

**THE ISLAMIC STATE IN WEST AFRICA PROVINCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF
SECURITY IN NORTH EASTERN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper examined ISWAP and the challenges of national security in North East Nigeria 2010-2023) with an objective that include examining the challenges ISWAP portends for security in North East Nigeria. Globalisation serves as underlying theoretical framework for analysis. The paper adopts the library-literature method in data collection. This model helps illuminate the realistic linkages of the current global system where interconnectedness is of utmost importance to state and non-state actors alike. This study finds that ISWAP has established a semblance of a fundamental governance structure, service delivery, and internal security in areas under its illegal control, ISAWP has altered its operational strategies over time in an effort to gain the allegiance and support of the local populace. The lacuna in governance over the years which has made communities in North East region feel neglected should be filled by creating sufficient government presence in the areas in terms of social infrastructure. The study recommends that a psychological warfare approach should be deployed by Nigeria government in collaboration with neighbouring countries around Lake Chad to truncate ISWAP ideology. ISWAP ex-fighter should be reoriented and made to acquire requisite skills needed to function in society.

Keywords: *Islamic State; Africa Province; security challenge; terrorism; refugee crisis*

Introduction

The national security of North East Nigeria and the surrounding area is seriously threatened by the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Over a decade of conflict has completely changed North-Eastern Nigeria and its neighboring regions. Prior to the start of the conflict, the area was among the poorest in Nigeria and faced several obstacles to development. The lives of millions of people are at risk due to years of attacks and destruction that have caused severe humanitarian, human rights, and development crises (Owenoriede, 2023). ISWAP stands for Islamic State West Africa Province. This terrorist organization is jihadist and operates mostly in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, but it also operates throughout the Lake Chad Basin. Founded in 2016, ISWAP originated as a breakaway faction from Boko Haram, an additional extremist Islamist group situated in Nigeria. ISWAP's original goal was to create an Islamic caliphate in West Africa and swore allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS). Using strategies like suicide bombings, ambushes, and raids, the group has carried out multiple attacks against targets in the military, government, and civilian sectors (Otinche, 2018). ISWAP has engaged in acts like kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and the recruitment of fighters, including child soldiers, much like its parent group, Boko Haram. Additionally, it has pushed its agenda by taking advantage of ethnic tensions and local grievances.

Significant humanitarian crises have resulted from ISWAP's operations, displacing millions of people and leaving them in need of aid. The group has proven difficult to defeat because of its adaptability to military operations and resistance to counterterrorism measures. The group's power is in its capacity to impose control over territory, take advantage of ungoverned areas, and linger in isolated locations. ISWAP continues to be a serious security threat in the region despite military pressure from both regional and foreign forces. ISWAP is one of the most potent jihadist organizations in the region, having formed as a Boko Haram splinter group in 2016. In northeastern Nigeria, the armed groups Boko Haram and Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP) engaged in combat with the Nigerian military resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, injuries, and displacement. International law was broken by all sides of the conflict, including war crimes, and they all got away with it. In other places, bandits committed violent crimes and unlawful killings; in response, the government used harsh restrictions on the freedoms of speech and peaceful assembly, as well as enforced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detention. The government restricted the freedom of expression of media organizations and journalists. The freedom of speech and the right to peaceful assembly were curtailed for activists and protestors. More than 60,000 people had their houses taken away from them by force. People died as a result of inadequate protection against the effects of climate change.

