

الجهاد في سبيل الله



ABOVE: The Lakurawa logo, obtained by GGA from close sources, features the Arabic phrase “Al-Jihad fi Sabil Allah” (Jihad in the cause of God). Inside a red circle is a stylized, insect-like character that closely resembles the Hornet, a well-known figure from the video game Hollow Knight. Those interviewed had no idea what the logo means or how it came about.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AFRICA

Lakurawa: From transnational jihadist insertion in Northeast Nigeria to criminal-predatory governance in Northwest Nigeria

By Malik Samuel

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Executive Summary

This report examines the origins, evolution, and operational logic of Lakurawa, a significant armed group operating in Northwest and North-central Nigeria. Based on triangulated qualitative data, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and primary source document analysis, conducted between early 2025 and April 2026, the study challenges prevailing narratives about the group's emergence and affiliations.

Contrary to widespread claims that Lakurawa formed between 2017 and 2018 when community leaders in Sokoto state invited armed men from Niger Republic to combat banditry, this report finds that the group's roots trace back to al-Qaeda recruitment in Mali around 2011–2012. Approximately 328 fighters, mostly Chadians and Malians, entered Northeast Nigeria in late 2013, fought alongside Boko Haram under Abubakar Shekau, and participated in major offensives including Baga, Bama, Dikwa, and Gwoza before relocating to North-central and Northwest Nigeria in 2015.

Central argument

Lakurawa is essentially criminal, not jihadi. However, because most jihadi groups also engage in criminality, this claim requires theorisation. This report advances three analytical criteria to distinguish Lakurawa from canonical jihadi organisations, especially those operating in Nigeria: (1) Ideological coherence, Lakurawa lacks a coherent doctrine beyond performative religiosity; (2) Strategic orientation toward the state, Lakurawa systematically avoids targeting state institutions, attacking security forces only when inevitable; and

(3) The nature of governance, Lakurawa's governance is purely extractive and revenue-focused, not programmatic or state-building.

The report's core conceptual contribution is a four-stage cycle that explains Lakurawa's evolution and resilience: protection–legitimacy–authority–extraction. Lakurawa gains community acceptance by offering security against bandits; that acceptance confers local legitimacy; legitimacy enables social and religious authority; authority is then monetised through coercive zakat, levies, cattle rustling, and ransom demands. This cycle is self-reinforcing and distinguishes Lakurawa's criminal logic from the programmatic governance of groups like The Islamic State – West Africa Province (ISWAP).

The report finds no credible evidence supporting claims of Lakurawa's affiliation with the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP). Instead, the group maintains historical and operational links to al-Qaeda and has developed deepening ties with Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) in Kwara state, including the loan of 100 fighters in early 2026. Despite suffering significant casualties, including the death of its Northwest leader, Dando Sibü, on 31 March 2026, and over 380 fighters killed between November 2025 and April 2026, Lakurawa has demonstrated resilience, regrouping and expanding into new communities.

The evolving Lakurawa-JAS-JNIM nexus poses a growing threat, with JNIM establishing a presence in Kwara state and reportedly planning expansion into Benue and Plateau states. This fluid militant ecosystem, enabled by porous borders and dense forest corridors, risks transforming Northwest and North-central Nigeria into a strategic node linking the Lake Chad Basin and the central Sahel.

Implications for policy

Four implications follow from this report’s findings. First, misdiagnosing Lakurawa as a conventional jihadi group would prioritise military strikes and ideological counter-narratives, missing the group’s actual vulnerabilities: its reliance on local economic collaborators and its need for community acquiescence. Second, the protection-extraction cycle is replicable; if left unchecked, this model could spread to other ungoverned spaces. Third, the JNIM connection means Northwest Nigeria is becoming integrated into the Sahelian jihadist theatre, potentially creating a multi-front insurgency. Fourth, state absence is the strategic vulnerability, Lakurawa exists because the state does not provide security as a public good.

Research methodology

The findings presented in this report are based on triangulated qualitative data drawn from both primary and secondary sources, including interviews, field observations, document analysis of primary materials (handwritten letters and correspondence), and literature analysis of existing published research.

This research was prompted by the need to contribute to the extremely limited literature on Lakur¹ (commonly known as Lakurawa), a group with around 3,000 fighters across Northwest and North-central Nigeria² whose origin, affiliation, and objectives remain debated. Existing reporting reflects significant analytical disagreement. While some researchers and officials have suggested Lakurawa is affiliated with the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), others argue the group is linked to Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). Despite these divergent claims, both strands converge on an inaccurate narrative of the group’s emergence: that Lakurawa was formed between 2017 and 2018 when community leaders in Sokoto state invited men from Niger Republic to protect local communities from bandit violence.

