

ISIS–West Africa (ISIS-WA)



OVERVIEW

AS OF APRIL 2025

ISIS–West Africa (ISIS-WA)—one of ISIS’s largest and most lethal branches—controls broad swaths of territory and has killed or displaced thousands of people in Nigeria and neighboring countries. The branch formed in 2015 when Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS and adopted the name ISIS–West Africa. ISIS-WA seeks to establish an ISIS caliphate. The branch collaborates with ISIS–Sahel and fights former Boko Haram members who broke from ISIS-WA. The branch exacerbates sectarian violence through its attacks and exploits poor economic conditions and social divisions in the Lake Chad region to attract members.

Operating Area

Primarily in northeastern Nigeria, with operations throughout the Lake Chad region, on the border of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.

Members

4,000 to 7,000 fighters

Tactics And Targets

ISIS-WA uses ambushes, military-style assaults, roadside bombs, kidnappings, and targeted killings; and equips its fighters with small arms, vehicle-mounted weapons, RPGs, mines, rockets, and IEDs. The branch mainly attacks regional military targets and civilian defense forces and frequently attacks government personnel and infrastructure; foreign aid workers for kidnapping and hostage-taking; Christians; and other civilians whom ISIS-WA perceives as working against the branch or opposing its interpretation of sharia.

Terrorist Group Designation

The State Department designated ISIS-WA as a foreign terrorist organization in February 2018. Former amirs Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Abu Abdullahi Umar al-Barnawi were named Specially Designated Global Terrorists in February 2018 and September 2019, respectively.

KEY LEADERS



Abu Musab al-Barnawi

Now-deceased former amir



ISIS–West Africa (ISIS-WA) *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS *(continued)*



Ba Lawan
a.k.a. Lawan Abubakar
Former amir



Abu Abdullahi Umar al-Barnawi
a.k.a. Ba Idrissa
Former amir

NOTABLE ATTACKS

December 2024

Yobe State and Lake Chad region, Nigeria

ISIS-WA conducts multiple armed drone attacks against a Nigerian military base, injuring five people.

1 September 2024

Mafa Village, Yobe State, Nigeria

ISIS-WA claims an attack that killed more than 130 villagers.

5 July 2022

Kuje, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

ISIS-WA uses firearms and explosives to attack a maximum-security prison in Kuje, freeing hundreds of inmates.

19 May 2021

Sambisa Forest, Borno State, Nigeria

ISIS-WA assaults Boko Haram's stronghold; Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau commits suicide.

1 March 2018

Rann, Borno State, Nigeria

ISIS-WA assaults a Nigerian military installation and a humanitarian aid facility, killing dozens of military personnel and kidnapping three aid workers, two of whom the branch executes.

