



Within the last one year, the two main Boko Haram factions and primary purveyors of insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin region, the Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) and the Daesh West Africa Province (DWAP), also known as Islamic State West Africa Province, have been engrossed with serious internal rebellions in what may become the undoing of the violent extremist groups.

Since the death of notorious factional leader, Abubakar Shekau, in May 2021, JAS has appeared incapable of remaining united, while DWAP struggles to consolidate its position as the major threat to security in the LCB. Losing its Sambisa Forest stronghold to DWAP is perhaps the second biggest loss JAS has suffered, the first obviously being Shekau's death. In addition, DWAP acquired the stockpile of weapons previously hoarded by Shekau and also forced many JAS fighters to join it, further weakening the group.

Not all fighters agreed to join the Daesh affiliate, though, with hundreds fleeing in different directions. Some surrendered to government forces; others fled to Barwa, an island in Diffa region in Niger, to reunite with Bakura Doro, one of Shekau's strongest lieutenants; some fled to Mandara Mountains, a JAS location that is difficult for DWAP to access or take over without being sighted from atop the mountains; some moved to villages and bushes in and around Bama, Dikwa, Jere, Konduga, and Mafa local government areas, and; others fled to northwest and north-central Nigeria to join bandits, with whom Shekau already established a crime-terror relationship.

Besides those who joined DWAP and those who surrendered to government forces, all other JAS fighters pledged allegiance to Bakura as the new JAS leader.

A major reason why these fighters refused to join Daesh was the killing of Shekau. According to some former members, they could not forgive Daesh for his death, and joining it would mean they agreed with it, making them complicit in their leader's death.

This reason is also at the heart of the current rebellion within JAS. Several fighters are furious that current leader, Bakura Doro, had reached out to Daesh around early 2022 seeking some form of collaboration. Since they found out in May 2022, there's been a fallout between them and Bakura.

Based predominantly in and around a village called Yaganama under Dikwa local government area of Borno state close to Cameroon borders, these fighters, led by two senior commanders identified as Ba Isa and Abu Suleiman, are taking advantage of being out of the reach of Bakura, who barely leaves the island, to independently raid communities, kidnap civilians and set up checkpoints to rob passengers. They also continue to defy the ceasefire reached between JAS and DWAP in late 2022 and have continued to wage fierce battles against the Daesh affiliate.

On its part, Daesh West Africa Province is no stranger to internal strife and tussles. In fact, its very existence owes to the leadership crisis that characterised the then Shekau-led Boko Haram. Since its founding six years ago, DWAP has gone through at least five leadership changes.



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Greed, personal ambition, abuse of office and, quite possibly, the desire of overseeing tens of millions of dollars in revenues, characterised these changes. However, despite the acrimonious leadership tussles, DWAP's proficient propaganda machine has helped it put up a façade to mask its troubles.

At the moment, DWAP is frantically trying to shut down a serious rebellion that crescendoed in early January 2023 and led by few of its pioneer members. What started as a jailbreak by two detained fighters ended with 50 other fighters fleeing with them to an island on the Chadian side of the lake. Civilians in Abadam local government area of Borno state had reported hearing gunshots in Tumbumma, an island notoriously controlled by DWAP, for about 20 minutes on 3 January.

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According to sources with inside information, including former fighters that surrendered to government troops but who still have connections within the group, the detained fighters, known as Ahmad Alkali and Ibrahim Umar, were accused of stealing two machine guns after the guns were not returned to the armoury following a DWAP operation in October 2022. The guns were found in Alkali's house, with Ibrahim being his accomplice. The sources admitted that the two had done a similar thing in 2017, when they joined others to temporarily breakaway before they were persuaded to return.

Since that incident, they were never trusted, only tolerated for being pioneer members with good followings among fighters.

The unfolding dynamics may seem worrisome as they point to the possibility of a spread and escalation of more violence in the Lake Chad region, notably because any new factions may want to have their own territories. Already, DWAP dominates the landscape in northeast Nigeria with incursions into parts of Chad and Cameroon. It also continues to spread out to other parts of Nigeria, including places it never attacked until 2022. JAS on the other hand operates around Diffa region and parts of southern Borno and northern Adamawa. It also maintains a presence in northwest and northcentral Nigeria. So, any breakaway factions may have to settle for pockets of uncontested spaces in these areas, starting from the Lake Chad region, and there are strong indications that this may already be happening. For instance, parts of central and southern Borno are being contested by the breakaway JAS fighters, particularly areas around Yaganama and Kumshe in Dikwa and Bama local government areas. Due to the proximity of these areas to Cameroon borders, communities in Cameroon's North and Far North regions are also targeted.

Villagers in these spaces, especially in Borno state, have been hard hit by the activities of these fighters. Whether traveling on highways, working their farmlands or just living in their communities, they are subjected to regular raids, armed robberies and kidnappings, with their livelihood increasingly threatened.

Between October and December 2022, at least 72 civilians were kidnapped in these areas, while five others were declared missing by family members when they did not return from their farms. Families were forced to pay a total of N13,175,000 (\$29,000) to secure the release of those kidnapped. For perspective, it is important to note that most of these victims are displaced persons struggling to eke a living.

These rivalries and rebellions can have a knock-on effect on these terror groups, which bodes well for the region and which the region must promptly take advantage of. The deadly clashes between DWAP and the breakaway JAS fighters has resulted in heavy casualties from both sides, while the heavy military campaigns, notably air raids, continue to seriously impede both groups' ability to launch the kinds of attacks they were known for in the past against the State. To consolidate these gains, stakeholders must either match, counter or better still, outdo DWAP's heart and mind strategy, which enables it to win over and recruit more civilians.