Initial doubts about Lakurawa’s reported Islamic State affiliation emerged during interviews conducted in the Northeast with Boko Haram defectors for separate research. Former members of Boko Haram, particularly ISWAP, questioned the plausibility of an IS-affiliated presence in Northwest Nigeria operating independently of ISWAP. According to these sources, ISWAP maintains an active operational cell in the Northwest led by senior figures Ba Idrissa and Abu Ikrima³, making it unlikely that another Islamic State affiliate could operate without its knowledge. A review of IS social media platforms showed no Lakurawa attacks claimed by ISSP, including the high-profile abduction of the deputy speaker of the Kebbi state House of Assembly and the capture and execution of a Nigerian soldier in Sokoto state, both in 2025.

Following initial interviews, preliminary data collection commenced in early 2025. The research team built an extensive network of sources across communities in Sokoto and Kebbi states, then conducted extensive field research between October 2025 and February 2026. This included key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and observations across Sokoto, Kebbi, and Borno states. In Kebbi state, interviews were carried out in Birnin Kebbi, Argungu, Augie, and Maiyama. In Sokoto state, interviews were held in Sokoto, Tangaza, and Gudu. For security reasons, community members from villages under these local government areas were transported to local government headquarters for interviews.

Remote interviews were conducted from Abuja and Zamfara. In October 2025 and February 2026, a member of the research team had impromptu interactions with Lakurawa members in Kalenjeni, Magoho, and Mastigi communities in Tangaza local government area. In these communities, fighters moved around with rifles and whips, interacting with community members who went about their activities as though this presence was normal. A Lakurawa fighter inspected the research team member’s phone, destroyed its memory card, and took his cufflinks, though he offered to pay for

1 The group refers to itself as Lakur (derived from the French “les recrues,” meaning “the recruits”). Consequently, “Lakurawa”, the Hausa appellation used by local communities, can be understood as “members” or “followers of Lakur.” For this report, the author stick to ‘Lakurawa’, as it is the name the group is generally known by.
 2 There are eight commanders in the Sokoto and Kebbi, with each commander having at least 300 fighters, while the head of the Northwest operation has 500 fighters in Tangaza.
 3 Ba Idrissa, a Yusufiyya veteran, had been exchanged for the oil prospectors kidnapped by ISWAP in Borno state in 2017; he then was briefly the wali for ISWAP. Abu Ikrima, the Kogi-born ISWAP top commander, led the 2022 Kuje prison break that freed more than 800 prisoners, including 68 Boko Haram members.

the cufflinks because he liked them, underscoring the group's degree of control in remote communities.

Additionally, a research team member embedded with community members to attend Lakurawa's Maulid celebration on 19 November 2025 in Kurungurki village, Maiyama local government area, Kebbi state. The team member spent four days in the community, conducting several short interviews with both low-level and senior group members, including individuals with direct access to the group's founder, the head of its Nigeria operations, and the head of its Northwest base, all of whom were present for the celebration. In total, six short interviews were conducted during this period.

Between November 2025 and April 2026, the team conducted 34 remote interviews with group and community sources. Every interview generated follow-up engagements to clarify or expand on earlier claims, and information was verified with other sources. Claims about Lakurawa's presence in Borno and participation in Boko Haram attacks were cross-checked with multiple sources in the Northeast, including three former Boko Haram members who joined Lakurawa in Niger state in 2016 before recently exiting. Interviews with these sources proved crucial in providing details about Lakurawa's presence in Borno and the group's internal dynamics.

Similarly, Lakurawa sources rejected the widely held assertion that the group was invited by community leaders in Sokoto state to protect their communities. This necessitated a follow-up field trip to verify this information by tracking down and interviewing community leaders who had invited armed men from Niger Republic. Four of the nine men who formed the committee to invite these armed men were identified and interviewed separately in their communities.

Document analysis of primary sources

During this research, GGA obtained and analysed 11 primary source documents, all handwritten letters, both in Arabic and Hausa. These letters were attributed to Lakurawa's leadership in Northwest Nigeria and to JNIM's leadership in Kwara state. The document analysis contributed to insights into Lakurawa's internal dynamics, communication protocols, relationships with communities, and external alliances. The letters examined were:

