

FIGURE 1 – TIMELINE AND FACTIONALISATION



After the Split

While Shekau had launched several attacks against the dissenters in the early days of the split, inter-factional combat eventually largely decreased in intensity. JASDJ fighters kept raiding ISWAP territories for plunder and captives and ISWAP limited itself to fending them off, probably still hoping that reconciliation efforts would work.

[8] Even as they refused to follow Shekau's critics, they reportedly lost contact with Shekau from 2016 to 2019, which led some observers to consider that their faction was a separate one. In 2019, Bakura sent envoys to Shekau, reiterating his allegiance, and Shekau made Bakura an *amir ul fiya*, a senior military commander.

During this time, **ISWAP** began developing its new model, with the guidance and some financial support from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. It launched a massive outreach campaign to local Muslim civilians, explaining that they could safely live and work in areas controlled or influenced by ISWAP as long as they paid taxes and did not collaborate with the governments in the region. It bureaucratized its functioning significantly, following the ISIL model. Special importance was given to an internal security service (*amniyya*) meant to keep its members in check. In 2018, Mamman Nur, an influential cleric who had been the most outspoken critic of Shekau and part of the initial dissenters that separated from the group, was executed by ISWAP itself, as he stood accused of having contacts with the Nigerian authorities. This resulted in a small wave of defections as some of Nur's associates chose to surrender to the Nigerian authorities, rather than stay with the group. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant asked ISWAP to change the *wali* – part of a policy designed to limit the risk of the group becoming a personality cult like JASDJ had under Shekau. Habib Yusuf thus gave way to Ba Idrissa in 2019, who was himself replaced by Ba Lawan in 2020. According to ISWAP members, Ba Idrissa and Ba Lawan were fairly weak leaders, but the *amir ul-jaysh,* Mustafa Kirmima,[9] the group's senior military commander, carried a lot of weight and influence in the group's internal decision making. Under Kirmima's influence, ISWAP progressively carried out more spectacular attacks, including on several occasions, overrunning large Nigerian military units and seizing their arsenals.

Shekau kept control of **JASDJ**, though, in the absence of a well-structured organization, he controlled it much less tightly than ISWAP was controlled. His commanders were increasingly autonomous, carrying out operations on their own. JASDJ lost much of its military capacity to attack the State and instead focused on the plunder of civilians. The one exception was the subgroup of Bakura Doro and Sahalaba, which experienced a discrete growth in the remote recesses of the northern part of Lake Chad. This subgroup had started very small but expanded, attracting disgruntled ISWAP fighters, notably among the ethnic Buduma community of Lake Chad. Learning from ISWAP, it developed its own taxation system. This allowed for the procurement of weapons through trade (in Chad) in addition to weapons taken in combat (notably in a successful attack on a Chadian military base in Bohoma in March 2020). Over the years, Bakura's patrols had engaged in skirmishes with ISWAP's patrols on Lake Chad, but starting in 2019, Bakura began to launch more deliberate attacks against ISWAP territory.

The Death of Shekau and the Return of Habib

In 2021, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) removed Ba Lawan as a *wali.* Habib Yusuf was designated as a caretaker leader of ISWAP just as the group was apparently going through

[9] The name appears in different forms and pronunciations, notably Krimima and Kirmami.

a series of problems, both internal and external. It was losing military momentum, as Nigeria improved its military response, notably by building up its air capacity. Air power prevented ISWAP from launching large-scale attacks. In response to increased State pressure, Habib increased his control over the group and demanded absolute adherence to ISIL guidance. Habib also finally moved against Shekau. ISWAP apparently convinced several of Shekau's commanders to switch sides, and they allowed ISWAP fighters to enter the Sambisa Forest from the Faruq area in mid-May 2021. After some fighting, ISWAP fighters cornered Shekau, who refused to surrender and detonated his suicide vest.

Right after Shekau's death, ISWAP reached out to JASDJ commanders all over the North East, explaining that they shared the same goal and could fight together as long as they obeyed ISWAP's basic principles, notably a ban on attacks against Muslim civilians. Most of Shekau's commanders initially agreed. Only Bakura, established on the northern part of Lake Chad, and Aliyu Ngulde, based in the Gwoza Hills at the border between Nigeria and Cameroon, refused to join ISWAP. Some of Shekau's fighters in Sambisa deserted the fight entirely, surrendering to the Cameroonian or Nigerian authorities. When ISWAP began to consolidate the ex-JASDJ groups that had come under its control and started implementing several rules – collecting guns from fighters, selecting only a few to join its fighting ranks, and implementing the ban on plunder – another wave of Shekau's fighters assessed that life under ISWAP would not be tenable. Some more surrendered to the authorities; to date, several thousand fighters have done so.[10] Some joined Ngulde in the Gwoza hills or Bakura in the Lake Chad, and others assembled around a third group of Shekau commanders - Bakura Jega, Abu Suleiman, Ikrima and Ba Issa - in the vicinity of Bama, forming the so-called Dar al Gazuwa (or Bula Daloye) subgroup.[11] The resistance from these three JASDJ-affiliated groups against ISWAP was initially not very successful, and ISWAP managed to fight off JASDJ raids into Lake Chad and the Sambisa Forest.