ISWAP has attacked civilian, military, and governmental targets on multiple occasions. They use raids, ambushes, and suicide bombings as tactics, which result in a large death toll and population displacement. In the Lake Chad Basin, ISWAP has taken control of territory and maintained it, establishing a quasi-administrative presence there. They have resources and a base from which to launch more attacks thanks to this territorial control. ISWAP actively seeks out disgruntled young people by taking advantage of their complaints about poverty, marginalization, and opportunity

gaps. They recruit new members to their cause by using social media, indoctrination, and propaganda to spread their extreme ideology. The humanitarian crisis in North East Nigeria has gotten worse due to the conflict with ISWAP. Millions of people are impacted by widespread issues like food insecurity, mass displacement, and restricted access to healthcare and education. Beyond Nigeria, ISWAP is also operating in nations like Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, endangering regional stability. Countering the group's influence is made more difficult by cross-border attacks and smuggling networks. To tackle these obstacles, a multifaceted strategy incorporating military operations and root cause interventions, such as addressing poverty, weak governance, and tensions between communities, is necessary. Combatting the threat posed by ISWAP and bringing peace and stability back to the affected areas also heavily depends on international support and regional cooperation. and relocation, as well as security in Northeastern Nigeria and the surrounding area. ISWAP is one of the most potent jihadist organizations in the region, having formed as a Boko Haram splinter group in 2016.

Conceptual Framework

National Security: National security is the ability of a country's government to protect its citizens, economy, and other institutions. Beyond the obvious protection against military attacks, national security in the 21st century includes several non-military mission. National security is the ability of a country's government to protect its citizens, economy, and other institutions. Today, some non-military levels of national security include economic security, political security, energy security, homeland security, cybersecurity, human security, and environmental security. Hussain (2022) describes national security as the requirement to maintain the survival of the state through the use of economic power, diplomacy, power projection and political power. The concept of national security refers to the protection and preservation of a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the well-being of its citizens from internal and external threats. It encompasses a broad range of measures and policies designed to safeguard the interests, values, and way of life of a country. In a similar expression, national security involves the safeguarding of the territorial integrity of the state. From this perspective, it is the job of defence strategy to promote national security, which is accomplished by relying on the acquisition of military hardware and the strengthening of the country's defence forces which military security focuses on as differentiated from human security (Singh, 2015).

The United Nations (2023) points out that national security involves a proactive approach to anticipate and address various challenges that can jeopardize a nation's stability, safety, and prosperity. National security has also been identified as the preservation of the norms, rules, institutions and values of the state. It also comprises the ability of a state to cater for the protection and defence of its citizenry. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the concept of national security can vary from country to country, depending on specific geopolitical circumstances, historical contexts, and the prevailing threats faced by individual nation, and balancing security measures with respect for civil liberties and human rights is a delicate challenge for governments worldwide (Singh, 2015). To ensure national security, governments rely on tactics, including political, economic, and military power, along with diplomacy. For most of the 20th century, national security was strictly a matter of military power and readiness, but with the dawn of the nuclear age and the threats of the Cold War, it became clear that defining national security in a context of conventional military warfare had become a thing of the past. Today, various policymakers

struggle to balance the demands of several national securities. Among these are economic security, political security, energy security, homeland security, cybersecurity, human security, and environmental security.

Methodology: The work relied on secondary data. Data, therefore, was collected from magazines, text books, monographs, journal articles, seminar papers, and symposiums that are directly or indirectly related to the subject matter. Data collected were analysed using the content analysis method.

Theoretical Framework: The globalization theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this project. The goal of the theory of globalization is to interpret current international events in terms of development, economic conditions, social situations, political and cultural influences, and global terrorism. Theoretically, globalization emphasizes two primary growing trends: the development of global active communication networks and fluid economic conditions, particularly high trade and financial resource mobility. It is assumed that as a result of globalization, more countries now rely on international trade, the international financial system, and communication. As a result, both positive and negative aspects of human endeavor are more integrated into the global scenario (Scholte 1995). Globalization is a phenomenon of change and effects. It permeates territories and societies entrenching new values in every facet of human life. To this extent, the nexus between globalization and insecurity may not be elusive but instructive to the challenges and expectations of a modern state.