- A request letter from JNIM dated 7 February 2026, signed by its leader in Kwara state, Amir Akibu Armiya'u, requesting the loan of 100 fighters from Lakurawa. This letter provided critical evidence of active coordination between JNIM and Lakurawa.
- A condolence letter dated 3 April 2026, also signed by Amir Akibu and addressed to Abu Yazid, following the death of Lakurawa's Northwest leader, Dando Sibü. This letter offered insights into the ritual and diplomatic dimensions of jihadist inter-group relations.
- A letter from Sibü to village heads in Sokoto state, dated 20 January 2026, notifying them of Lakurawa's forthcoming arrival for da'awah (religious outreach). This letter revealed how the group announces its presence, frames its activities in religious terms, and seeks to pre-empt resistance through formal notification.
- An undated letter, which GGA confirmed was sent on 28 March 2026, on behalf of Sibü, following his gunshot wounds four days earlier (24 March). It was addressed to village heads in Sokoto state, requesting that they send anyone capable of treating bone-related injuries. This letter provided rare insight into Lakurawa's logistical vulnerabilities, including medical shortfalls and the group's reliance on civilian expertise even as it preys on the same communities.
- A letter from Sibü dated 15 February 2026, addressed to village heads in Sokoto state, demanding payment before the 2026 Ramadan tafsir would be allowed to be conducted in their villages. This document was instrumental in understanding Lakurawa's extortionary governance, how religious obligations are weaponised, and how communities are coerced into paying for basic religious rites.

- An undated letter from Sibu, addressed to bandit leader Bello Turji demanding that Turji ceased banditry and either join its jihad or face destruction. This letter illuminated Lakurawa’s complex relationship with bandit groups operating in Northwest Nigeria.
- A letter from Sibu dated 2 November 2024, addressed to Bello Turji, calling on him to stop banditry. This letter, which, according to sources, followed the undated letter, pointed to Lakurawa’s complex relationship with bandit groups: competition framed as religious correction, and an attempt to assert ideological supremacy over criminal actors operating in the same theatre.
- A letter dated 10 April 2026 from Abu Yazid, addressed to community leaders in Sokoto state, notifying them of his appointment as Lakurawa’s new Northwest Nigeria leader and expressing hope that they would continue to support him in spreading God’s message. This letter provided critical insights into how Lakurawa manages leadership transitions not only internally but also in its relationship with the communities under its control.
- A letter dated 12 April 2026 from Abu Yazid, addressed to JNIM’s leader in Kwara state, thanking him for sending emissaries to condole with Lakurawa following Sibu’s death. This letter showed the post-succession dynamics within the group and its continued external alliances, especially in the Nigerian context.
- A letter dated 14 April 2026 addressed to Tijani al-Bashir, confirming his appointment as deputy to Abu Yazid, based on his “effort, intelligence and loyalty”. This document gave rare glimpse into Lakurawa’s internal personnel decisions and the criteria the group values in its leadership selection. The explicit mention of “effort, intelligence and loyalty” revealed that Lakurawa, despite its jihadist rhetoric, prioritises managerial and organisational qualities over purely religious credentials when appointing senior commanders.
- A letter dated 14 April 2026 from Abu Yazid addressed to community leaders in Kebbi state, notifying them of his appointment as Lakurawa’s new leader for the Northwest and expressing hope that they would continue to support him in spreading God’s message. This letter, similar in content to the 10 April letter to Sokoto communities, also gave insights into Lakurawa’s administrative reach and its methodical approach to consolidating authority.

These letters confirmed Lakurawa’s bureaucratic ambition, revealed the dual nature of its community engagement (religious invitation layered over coercive extraction), provided empirical evidence of external alliances with JNIM, exposed internal vulnerabilities including medical incapacity, and illustrated how the group exerts control through administrative means rather than violence alone.

Methodological limitations

This study faced limitations inherent in research on clandestine armed groups. Access to the group’s top leadership, particularly its founder, Amir Habib Tajje, and the head of Nigeria operations, Amir Tajudeen Muhammad bin Al-Wali, presented gaps in information about the group’s formation, doctrine, and long-term strategy. Interviewees constituted early recruits with access to leadership but were not part of decision-making on group formation. Additionally, the growing connection between Lakurawa and JNIM requires further research, as time constraints prevented full investigation of this nexus.

Introduction: Theorising Lakurawa as a criminal-jihadi hybrid

This report argues that Lakurawa is essentially criminal, not jihadi. However, because most armed groups, including canonical jihadi organisations like ISWAP, JAS, and al-Qaeda, also engage in criminality (cattle rustling, kidnapping, extortion, ransom demands), this argument risks analytic weakness if it rests solely on evidence of criminal behaviour. Simply demonstrating that Lakurawa steals cows, extorts communities, or kidnaps does not, on its own, distinguish it from other groups.

To address this problem, this report advances three analytical criteria that distinguish Lakurawa from canonical jihadi organisations. These criteria focus not on whether a group commits crimes (almost all do) but on how criminality relates to the group’s overall logic, objectives, and governance structure.