ISWAP invested resources in administering the newly conquered JASDJ territory, which it organized in two districts (*mantiqa*): the district of Sambisa and that of Banki, at the border between Borno State and the Far North Region of Cameroon. It sent teams of trainers there to spread its governance model and build up a bureaucracy. ISWAP also invested resources outside of the North East. It began building capacity in certain parts of the rest of Nigeria, relying sometimes on former Ansaru associates who had joined its ranks. ISWAP launched a series of

[10] If one adds their families and, more importantly, the many civilians who had been living in JASDJ-controlled areas, several dozens of thousands of people have left the Sambisa Forest since May 2021.
[11] JASDJ also controls at least one enclave outside of the North East, placed under the command of a Borno-born militant JASDJ called Sadiku, in hills in the vicinity of the Shiroro reservoir in Kaduna State. Sadiku had been sent out by Shekau to negotiate the allegiance of Darusalam, a radical Islamic group initially based in Niger State.

terror attacks that culminated with a spectacular attack on a federal prison in the suburbs of Abuja in July 2022. The ISWAP leadership also invested more attention and resources into its relationship with the Mali-based Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), which belongs to the same coordinating office of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Furqan, which is led by ISWAP's current leaders.

Starting at the end of 2022, however, the remaining JASDJ subgroups began to have a more success in their attacks against ISWAP in Lake Chad. Their success was made possible by the support of a disgruntled ISWAP commander. Keila, an ISWAP *amir ul*-fiya (senior commander) who was in charge of warding off JASDJ's attacks on the Lake, was frustrated with ISWAP's leadership on a variety of counts.[12] He decided to abstain from fighting and let JASDJ through, eventually joining Bakura. Because of this access, JASDJ was able to break through ISWAP's territory in early 2023, taking over some of ISWAP's key islands in Lake Chad, including its headquarters and main market. It seized important stocks of weapons, fuel, and supplies, weakening ISWAP's military capacity as a result. As JASDJ consolidated its control over the Nigerien and Chadian parts of the Lake, ISWAP retreated towards the shores of the southern part of the Lake on the Nigerian side.

Despite its success in pushing back against ISWAP, JASDJ has continued to suffer from internal tensions. After Shekau's death, Sahalaba, reportedly designated by Shekau as his successor, took over as *imam*. Soon thereafter, Bakura Doro had him executed, claiming that Sahalaba had been pushing for a deal with ISWAP. This move was not well-received by some leaders, who considered that Bakura Doro lacked the religious expertise to be the imam of JASDJ. The Dar al Gazuwa group in the vicinity of Bama was apparently particularly hesitant to follow Bakura. Nevertheless, it seems that Bakura Doro eventually secured the loyalty of all JASDJ subgroups, possibly in part because he was in a position to supply them with weapons and ammunition, which they have difficulty sourcing elsewhere.[13] Still, Bakura's control over his own faction remains uncertain. Tensions erupted between Bakura and Keila, who was eventually released of his command, along with Ustaz, another leading JASDJ commander and close relative of Keila. Apparently, they were critical of Bakura's leadership and wanted to establish an independent faction. Two *qaid* (the title used for a mid-level commander in both factions) loyal to Keila and their fighters reportedly flipped back to the ISWAP side, allowing it to regain some ground in the Lake. In Lake Chad, his group is settled in the territory of the Buduma

[12] Some former fighters mention Habib's decision to arrest a close associate of Keila who stood accused of using drugs. Others consider that Keila, an ethnic Buduma from Lake Chad, resented Habib's decision to tax the Buduma, and more generally considered that ISWAP did not recognise the Buduma's part in ISWAP. Bakura's own group has a large Buduma component, and Ustaz, one of Bakura's commanders at the time, is reportedly a cousin of Keila (and a Buduma too).

[13] A former Gazuwa fighter noted that Bakura sent 300 guns to the Gazuwa group as he tried to patch things up with them.

ethnic group and has recruited many Buduma, though it also includes militants hailing from other ethnic groups. But Bakura himself is not a Buduma and has tried to navigate this by designating Buduma for all the highest ranks in his group. This might, however, not suffice to satisfy some Buduma leaders. Fundamentally, it seems that Bakura has to navigate inter-ethnic rivalry.

Combat between the two factions continues, though there are reports of renewed mediation attempts by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Each group has consolidated control over their territory, and the frontline between them seems to have stabilized somewhat.

ISWAP's Hierarchy and Governance

ISWAP was born from a sustained criticism of Shekau's personalistic leadership, and it has benefitted from the advice and aid of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to organize itself more efficiently and ensure its strategic development. It thus differs in very significant ways from Shekau's JASDJ faction in terms of international links, organization, governance, and practice. Compared to JASDJ, the group employs a more collective approach to leadership, with a functioning and influential *shura* (advisory council) made up of a number of senior leaders and clerics who must be consulted over key decisions. This structure has allowed the group to successfully manage internal tensions, and ease periodic leadership changes.

Along with the Mali-based Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), ISWAP is placed under the Al-Furqan office, an office of the IS Central, but it seems it is ISWAP leaders who are in charge of Al-Furqan, in line with the IS broader attempt to promote autonomous regional leaderships.[14] The command structure of Al-Furqan seems to revolve around two men: the previously mentioned Habib Yusuf and Abubakar Mainok (aka Abu Bilal) who had both defected from Shekau.[15] A 2022 United Nations report identified Habib Yusuf as the head of Al-Furqan, but a subsequent United Nations report from 2024 mentioned that Mainok "had replaced Abu Musab

[14] From March 2019, Islamic State groups in the Sahel, which were often designated as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) was placed directly under the formal dependence of ISWAP, and their attacks were claimed in the name of ISWAP. In March 2022, they were given their own *wilaya* under the name Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP).

