

# TERRORISM MONITOR

## Is the 'Bakura Faction' Boko Haram's New Force Enhancer Around Lake Chad?

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Image of ISWAP fighters from propaganda video (source: futureuae.com)

On January 19, a female suicide bomber detonated explosives at Kaiga Kindjiria village near Lake Chad in Chad, killing nine civilians ([Actucameroun, \(https://actucameroun.com/2020/01/20/tchad-plusieurs-morts-apres-lexplosion-dune-femme-kamikaze/\)](https://actucameroun.com/2020/01/20/tchad-plusieurs-morts-apres-lexplosion-dune-femme-kamikaze/) January 20). The attack occurred at a time of heightened sensitivity in the Lake Chad subregion, as only two weeks earlier Chad had announced the withdrawal of 1,200 troops stationed in the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria—Borno State—since early 2019 ([Daily Trust, \(https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/boko-haram-chad-pulls-troops-out-of-nigeria.html\)](https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/boko-haram-chad-pulls-troops-out-of-nigeria.html) January 5). The attack also coincided with Borno Governor Babagana Zulum's January 19 visit to the Chadian capital N'Djamena to meet military commanders from Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria who were coordinating the fight against Boko Haram as part of a multinational force ([Facebook.com \(https://www.facebook.com/355177254819159/posts/1086902708313273/?d=n\)](https://www.facebook.com/355177254819159/posts/1086902708313273/?d=n), January 19).

The broader context of these events was the G-5 meeting in Pau, France on January 13, which includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger ([Lepoint.fr, \(https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/sahel-macron-annonce-l-envoi-de-220-soldats-supplementaires-13-01-2020-2357564\\_3826.php\)](https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/sahel-macron-annonce-l-envoi-de-220-soldats-supplementaires-13-01-2020-2357564_3826.php) January 14). One of the outcomes of that meeting was a decision to designate the terror group Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) – as the greatest security threat in the Sahel ([Dakaractu, \(https://www.dakaractu.com/Ennemi-prioritaire-de-la-France-et-du-G5-Sahel-Comment-l-ex-ElIGS-en-est-arrive-la\\_a182471.html\)](https://www.dakaractu.com/Ennemi-prioritaire-de-la-France-et-du-G5-Sahel-Comment-l-ex-ElIGS-en-est-arrive-la_a182471.html) January 15). Shortly after the female suicide bombing occurred, Chad announced its intention to deploy troops to ISGS' main operational strongholds along the Niger-Burkina Faso-Mali tri-border region ([Alwihda, \(https://www.alwihdainfo.com/G5-Sahel-le-deploiement-d-un-bataillon-tchadien-dans-le-fuseau-Est-se-precise\\_a81574.html\)](https://www.alwihdainfo.com/G5-Sahel-le-deploiement-d-un-bataillon-tchadien-dans-le-fuseau-Est-se-precise_a81574.html) January 20). One might presume Chad's withdrawal from Borno was done with some foresight of the country's impending deployment of troops to the Sahel.

## **Who Deployed the Female Suicide Bomber?**

Female suicide bombings have been a key tactical characteristic of the Boko Haram insurgency since 2014, but in recent years, particularly since 2016, the number of women involved in suicide attacks has declined at a rapid rate. In what appears to be a new upswing, however, another female suicide bombing recently occurred in Kaiga Kindjira, Chad in August 2019, killing six people, including one soldier ([Al-Jazeera, \(https://www.aljazeera.com/news/afrika/2019/08/suicide-bomber-kills-chad-including-soldier-190814140629813.html\)](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/afrika/2019/08/suicide-bomber-kills-chad-including-soldier-190814140629813.html) August 14, 2019). What is unusual about these two recent female suicide bombings is that since the split within Boko Haram in August 2016 created the faction of Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), ISWAP has been the most active group operating around Lake Chad. ISWAP incorporated ISGS in March 2019. The other, weaker faction created in 2016 is led by Abubakar Shekau, and is based relatively far from Lake Chad in southern Borno. Because ISWAP does not conduct female suicide bombings, and the Shekau-led faction of Boko Haram operates in an area far from the site of the attack, neither groups seem likely to have conducted these attacks.

Ironically, ISWAP surprisingly has not claimed responsibility for several major barracks raids around Lake Chad since June 2019, nor has it claimed a series of abductions of Muslim civilian women in primarily southeastern Niger, where ISWAP is also strong ([Terrorism Monitor,](#)

(<https://jamestown.org/program/boko-haram-factionalization-who-are-islamic-state-in-west-africa-province-iswap-fighters-in-niger-and-chad/>). June 14, 2019). Shekau has publicly acknowledged using female suicide bombings and enslaving Muslim women who are, in his view, apostates for living outside his territories. It would seem that his southern Borno-based faction would condone these attacks even if Shekau's fighters are geographically incapable of carrying them out. This then raises the question about who might actually be conducting these attacks on Shekau's behalf?

### **The Bakura Faction: Reconciling the Paradox**

Reports from local journalists and Nigerian security officials indicate the emergence of a new faction of Boko Haram led by 'Bakura.' Bakura has reportedly pledged loyalty to Shekau within the past year, which would make it all the more likely that Bakura's fighters are conducting attacks in Niger, Chad, and around Lake Chad, which ISWAP would deem impermissible ([Twitter.com/sembetv](https://twitter.com/SembeTv/status/1209050749587673089), (<https://twitter.com/SembeTv/status/1209050749587673089>), December 23, 2019). Shekau, for his part, also sent "glad tidings" to fighters near Lake Chad in a September 2019 video, just after fighters there had declared their loyalty to Shekau in a video that also claimed attacks on Lake Chad. [1] While those fighters near Lake Chad did not explicitly identify themselves as Bakura's fighters, they may well have been under Bakura's command.