Three analytical criteria

Lakurawa fails all three criteria. It has no coherent ideological project, no media presence, no claimed attacks, and no systematic targeting of the state. Its governance is not state building but predation: it appoints imams, resolves disputes, and enforces dress codes not to build a caliphate but to create stable conditions for extraction. The group is best understood as occupying a specific location

on the crime-terror continuum: it uses the language of jihad to legitimise the logic of organised crime.

The protection-legitimacy-authority-extraction cycle

The report’s core conceptual contribution is a four-stage cycle that explains Lakurawa’s evolution, resilience, and distinctive character. This cycle is the mechanism through which a foreign fighter cohort transformed into an embedded predatory governance structure.

Stage 1: Protection

Lakurawa enters communities suffering from banditry. It offers security against a common enemy, often by publicly executing captured bandits. Communities, abandoned by the state and desperate for safety, accept this protection. The group does not initially demand payment; protection is offered as a gift or religious duty.

Stage 2: Legitimacy

Because Lakurawa delivers what the state cannot, physical safety, it acquires local legitimacy. This legitimacy is reinforced through performative piety: joining community prayers, preaching, punishing moral transgressions (eg., destroying memory and SIM cards⁴, and whipping individuals with phones containing music), and presenting itself as more pious than both bandits and the state.

Criterion	Jihadi (eg., ISWAP, JAS, al-Qaeda)	Criminal-jihadi hybrid (Lakurawa)
Ideological coherence	Clear, articulated doctrine; published goals (caliphate, Sharia enforcement, expulsion of Western influence); active propaganda and media wings; claimed responsibility for attacks	Performative religiosity; no coherent doctrine beyond generic calls for Sharia; no media wing; no claimed attacks; religious rhetoric functions as recruitment and legitimisation tool, not strategic framework
Strategic orientation toward the state	Systematic targeting of state institutions, security forces, democratic symbols, and Western interests; state destabilisation as a core objective	Active avoidance of state confrontation; attacks on security forces mainly when inevitable; no strategic logic of state destabilisation; the state is avoided, not targeted
Nature of governance	Programmatic governance: state-building projects, parallel administrations, service provision (even if coercive); revenue extraction serves a larger political project	Purely extractive governance: authority is monetised directly; religious obligations (zakat, tafsir) weaponised as taxation; dispute resolution and imam appointments serve revenue generation, not state-building

Table 1: Lakurawa’s three analytical criteria.

⁴ The group has since stopped destroying SIM cards, focusing only memory cards.

Stage 3: Authority

Legitimacy enables authority. Lakurawa begins replacing imams, resolving land and divorce disputes, and usurping the roles of traditional rulers. Community members report grievances to Lakurawa representatives, not to village heads. This authority is administrative and social, not merely coercive. It is consented to (however reluctantly) because the group has demonstrated its utility.

Stage 4: Extraction

Authority is then monetised. Zakat demands become coercive taxes with no basis in Islamic nisab rules. Cattle are rustled systematically. Ransom demands follow abductions of community leaders. Communities that comply receive protection, from both bandits and Lakurawa itself. Those that resist face violence, abduction, or property seizure.

This cycle is self-reinforcing. Extraction funds the means of protection (weapons, fighters, motorcycles). Protection maintains legitimacy (as long as bandits stay away). Legitimacy underwrites authority (communities continue to accept Lakurawa's governance). Authority enables extraction (the group knows exactly who has cattle, who can pay, who can be abducted). The cycle explains Lakurawa's durability: it is not imposed entirely by force but is co-produced by communities that have no viable alternative.

Distinguishing Lakurawa from bandits

A further analytical distinction is necessary. If Lakurawa is essentially criminal, how does it differ from the bandit groups it claims to oppose? The answer lies in governance ambition. Bandits in Northwest Nigeria engage in predation – kidnapping, rustling, extortion – but they do not seek to govern. They do not replace imams, resolve disputes, dictate how people look or dress, or issue written administrative letters to village heads. Bandits extract and flee. Lakurawa extracts and stays. It seeks not just revenue but authority. This is what makes it a criminal-jihadi hybrid rather than simple banditry: it combines criminal revenue generation with a governance project, however extractive and predatory that project may be.

Phase 1: Transnational jihadist insertion (2011–2015)

Contrary to claims that Lakurawa emerged spontaneously in 2017–2018 as a community defence force, this report finds that the group's origins lie in al-Qaeda recruitment in Mali around 2011–2012.

Around late 2011 or early 2012, approximately 18 Chadians, some from the Lake Chad region, were transported to Mali and recruited into al-Qaeda. Their journey took them to Nioro du Sahel, Lakamane, and finally Banamba. Among these men was Muhammad Abubakar al-Karawi, also known as Mubarak Abdullahi Ibn Zubairu, mostly referred to as Dando Sibou.