[15] Mainok is the name of his locality of origin, a town to the west of Maiduguri. In Borno, the first name Abubakar is sometimes shortened as Abor, Bor or Bukar.

as the head of the ISIL Al-Furqan office."[16] Defectors interviewed have conflicting interpretations of the respective roles of Mainok and Habib, the hierarchy between them, and their ranking in Al-Furqan. Both men have long been closely associated and they do seem to function as a pair, with Habib acting as the interface with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant(he is known for his good Arabic) and Mainok (who is not much of a cleric nor an Arabic speaker, but an experienced field commander) handling the day-to-day operations.[17] Several defectors insist that Habib now sits on the *shura* of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and spends a lot of time online, in exchanges with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and its other branches. Some sources place him visiting the ISSP in the Sahel recently.

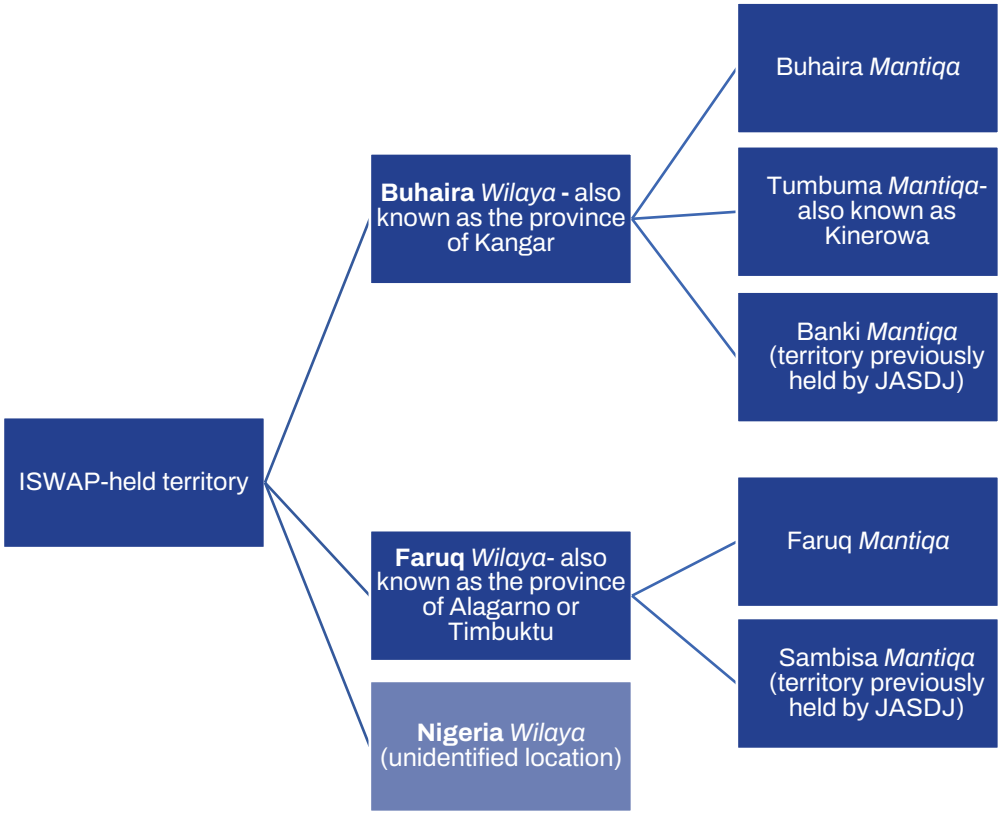
ISWAP's leadership structures are closely tied to the organization of its territory (see Figure 2). ISWAP has divided its territories into two *wilaya* or provinces, which are in turn subdivided into smaller *mantiqa* or districts. The two *wilaya* (provinces) are Buhaira (aka Kangar) and Faruq (aka Alagarno or Timbuktu). Many defectors confirm that ISWAP has intensified its presence outside of the North East since the death of Shekau and some claim that ISWAP has recently created a third *wilaya* in charge of operations outside of the North East, in a location in Nigeria that was not identified at the time of writing.[18] The Buhaira *wilaya* comprises three *mantiqa* (districts) – the Buhaira *mantiqa*, the Tumbuma (aka Kinerowa) *mantiqa* and the Banki *mantiqa*. The Faruq *wilaya* comprises two *mantiqa* only: the Faruq *mantiqa* and the Sambisa *mantiqa*. Two *mantiqa* of Sambisa and Banki were added after ISWAP took over following the death of Shekau.

[16] UN Security Council, "Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities," United Nations, 03 February 2022, S/2022/83; UN Security Council, "Thirty-third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities," United Nations, 29 January 2024, S/2024/92. In between the two reports, in June 2023, the U.S. State Department identified Mainok as a "senior leader" in Al-Furqan. See, U.S. Department of State, "Terrorist Designation of ISIS General Directorate of Provinces Leaders," *Press Statement*, 08 June 2023.