Thus, global reality is therefore a phenomenon of this century but its origin transcends centuries. In illustrative sense, today, our planet has become a web of interdependence linked together in ways that our forbearers could not have imagined. Like individuals and families, peoples, nations, and states are all spinning this web while at same time they are suspended on it. Terrorism is one of the many negative forces that globalization has brought about for nations and society at large during its growth and expansion. Terrorism and its threat have become more global as a result of globalization (Iliria 2020). Globalization has led to a rise in global challenges, which has made them more difficult to address. An enormous issue that has arisen as a result of globalization is the increase in terrorism. One could argue that the degree of terrorism is higher and more developed the greater and more developed the effect of globalization. International terrorism poses a possible risk to the peace and stability of the world.

ISWAP and the Challenges of National Security in North East Nigeria

According to Adam (2018), terrorist activity is nothing new in Nigeria's North-East. It has manifested in various dimension through the region's long history since independence. The phenomenon has remained an unfair, cruel, and unconscionable tool used by the insurgent movement to instill fear in Nigerians. On the contrary, however, terrorism is considered an act that is deployed in pursuit of justice in modern-day Nigeria. Terrorist acts are always unfair and inhumane, regardless of the degree of social systemic injustice or provocation. Therefore, there is never a human or other standard that can justify the acts of terrorists. There is now a new kind of terrorism in the area as a result of ISWAP breaking away from Boko Haram. By establishing a semblance of a fundamental governance structure, service delivery, and internal security in areas under its illegal control, ISWAP has altered its operational strategies over time in an effort to gain the allegiance and support of the local populace. Due to this development, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has been able to strengthen its ideology in the region. This is because its local affiliate, ISWAP, has become more powerful and is currently in charge of coordinating all

terrorist activities within the axis (Malik, 2021). Because opposing forces differ greatly in terms of strength, capability, and terrain, terrorism is an asymmetric form of warfare that is more common or applicable in situations where conventional warfare proves to be ineffective. Consequently, the people, locations, and establishments that terrorists typically target for attack, as well as the tactics they use, are determined by their political or religious goals.

To generate as much fear and publicity as possible, terrorist attacks are typically directed towards one or more specific objects or subjects. The strategies and tactics used by ISWAP in Nigeria have changed depending on the location and circumstance. Throughout the years, ISWAP has terrorized the populace and governments of numerous states in northern Nigeria and beyond by executing targeted killings, kidnappings, suicide bombings, gang rapes, and other violent crimes. Consequently, in 2019 ISWAP tactically withdrew into the Sambisa Forest in Borno State and other mountainous areas within the Lake Chad Basin region, following severe military losses sustained at the hands of the combine security forces of the MJTF. ISWAP has adopted guerrilla warfare tactics against security forces and occasionally other soft targets within their immediate reach, based on their strategic position (Haner & Sloan 2022).

However, in recent years, kidnapping and criminal abduction of minors, particularly innocent schoolchildren, has become one of the most common and horrifying strategies used by ISWAP terrorists to further their cause (Malik, 2021). For instance, ISWAP abducted roughly 118 schoolgirls in the Kakara Local Government Area of Katsina State at the beginning of February 2018, a move that sparked outrage and condemnation throughout the world (Gadzama, 2022). Since then, the group has felt empowered to carry out more kidnapping attacks against innocent civilians and a few prominent politicians and businessmen due to the large ransom they typically demand from their victims and the government. Last but not least, the ISWAP terrorists have been regularly attacking Nigerian security forces with guerrilla warfare techniques, including ambushing and bombing military formations and checkpoints in Borno, Kaduna, Zamfara, and Yobe States, respectively (Ojelade, 2021). Unfortunately, the group appears to be winning this part of the conflict, as our armed forces' morale is appallingly low due to the incalculable losses they have recently sustained from ISWAP attacks as a result of the Air Force's lack of aerial coverage and support.