According to interviews, Sibou and his cousin, Mubarak Bin Hassan, had wanted to join Ansar Dine, having heard about the organisation from a wealthy man Sibou worked for. Sibou believed joining the group would also make him rich. A relative promised to take him to Mali, along with 16 other men. Each was given CFA100 as pocket money. However, upon arrival in Nioro du Sahel, the relative handed the young men to another man and disappeared. They were later informed they had been sold. The new handler identified himself as an al-Qaeda recruiter and convinced them to join.

It was in Banamba that the group encountered Amir Habib Tajje, also referred to as Nurul Qalbi, a Mauritanian who had reportedly grown up in Mali and joined the Malian army before his dismissal for disciplinary reasons. After confirming the men were Muslims and not coerced, they were made to swear by the Koran and begin training. Interviewees identified Djamel Okacha⁵ as the leader of al-Qaeda in Mali at the time.

During this period, discussions emerged among handlers in Mali. Some, led by Tajje, pushed for al-Qaeda to be brought to Nigeria; others resisted. The global context was significant: Boko Haram was gaining global attention by conducting high-profile bombings targeting the UN building, the police headquarters, and several places of worship in Nigeria. The Boko Haram offshoot Ansaru⁶ was

⁵ The author also asked who the global leader of al-Qaeda was at the time and they mentioned Ayman al-Zawahiri.

⁶ Ansaru was formed by few people not happy with Shekau's Boko Haram leadership, including disagreement over how to spend the money the group received from al-Qaeda.



Figure 1: N'Djamena - Moundou - Changou - Bongor - Baga - Madagali Route.

also active, including the kidnapping of an Italian national working for Setraco⁷. Tajje and others eventually prevailed. A new group was formed that would maintain loyalty to al-Qaeda. The recruits were simply called *les recrues* (French for “the recruits”).

At the end of training, around late 2013⁸, 328 men left Mali for Nigeria, led by Amir Tajudeen Muhammad bin Al-Wali, a Chadian with a Libyan mother, while Tajje remained in Mali. He continues to be mainly based in Mali but shuttles between Mali, Niger Republic, Nigeria, and Chad, maintaining tight control over operations, decisions, appointments, and finances. Northwest and North-central operations are required to remit money to him annually, in both cash and cattle.

The group entered Nigeria via the N'Djamena-Moundou-Changou-Bongor-Baga-Madagali route⁹. Each fighter

reportedly arrived with an extra unassembled rifle, along with 30 burlap sacks of bullets, 33 bags of rice, N361 million (approximately \$2.2 million at the then exchange rate) in cash, a first aid box, and cooking utensils. (See Figure 1).

In Northeast Nigeria, they identified themselves as al-Qaeda, not Lakurawa¹⁰. The name did not exist then. They settled in Madagali, Adamawa state, and soon encountered Boko Haram commander Ali Madagali's men. Ali Madagali facilitated a meeting between the team's leaders and Abubakar Shekau. Shekau was sceptical about the men's motives, questioning whether they were sent by security forces. After being convinced, he allowed them to join but placed them under Boko Haram commanders to keep them under observation.

Lakurawa fighters participated in Boko Haram attacks on Baga, Bama, Dikwa, Doron Baga, Gwoza, Konduga, and

7 BBC (2012), Nigeria rescue bid: Kidnapped Briton and Italian killed, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-17305707>

8 This estimate is the author's based on the timeline of events narrated by the interviewees. The group of 18 men left Chad around 2012 and spent eight months in Niore du Sahel. According to them, the training in Banamba lasted more than a year.

9 This was according to group sources

10 Former Boko Haram members that knew and later followed them to Niger State confirmed that during their time in Borno, they never mentioned the name Lakurawa.

Monguno, among others. They lost 10 fighters during these attacks, including Mubarak Bin Hassan, the only one who married one of the Chibok girls¹¹. Following his death, his wife and daughter moved back to Sambisa Forest. Some of the Boko Haram members that Lakurawa men fought alongside included Abu Ummaymata, Sahaba, Amir Hasana, Amir Khalid, Alai Bukar, Amir Huzaifa, Mallam Musa Abuja, Baba Konduga, Amir Ukasha, Ali Madagali, Musa Bashir, Abu Fatima, Aboul Bass, Bin Habib, Bin Diska, Ja'afar Hamma, Amir Dunki, and Abu Nazir. (See right insert box).

This phase is important because it establishes Lakurawa's original character: it was not a spontaneous criminal enterprise but a transnational jihadist insertion with explicit al-Qaeda links. However, as the next phases demonstrate, strategic necessity, not doctrinal commitment, transformed the group into something fundamentally different.