[17] When ISWAP took over the JASDJ group near Banki and set out to reform it along its own organizational guidelines, it was Mainok who spent time there to brief the local commanders, not Habib.

[18] In the chart, we chose to designate this wilaya as "Wilaya Nigeria", because former ISWAP associates use "Nigeria" to designate the land under control of the Nigerian authorities, but it is not a designation used by ISWAP. According to interviewees, a former ISWAP *wali* between 2019 and 2020 named Ba Idrissa (aka Abu Abdullahi), is in charge of this *wilaya*.

FIGURE 2 – ISWAP TERRITORIAL DIVISION INTO WILAYA (PROVINCES) AND MANTIQA (DISTRICTS)



Each of the five *mantiqa* or districts has its own *amir ul mantiqa* (district head). Apparently, the *wali* for the *wilaya* (province) of Buhaira and Faruq also act as *amir ul mantiqa* respectively for the *mantiqa* of Buhaira and Faruq. In the other districts, the *amir ul mantiqa* is the most senior military commander. The *amir ul mantiqa* answers to the ISWAP leadership and sends up a monthly report. Each *mantiqa* seems to be organized along similar lines. At the *mantiqa* level, a *shura comprised* of all non-military officials in the district (the *amir* for *da'wa* (predication), the *amir* of *hisbah* (Islamic police), the chief judge, and important clerics) consults with the *amir ul mantiqa* on a weekly basis.[19]

In each *mantiqa,* all military commanders (*qaid)* are placed under a more senior commander, an *amir ul fiya* (who supposedly commands four *qaid*). If there are enough *amir ul fiya* in the *mantiqa*, there is an *amir ul jaysh* (who supposedly commands several *amir ul fiya*).[20] As ISWAP

[19] The military commanders and the *amir* for *amniyya* (internal security) are placed under the direct command of the *amir ul mantiqa* and apparently do not take part in the *shura*.
[20] Based on interviews, it seems that the rules are not strictly implemented when it comes to how many *amir ul fiya* an *amir ul jaysh* commands or how many *qaid* an *amir ul fiya* commands.

is fairly bureaucratized and standardized, it is possible to have a reasonably solid estimate of the number of fighters in a *mantiqa* based on the number of *qaid*. A *qaid* (equivalent to a major in a NATO-style army) has four underlings, the *munzir* (equivalent to a captain), who each have four underlings, the *naqib* (equivalent to a lieutenant), who each command between 20 and 30 fighters. Thus, in the ISWAP structure, a *munzir* commands about 100 men, and a *qaid* about 400.[21] This figure does not take into account other non-military armed units like the *amniyya* (the internal security unit), and the *hisbah* (the Islamic police). One should also note that there are people who are considered *rijal* (full male members of ISWAP) but who live as civilians, farmers, traders, or craftsmen. They are not supposed to partake in attacks but can be mobilized for defensive operations if needed, and they can be called to join combat units to replace losses.[22] In contrast with JASDJ's large militia-style units, ISWAP prefers smaller standing professional units that are well-controlled, well-trained, and reasonably maintained. Attempts to pay wages to fighters were made, but never quite worked out; it seems only commanders and members of the *idari* (administration) and *amniyya* (internal security) get a fixed pay. But fighters get money from ISWAP from war spoils (*ghanima*), their food is provided for, and they can ask their commander for financial assistance if need be.

With the advice of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISWAP developed a substantially different model from JASDJ, which it has implemented rather coherently over time: a more bureaucratic governance and a standing armed force, based on taxation exacted through stable and regulated relations with the Muslim civilians who live in the territory where it exerts influence. This model diverts from Shekau's ways, both his personalistic and clientelistic power and his sectarian *takfiri* posture – considering all Muslims who were living outside of his territory as infidels who could be attacked, plundered from, and enslaved. ISWAP realized that Shekau was alienating the population and adopted a different course, trying to reconnect with the Muslims of the North East (the Christian minority, however, is considered a legitimate target). As soon as they separated from Shekau, ISWAP launched an outreach campaign to explain to civilians in rural areas (particularly herders, traders, farmers, and fishermen) that they would be safe in ISWAP-controlled areas, provided they paid taxes.[23]

This approach required the development of a bureaucracy, with more differentiation in functions and offices than in Shekau's group, including the creation of a cadre of regularly remunerated officials; the increased use of computers, ledgers, and paperwork to document membership

[21] This is based on an average of 25 men per *naqib*.
[22] Many of these *rijal* had acquired some combat experience in the time of Shekau, before the split or before ISWAP took over the JASDJ territories that are now the *mantiqa* of Sambisa and Banki.
[23] Jihadi commanders in Lake Chad had already begun implementing tax collection in the time of Shekau, after he had told them to develop their autonomy. This may partly explain why Habib Yusuf and Mamman Nur were welcomed by most jihadi leaders there; the latter had already seen the virtues of reconnecting with civilians.

lists and personal information of members, stocks of food, equipment and fuel, the standardization of military units; the rotation of officials; the centralization of weaponry; and the notable strengthening of internal controls. The internal security (*amniyya*), a central institution in the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, took on a major role in this process, gathering information on the fighters and controlling them in combat as well as in the communities. The *amniyya* unit is placed under the direct control of the *amir ul mantiqa*, but in turn, exercises oversight over him, as it can report directly to the highest level, the overall *amir ul amniyya*. ISWAP has also developed audit functions and has at least one auditor, attached to the *maktabat ul sharii* (the office of the judiciary), who monitors the group's finances as well as the functioning of ISWAP services (such as courts, clinics, and Islamic education).