Impact of ISWAP Attacks on North-East Socio-Economic and Security Sectors

Security and territorial integrity have been gravely threatened and undermined since ISWAP became the predominant terrorist group in the Lake Chad Basin region in 2016 (Agbo, 2020). The impact of terrorism on human security cannot be overstated, since ceaseless terrorist attacks have resulted in the loss or destruction of hundreds of thousands of lives, property, and farmlands. Our armed forces have been demoralized and deflated by ISWAP, particularly the elite Nigerian Army's Infantry Brigade, which was once ridiculed for being among the best in Sub-Saharan Africa due to its previous successes in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. In addition, terrorism has revealed the massive corruption, administrative decay, and physical inadequacy of Nigeria's defense systems in terms of combat readiness during the past few years. The region's industrial and economic activity have drastically decreased, particularly in the livestock and textile subsectors (NBS, 2019 as cited in Owenoriede, 2023). This is another way that the ISWAP terrorism has affected the economy. Numerous businesses and industries that were formerly based in the Northeast have either moved to other regions of the nation or have completely ceased operations, according to UNDP (2019). The agricultural and food security sub-sector has also been

severely impacted by ISWAP's operations. Most of the villages, towns, and communities in the Northeast, which was once considered Nigeria's breadbasket, have seen little to no farming activity in the past few years (Okore & Nwadiubu, 2022). In fact, the vast majority of the farming communities in this region of the nation have either been forced from their ancestral lands or are hibernating at one of the federation's many camps for internally displaced people (IDPS). Additionally, ISWAP terrorist activities have had a terrible impact on people's fundamental human rights. Since its incursion, flagrant violations of the rule of law, fundamental human rights, and established authority have contributed to the escalation of extremist religious ideology in the region.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is terrorism in the Northeast, even though there have been occasional terrorist attacks in the past in some parts of the nation and among the various ethno-religious groups claiming to be fighting for the socio-economic and political emancipation of their people, terrorism in the North-East, as exemplified by ISWAP, is a relatively new phenomenon. But in terms of their violence, savagery, impunity, and international notoriety, none of the previous terrorist or militant groups that operated in Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s comes close to these current bloodthirsty actors. Additionally, as demonstrated by ISWAP, these terrorists have recently gained so much confidence that they are able to operate virtually freely in the northern region of Nigeria. This is a relatively recent development, even though. In addition to their regular attacks on MJTF military bases and important towns, they have progressed to target and attack railway lines and airports, which has led to an overall sense of unease in Nigeria. Regrettably, the government's lack of political will to address the situation head-on and with decisiveness has made it even worse. Otherwise, how else would one account for a scenario in which terrorists are able to break into a jail in the middle of a country's capital city and free their members without encountering any opposition from the security guards stationed nearby? As a result, since 2016, the ISWAP's incursion into Nigeria has caused untold security harm to the nation's sociopolitical and economic development. The political stability and emerging democracy of Nigeria are currently perilously close to collapse due to the unstable security challenges posed by these religious terrorists or insurgent groups, especially in ISWAP.

Given the ongoing threat posed by ISWAP, the government had to implement significant counterterrorism measures to ensure good governance and social justice in society. In doing so, the people will respond with unwavering loyalty to the state rather than any terrorist organizations. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, and political marginalization that encourage terrorist recruitment should be swiftly addressed. In order to preserve the rule of law, civil authority, and the state's territorial integrity, the government should also implement all civil security measures that are within its purview, capabilities, and authority. This will restore the political system's stability, security, peace, and law and order. Additionally, there should be enough space for diplomatic overtures in which the terrorist is invited to engage in peace negotiations through dependable and well-respected middlemen. Insurgents and terrorists may surrender their weapons and accept the government's offer of amnesty and alternative dispute resolution if the procedure is open and honestly carried out. The government should show, in concrete terms, that it has the military and political will to arm its armed forces with cutting-edge weaponry in order to strategically engage and eliminate all terrorist resistance within the state, thus defeating the terrorists on their own territory. This will make other would-be terrorists aware that the government will not tolerate any kind of criminal activity at all within the region.

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