Phase 2: Relocation and survival (2015–2018)

By late 2014 and into 2015, Boko Haram was losing territory under military pressure. This intensified after President Muhammadu Buhari assumed office. Lakurawa's departure from Borno was not planned. The pressure from military operations following the postponement of the 2015 elections¹² was a deciding factor. In March 2015, Boko Haram suffered a heavy defeat when fighters attempted to attack Maiduguri. Lakurawa members participated in this failed attack.

With mounting pressure, Lakurawa members decided internally to leave the Northeast without notifying Shekau. The decision not to inform him stemmed from fear of his reaction. Shekau had never fully trusted them, only accepting them because associates argued their numbers would swell Boko Haram's fighting force. Even after acceptance, they were initially reduced to serving as motorcycle riders for fighters and conducting reconnaissance. One incident remained with them: when Shekau allowed fighters to marry some Chibok girls and Mubarak signalled interest, Shekau initially objected

Verified Boko Haram commanders who fought alongside Lakurawa in Borno between 2013 and 2015

Amir Hasana:

He was later made a Qa'id in charge of Garin Hasana, close to Jimya along Sabil Huda road in Sambisa. After Shekau's death, Hasana moved Gazuwa and then to Mandara Mountains and was promoted to Amir al-fiya. He was later killed by Ali Ngulde for suspicion of trying to form his own group.

Amir Khalid:

Later promoted to Qa'id by Shekau, in charge of Jimya Bomma in Sambisa. Later killed by Shekau few months before his (Shekau) death. Another source claimed he was still alive in Sambisa and demoted from Qa'id not more than 6 months before Shekau was killed.

Alai Bukar:

A Qa'id in Gargash/Kwalfarji (Banki). He was Killed by soldiers six years ago in Mayanti, between Bama and Pulka.

Amir Huzaifa:

One source claimed he died not more than two years ago. Another source claimed he was in Yuwe in Konduga, having been redeployed from Sambisa by ISWAP, whom he joined after Shekau's death. According to this source, he's now an Amir al-Jaish in Yuwe under ISWAP.

Mallam Musa Abuja:

He was JAS chief bombmaker and was based in Arra inside Sambisa. He later exited the group through the Federal Government DDR programme.

Baba Konduga:

He was a nurse working in a government hospital in Konduga where he was kidnapped by the group in 2011/2012. He's still in Sambisa, but now with ISWAP. Under Shekau, he was the overall doctor in Guraba inside Sambisa, where he ran a big hospital.

Amir Ukasha:

He was a mechanic and a fighter under Mustapha Chad, one of Boko Haram's pioneer commanders. He was killed by government troops two years ago.

Ali Madagali:

He was a Munzir under Hasana. He's reportedly now in Sambisa with ISWAP

Abu Fatima:

He was a fiya and was killed by Shekau.

11 The Chibok girls were schoolgirls kidnapped from their school in Chibok, Borno state, on 14 April 2014. The attack drew world attention and is famous for the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

12 Premium Times (2015), INEC postpones 2015 general elections, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/176440-inec-postpones-2015-general-elections.html?tztc=1>



Figure 2: Boko Haram members who joined Lakurawa.

because Lakurawa fighters, in addition to being viewed as outsiders, had not participated in the operation that took the girls. Commanders persuaded Shekau to allow it, but the experience left the group aware of their outsider status.

The choice of destination was between Zamfara and Sokoto states, both far from the military campaign, close to Niger Republic, and relatively peaceful at the time¹³. Lakurawa extracted information from two captured soldiers about routes. One soldier, from Kwara state, called his driver-friend and put the phone on speaker. The friend provided directions to Niger state, saying from there they could find their way to Sokoto or Zamfara state. By November 2015, Lakurawa fighters left Borno.

In Niger state, the group settled in the forest in Teginia, Rafi local government area, near Shiroro. Focus shifted to resource mobilisation through community predation, especially cattle rustling. Fighters also made exploratory trips to Ngaski and Yauri in Kebbi state.

In 2017, Lakurawa opened a base in Yauri. By 2018, it

arrived in Sokoto state. It was in Sokoto that the group became known as “Lakurawa,” though members insist the correct name is “Lakur.”

Meanwhile, some Boko Haram members maintained phone contact with Lakurawa fighters. In 2016, 14 Boko Haram members left Borno and linked up with the group in Niger state. Eight of the 10 still with the group now hold leadership positions, with Tijani al-Bashir as deputy Northwest leader. (See Figure 2).

The Mutanen Nijar episode: A critical juncture

Understanding Lakurawa’s subsequent evolution requires examining a parallel process that created the conditions for its acceptance. By the mid-2010s, banditry had been gaining momentum in Zamfara state, shortly afterwards, communities in neighbouring Sokoto state were feeling the spillover. Eight communities – Tangaza, Gidan Madi, Magoho, Sitti, Tabaringa, Jinajini, Wasaniya, and

13 Banditry in Zamfara state was yet to receive the attention of security forces because it was more of cattle rustling and armed robbery than the sheer wanton killings and kidnapping for ransom that later took over.