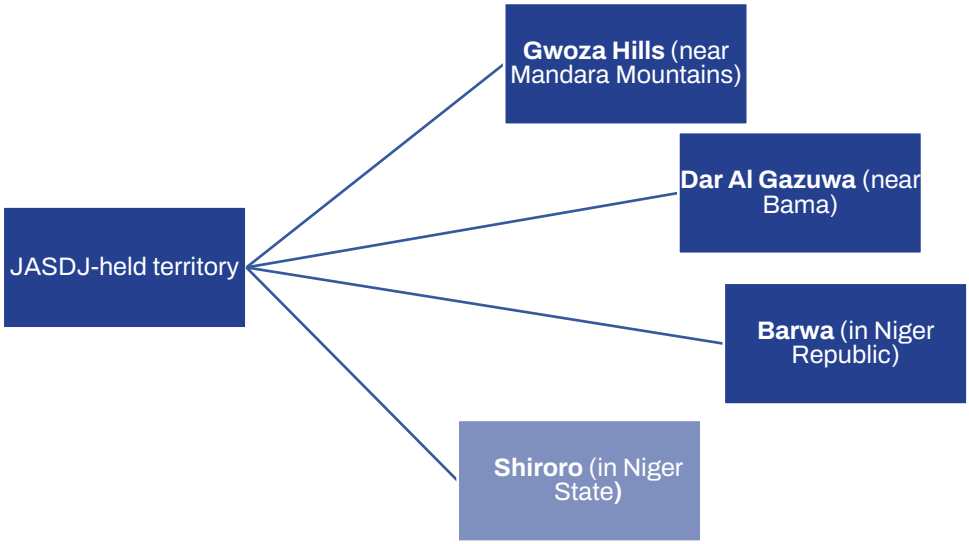
The specificity of ISWAP's model becomes clear when looking at what happened after ISWAP took over JASDJ territories in the Sambisa and in the vicinity of Banki in 2021. High-level ISWAP officials spent time with the former JASDJ associates still in the area, to explain their new model, insisting on the ban on plunder. A number of former JASDJ associates were sent to intern in established ISWAP areas for several months. Some former JASDJ members were selected as full-time fighters, but many were removed from the fighting force. Their weapons were seized, and they were told to develop an economic activity. ISWAP also deployed teams of *amniyya* (internal security) and *idari* (administration) officials. They trained local former JASDJ associates to fulfil their new functions, set up computers and built prisons, which are central to ISWAP's model and play a very limited part in JASDJ.

The imposition of these structures and rules has not been easy. It has created internal frustration, tensions, and suspicions – it did so within ISWAP before 2021, and it has done so even more in the JASDJ territories that ISWAP took over after the death of Shekau in 2021. Many defectors describe the ISWAP model as more controlling than the JASDJ model. While some former fighters appreciate this strengthened system of internal checks and balances, arguing it prevents abuse and makes for a stronger state-building project and military campaign, others have left ISWAP to join JASDJ because they felt that ISWAP was constraining them too much and not giving them enough access to resources. ISWAP's claims of impartial treatment feed the resentment of fighters who feel they deserve special treatment, and of those who feel that some are 'more equal' than others in ISWAP and who resent the leaders and bureaucrats supposedly living the good life while the rank-and-file fighters suffer.

JASDJ: Enclaves of Plunder and Jihad

In the Lake Chad Basin, JASDJ currently controls three disjointed territorial enclaves (see Figure 3).[24] The top leader of JASDJ (its *imam*) is currently Ibrahim Bakura Doro (aka Bakura Buduma, even though he is not an ethnic Buduma himself).[25] The main JASDJ territory, placed under the direct command of Bakura is on the islands of Lake Chad, at the border of Niger and Chad. There is another significant enclave in the Gwoza Hills, along the Nigeria-Cameroon border, under the command of Aliyu Ngulde. And there is a small, much less settled, JASDJ group in the vicinity of Bama, the so-called Dar al Gazuwa group (sometimes also designated as Bula Dalo or Bula Daloye), now under the command of Alhai Kale. JASDJ does not seem to have a standing *shura* council, since it was dissolved under Shekau and has not been formally revived since although there are reports that Bakura has a *de facto shura* that he consults on occasion.

FIGURE 3 – JASDJ TERRITORIAL DIVISION



[24] JASDJ also controls at least one enclave outside of the North East, placed under the command of a Borno-born militant JASDJ called Sadiku, in hills in the vicinity of the Shiroro reservoir in Kaduna State. This sub-group is not discussed here.

[25] Bakura himself is reportedly of mixed Fulani-Kanuri descent and hails from Monguno. He took the name Doro because he emerged as a commander during a battle in the vicinity the town of Doron Baga. Over time, he has developed a strong relation with the autochthonous Buduma of the Lake, earning himself the "Buduma" nickname.

