



## Militancy/Terrorism

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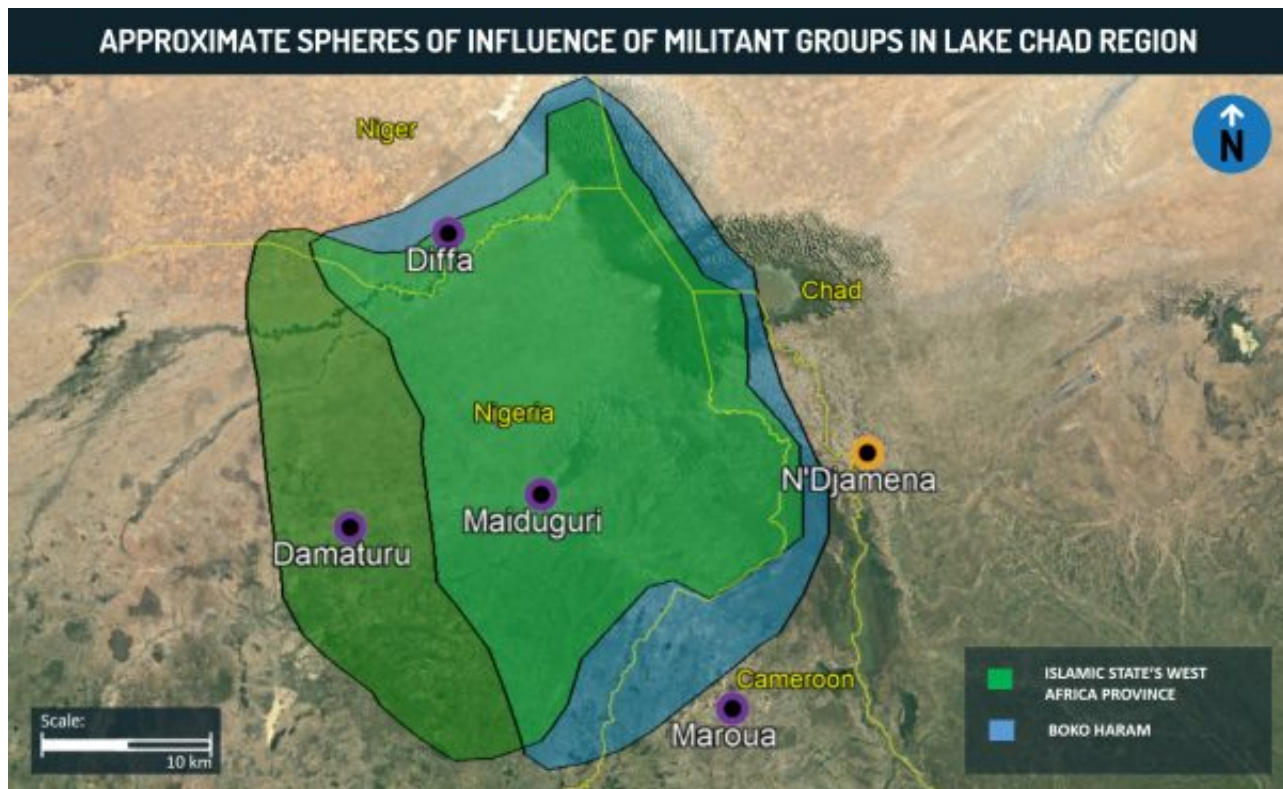
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### **Lake Chad SITUATION UPDATE: Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, allegedly killed in clashes with ISWAP in Sambisa forest, Borno State during overnight hours of May 18-19**

#### Executive Summary

- Given that reports of Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau being reportedly killed previously have been proven false, this latest report should be treated with caution. However, if confirmed, Shekau's death is likely to significantly change the dynamics of the ongoing jihadist insurgency in the Lake Chad Region.
- Even if Shekau is only "badly wounded", it would mean that Boko Haram have limited capabilities in countering the incursion by Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) into their traditional stronghold in the Sambisa Forest.
- In this context, these latest clashes underscore ISWAP's heightened intelligence gathering and operational capabilities with the security forces seemingly being unable to do the same, despite their decade-long counter-militancy campaign against Boko Haram. ISWAP also likely launched the attacks to establish a stronghold closer to Maiduguri, and neighboring Adamawa state.



## Notable Developments

- Reports indicate that Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) fighters onboard approximately 50 trucks, allegedly attacked Boko Haram strongholds in the Sambisa forest in Borno State during the overnight hours of May 18-19.
- Several reports cite unconfirmed reports that Shekau killed himself using a suicide bomb to evade being captured by ISWAP.
- Some sources indicate that Shekau detonated his suicide vest in a meeting with ISWAP members, during which he was being asked to surrender and pledge allegiance to the Islamic State. Conflicting reports claim that Shekau was “badly wounded” during the attack.
- At the time of writing, Shekau’s death has not been confirmed by either of the jihadist groups. Additional reports regarding the details of the clashes are also still coming in.

## Assessments & Forecast

1. Given that Shekau’s death has been falsely reported a number of times over the past few years, this latest news regarding his death should be considered with caution. If confirmed, Shekau’s death is likely to significantly change the dynamics of the ongoing jihadist insurgency in the Lake Chad Region. Shekau has been known to scarcely trust his own commanders and fighters with the constant fear of a rebellion against his leadership. There were sources indicating that Shekau allegedly killed his “Commander of War” for betraying him about four weeks ago with no further explanations reported. Under these circumstances, it is unclear who will replace Shekau as Boko Haram’s leader. That said, even if Shekau is not dead, it is possible he may have been severely injured during the ISWAP attack and will likely have limited capabilities to organize his fighters to respond to the attack in the near term. Following this attack, most of the remaining Boko Haram fighters can be expected to either be absorbed by ISWAP or dispersed in the surrounding areas.
2. Regardless of Shekau’s condition, these latest clashes illustrate ISWAP’s heightened intelligence gathering and operational capabilities with the security forces seemingly being unable to do the

same, despite their decade-long counter-militancy campaign against Boko Haram. While the rivalry between the groups is known to manifest in sporadic clashes, this latest attack illustrated ISWAP's intent to take over Boko Haram's stronghold in the Sambisa forest. This may have been driven by motivations to establish a stronghold in Borno State's center, close to Maiduguri, and neighboring Adamawa state. Furthermore, the Savannah forest cover and mountainous terrain would also provide cover from persistent security forces' airstrikes.

3. – : Moving forward, it is possible that the security forces will capitalize on this opportunity to launch operations and target fleeing Boko Haram militants in Sambisa forest's fringes. Additionally, airstrikes may take place targeting the militant stronghold within the forest to prevent ISWAP from entrenching itself within the forested area. In the coming days, additional details of these latest ISWAP-Boko Haram clashes may be disclosed.

## **Recommendations**

We advise to avoid all travel to areas of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad within the Lake Chad Region given the extreme risk of militancy.