Mulawa¹⁴ – were at the forefront of attacks. Community-led vigilantes with locally made rifles proved no match for bandits with AK47s.

In 2017, migrants who travelled seasonally to Niger Republic for dry-season farming told community leaders about men in Niger who “had experience fighting Boko Haram.” Desperate, communities explored hiring them. A nine-member committee was established. The committee sent a three-man delegation to meet representatives of these men in Niger Republic. An agreement was reached to employ 100 men, starting with 50 as a trial, at a monthly stipend of N30,000 (\$97 by then exchange rate) each.

When the 50 men arrived in Tangaza, they were well-armed with assault rifles and grenades. As one community member put it: “We knew immediately that these were not vigilantes, but we desperately needed to get rid of the bandits.” The men were provided with 25 brand new motorcycles and uniforms labelled “CJTF” (Civilian Joint Task Force) to create a local impression. Communities simply called them *Mutanen Nijar*¹⁵ (people from Niger).

Within a short time, security improved. The men returned from patrols with motorcycles, cattle, cash, and phones taken from bandits. As agreed, they kept everything. Bandits stayed away from communities hosting the *Mutanen Nijar*. Within two months, communities requested the remaining 50 men.

After more than a year, the relationship soured. The *Mutanen Nijar* began robbing community members, rustling cattle, raping women, and disrupting weddings. When communities terminated the arrangement, the men returned from Niger Republic and attacked from forest bases. Community vigilantes arrested some, all identified as *Mutanen Nijar*.

This episode is important for two reasons. First, it created the security vacuum and community desperation that Lakurawa would later exploit. Second, it demonstrates a transformation pattern: the *Mutanen Nijar* became what can be described as conflict entrepreneurs, actors who depend on the continuation of insecurity for economic survival. With bandits neutralised, their services became

redundant. Rather than become unemployed, they became the problem they were hired to solve. This logic would later characterise Lakurawa itself.

Phase 3: Embedded predatory governance (2018–present)

As communities continued to be attacked by the *Mutanen Nijar*, new armed men began appearing. In some communities, they called themselves Mujahideen; in others, Lakurawa. They preached, joined community prayers, assured protection, and then left, returning periodically.

When Lakurawa encountered the *Mutanen Nijar* in the forest, the *Mutanen Nijar* rejected Lakurawa’s call to stop attacking communities and join them. Lakurawa, with superior numbers, killed many and forced others to flee. Sometimes, Lakurawa arrived in communities with captured bandits or *Mutanen Nijar* members, read from the Koran, pronounced judgment, and executed them publicly. Word spread quickly about “genuine Muslims” getting rid of both bandits and the *Mutanen Nijar*. As one community leader put it: “It was Lakurawa that cleared and got rid of these people. We saw them as our fellow Muslims.”

This moment activated the protection-legitimacy-authority-extraction cycle. (See Figure 3).

Protection

For vulnerable communities abandoned by the state, Lakurawa’s offer of protection required no debate. Even communities that had suffered under the *Mutanen Nijar* did not ask about conditions. Lakurawa delivered on its promises: bandits stayed away from areas with known Lakurawa presence. People could farm, attend markets and schools, and sleep in their homes without fear.

Legitimacy

With increased acceptance, Lakurawa extended its mandate. It offered dispute resolution, economic empowerment (providing petty traders with small grants), and cultivated social acceptance. The group even passes

¹⁴ Wasaniya and Mulawa are in Gudu local government area while the other six are in Tangaza local government area.

¹⁵ Interviewees were asked whether the men identified themselves by any group name, and if not, what name the communities had given them.