JASDJ has the same ranks as ISWAP, but it is much less systematic in how it allocates troops under them. According to JASDJ defectors, it is not rare to see a *naqib* with 100 or 200 fighters (for ISWAP, a *naqib* commands around 20 to 30 men). Unlike ISWAP, JASDJ does not operate with units with standardized sizes. Given that all *rijal* (male members) can take part in attacks if they are available, it is thus particularly difficult to assess JASDJ troop numbers. In April-May 2024, two defectors assessed the smallest group, that of Dar al Gazuwa, to have around 600 fighters, albeit not all of them armed. Doro's group in Lake Chad is certainly the biggest JASDJ force – it has attracted many JASDJ fighters who left the Sambisa and Dar al Gazuwa, as well as some disgruntled ISWAP fighters, and it is currently recruiting in the Diffa region of Niger. Even with the losses sustained in the course of fighting ISWAP, which has grown in intensity since 2023, Bakura certainly has several thousand fighters. The sub-group in the Gwoza Hills, about which much less is known, stands probably somewhere in between the Bakura and Dar al Gazuwa groups. JASDJ also controls at least one enclave outside of the North East, placed under the command of a Borno-born militant JASDJ called Sadiku, in hills in the vicinity of the Shiroro reservoir in Kaduna State. This sub-group is not discussed here because of a lack of further details on its size and history.

Overall, there is less organizational differentiation within JASDJ than in ISWAP. Most JASDJ interviewees mention fewer internal governance and oversight organs. Interviewees usually depict a distinction between a military wing and a civilian wing led by a group of clerics, who double as leaders of hisbah, preachers, and judges. JASDJ has developed only rudimentary bureaucratized procedures. It seems to use computers mostly for communication and have only a very limited administrative capacity. The treasury (*beit el-mal*) is under the direct control of each area leader.

JASDJ remains true to its predatory history: it uses plunder and ransom against the populations within the enclaves it controls to mobilize resources (unlike ISWAP which avoids Muslim civilian targets and kidnaps higher value targets: NGO workers or associates and state officials). However, in Lake Chad, JASDJ, possibly under the influence of ISWAP's reformist model, has taken to taxing herders and fishermen instead of attacking them, and even hands out tax receipts and has fiscal patrols to ensure adherence. At some point in 2024, JASDJ reached out to farmers on the shores of Lake Chad to set up a taxation regime.[26]

At the moment of writing, the dynamics between and within the different factions are in flux, and rumours abound of peace negotiations between different parts of ISWAP and JASDJ, as well

[26] Unlike ISWAP, which considers Muslim civilians as proper Muslims, and taxes them in the name of the Quranic prescription for *zakat* (yearly alms), JASDJ apparently taxes in the name of *jizya,* a tax justified as a protection levy demanded from non-Muslims who are protected by Muslim authorities.

as the internal power struggles and shifting alliances within each faction. Despite the defection of thousands of people from the factions in recent years (or tens of thousands more from areas of their control) and the significant losses resulting from inter-factional combat, it is clear that both factions still hold significant territory, exert influence, and maintain fighters in their ranks. Creating a better understanding of their governance models, leadership structures, and intra- and inter-factional dynamics will be key to informing efforts to craft effective responses to the conflict in the region.

Appendices

The names, locations and designations used in the diagrams and map below are best estimates based on available information, and as such, represent an approximation of the organizational structures of ISWAP and JASDJ and their locations at the moment of writing. Please note that the factions' areas of influence extend beyond these locations and often overlap.