Bakura is believed to be from the area north of Lake Chad in Niger and leads primarily ethnic Buduma militants, although Bakura is Kanuri, like most ISWAP members and especially most Shekau faction members ([Twitter.com/vincentfoucher](https://twitter.com/VincentFoucher/status/1092445244942155777), (<https://twitter.com/VincentFoucher/status/1092445244942155777>), February 4, 2019). The Buduma people on Lake Chad are known for fishing and livestock herding. Buduma militants were featured in a 2014 Boko Haram video in which Buduma fighters beheaded three Kanuri vigilantes for crossing into their territory and stealing their cattle. [2] An audio message in 2014 featured Chadian fighters speaking in the Buduma language threatening Chad with attacks. These attacks occurred at an increasing pace in 2015 ([Alwihda](http://www.alwihdainfo.com/L-enregistrement-de-Boko-Haram-qui-menace-le-Tchad_a11536.html), ([https://www.alwihdainfo.com/L-enregistrement-de-Boko-Haram-qui-menace-le-Tchad\\_a11536.html](http://www.alwihdainfo.com/L-enregistrement-de-Boko-Haram-qui-menace-le-Tchad_a11536.html)), June 5, 2014). It would not be inconsistent if Buduma fighters fought with Shekau from 2014 onward and then more recently realigned under Bakura's command to act as Shekau's force amplifiers around Lake Chad. This would be despite the fact that the area has been mostly under ISWAP's influence since August 2016. Shekau had led ISWAP from March 2015 until IS announced a new leader, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, in August 2016, at which point he left ISWAP to lead his own faction.

Other attacks on Lake Chad that can be attributed to Bakura's faction have been reports of various massacres of civilians, including one in December 2019 where dozens of fisherman were killed on Darak island, Cameroon, in Lake Chad ([PM News](https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/01/04/boko-haram-gunmen-disguised-as-traders-kill-50-fishermen/), (<https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/01/04/boko-haram-gunmen-disguised-as-traders-kill-50-fishermen/>), January 4). A major barracks raid also occurred on this island in 2019 that was claimed by the fighters near Lake Chad who had declared loyalty to Shekau in the September 2019 video. The attack on Darak's fishermen would have been sanctioned by Shekau, but not ISWAP. The massacre seemed to be related to Bakura's fighters' desire to control the fishing trade on Lake Chad. This would boost Shekau's coffers if Bakura has aligned with him. Seeing anyone living outside his territories as

an infidel—whether or not they are Muslim—Shekau would have few ideological problems with the Bakura faction enslaving Muslim women, conducting female suicide bombings, raiding barracks, or killing innocent fishermen, even if Bakura’s fighters’ motives relate to both ideology and economics.

## **The Shekau Faction Prospectus**

While Shekau’s faction is nowhere near as strong as ISWAP, it is seeing a resurgence in not only its Lake Chad presence, but also in central Borno. This was demonstrated by the Shekau faction’s January 20 attack that reportedly killed 17 Nigerian soldiers on the Bama-Gwoza highway ([Vanguard](https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/01/17-soldiers-killed-in-fresh-boko-haram-attack-scores-abducted/), (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/01/17-soldiers-killed-in-fresh-boko-haram-attack-scores-abducted/>), January 20). Reports have emerged of battles taking place between ISWAP and the Shekau faction along the Nigeria-Niger border, where ISWAP has been trying to rescue Muslim civilian women captured by the Shekau faction (or possibly its allied Bakura faction). These reports come amid jihadist infighting that is also gripping the wider Lake Chad subregion ([Vanguard](https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/01/several-killed-in-fight-between-boko-haram-iswap-members/), (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/01/several-killed-in-fight-between-boko-haram-iswap-members/>), January 20).

The jihadist map in West Africa continues to evolve: with a strengthened Shekau faction around Lake Chad and in central Borno, a resurgent ISWAP (including ISGS, which is now officially a part of ISWAP) in Borno and the Sahel, and a revived Ansaru in northwestern Nigeria—which in January claimed an ambush on the convoy of the emir of Potiskum, a city in northwest Nigeria ([TheCable](https://www.thecable.ng/militant-group-claims-responsibility-for-attack-on-yobe-emir), (<https://www.thecable.ng/militant-group-claims-responsibility-for-attack-on-yobe-emir>), January 20). These developments cannot be decontextualized from the expanding French and Chadian presence in the Sahel and reduced Chadian presence in Borno. Shekau’s faction is the potential winner of these developments, as his group is seen as less of a military priority by the regional governments than ISWAP. This is perhaps because Shekau’s faction is not a formal Islamic State province, despite Shekau’s faction potentially posing a greater danger to civilians. Nevertheless, Shekau’s faction is hardly a peripheral jihadist actor, especially if Bakura’s fighters are now loyal to and becoming force enhancers for Shekau.

## **Notes**

[1] The video is available via the SITE website: <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/boko-haram-leader-shekau-addresses-video-speech-to-nigerian-muslims-in-lake-chad-region.html> (<https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/boko-haram-leader-shekau-addresses-video-speech-to-nigerian-muslims-in-lake-chad-region.html>).

[2] The graphic video is available at: <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2019/03/30/boko-haram-chadian-buduma-faction-execution-video-november-2014/>.



[TM-Jan.-28-2020-Issue.pdf \(/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/TM-Jan.-28-2020-Issue.pdf?](/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/TM-Jan.-28-2020-Issue.pdf?x96664)

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