FIGURE 4 – ISLAMIC STATE WEST AFRICA PROVINCE (ISWAP) ORGANIZATIONAL MAPPING AS OF JULY 2024

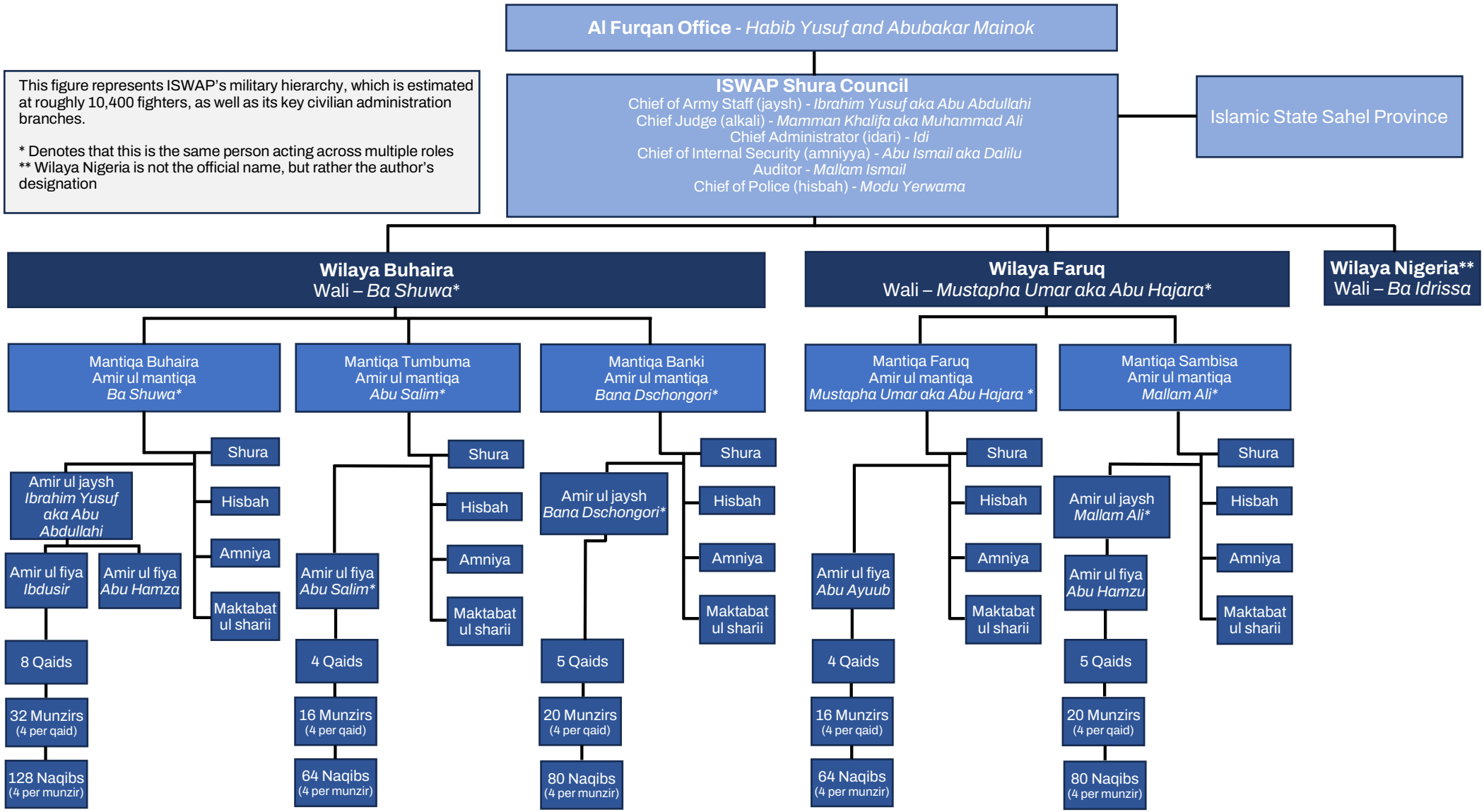


FIGURE 5 – JAMĀ'AT AHL AS-SUNNAH LID-DA'WAH WA'L-JIHĀD (JASDJ) ORGANIZATIONAL MAPPING AS OF JULY 2024

This figure represents an approximation of JAS's military and civilian hierarchy. It is not possible to provide an estimate of the total number of fighters, given the lack of a definite hierarchical order within the faction. Proximate locations are given in brackets for each level of leadership, if available.

*Members of the ad hoc shura (along with clerics *Abu Umamah*, *Alhaji Kyari*, and *Mallam Kachalla*)

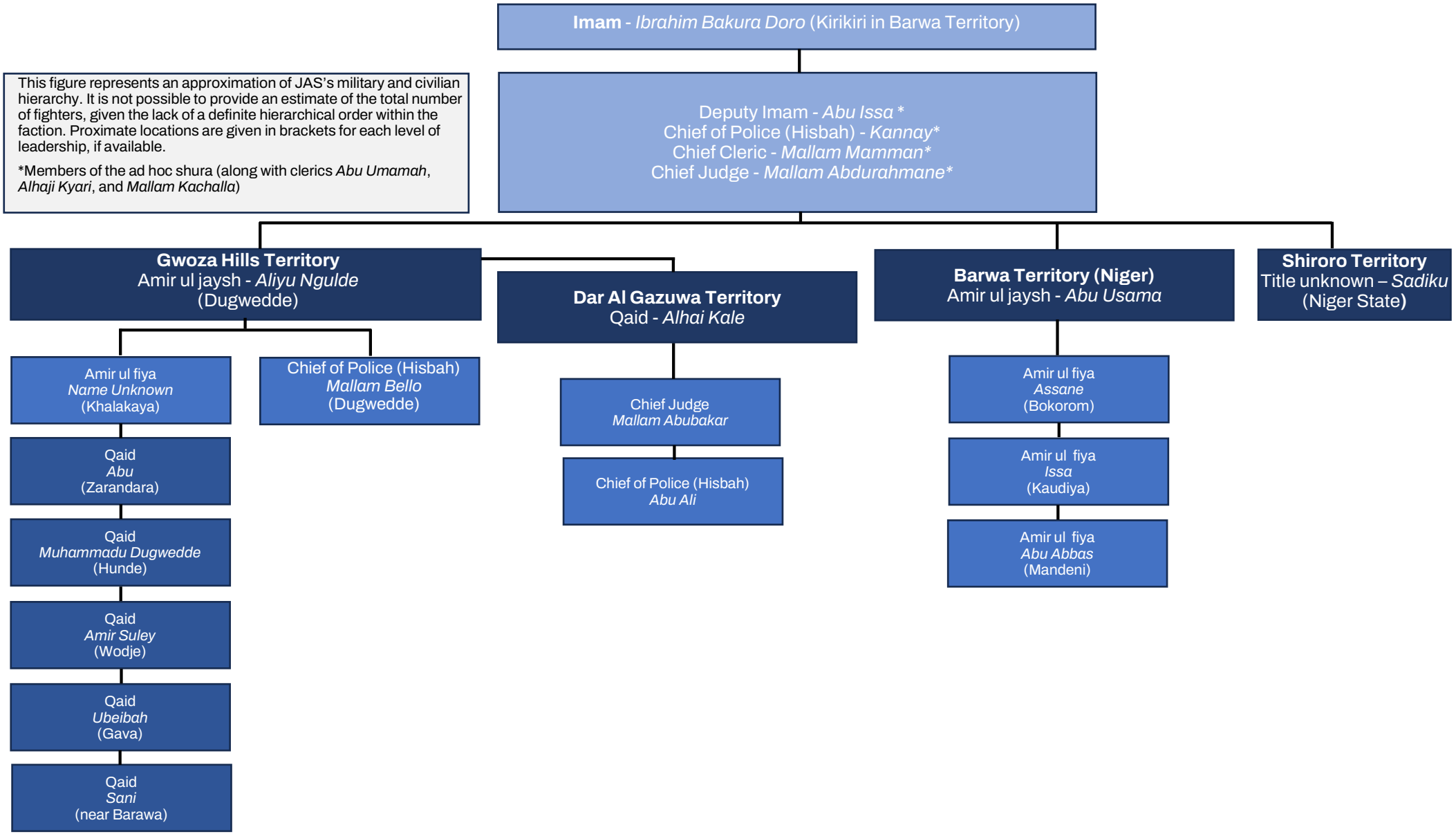
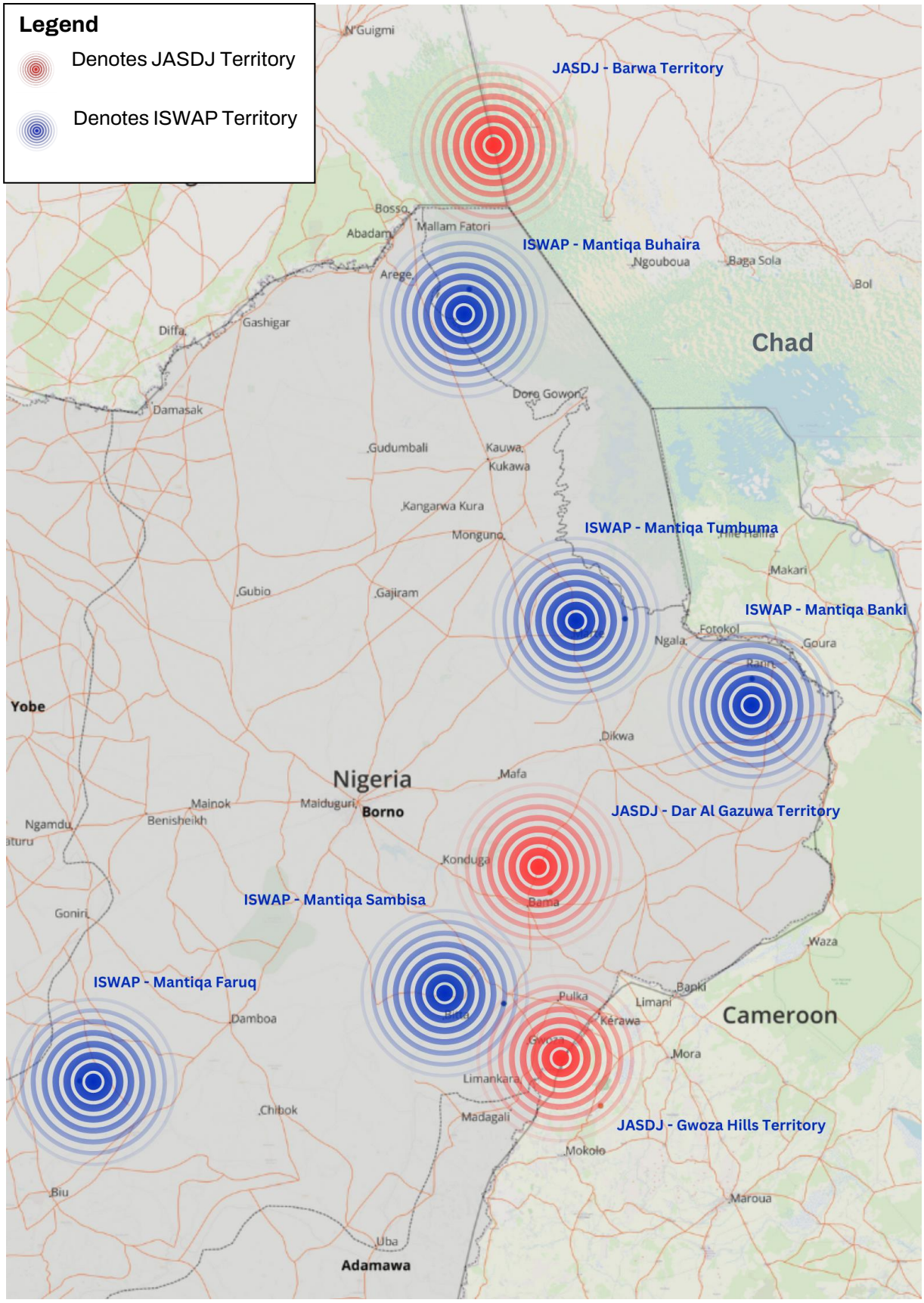


FIGURE 6 –MAP OF THE DIFFERENT FACTIONS IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN



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