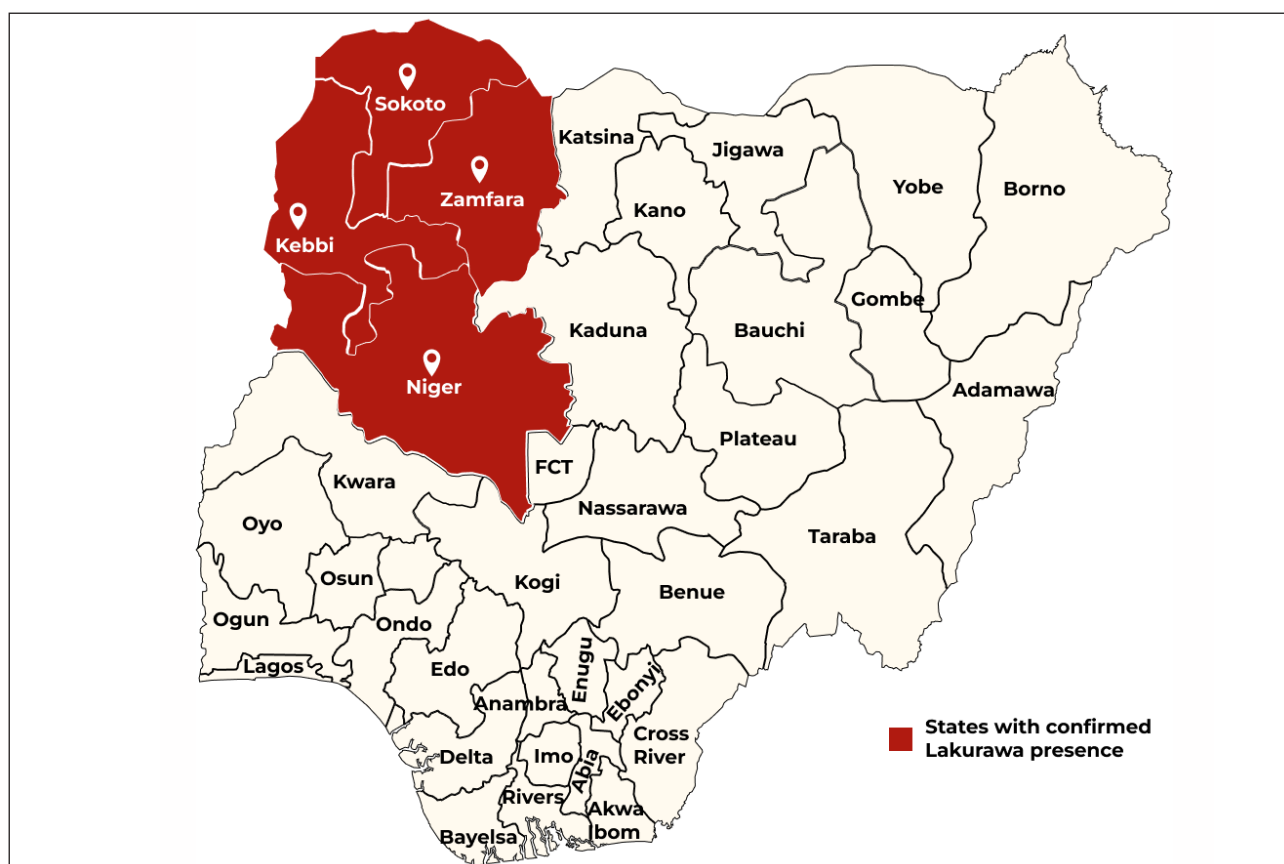


Figure 3: Lakurawa’s footprint in Northwest and North-central Nigeria.

judgement against its own fighters. On 11 March 2026, a Lakurawa fighter was executed for raping a 10-year-old girl in Sitti village in Tangaza local government area of Sokoto state. This performative justice reinforces local legitimacy.

Authority

Lakurawa’s influence extends to controlling lifestyle choices: what people wear, how they look, and how they use phones. Songs on phones earn lashes¹⁶; memory cards are destroyed as haram. The group usurps the roles of traditional leaders, who become figureheads. People report cases to Lakurawa representatives, not village heads. On 11 November 2025, the village head of Kurdula in Gudu, Sokoto state, was abducted by Lakurawa on accusations of abusing his position, granting a woman’s divorce request against her husband’s wishes and denying a man access to farmland. The group held him for two months, convened a judgment with clerics, and demanded N1 million (\$727) ransom, which the family paid.

Lakurawa also decides whether an imam is fit to lead prayers. An imam is replaced immediately if he does not have a beard, regardless of his religious knowledge. On 18 March 2026, Lakurawa dispatched fighters to Sitti and Magoho villages in Tangaza local government area, and to Babban Rafi, Sago, Saula, Lonka, and Karaye villages in Kebbe local government area. The fighters notified each community that their imams would not be permitted to lead the 2026 Eid al-Fitr prayers. Instead, the group would appoint its own imams for all mosques in those villages for the Eid prayer.

Extraction

Over time, Lakurawa’s protective posture evolved into a structured extraction system. Communities willingly accept zakat demands not only because zakat is Islamically mandated but because they see payment as a small price for safety, especially as they have no choice. Those who refuse face property seizure, hostage-taking, or both.

16 Each Hausa song incurs 50 lashes, while Afrobeat and other secular songs carry double the penalty.

The group does not follow Islamic rules regarding zakat thresholds (nisab). Instead, it dictates payments: from ten cows, one is taken; from goats and sheep, 20%. Refusal results in abduction and ransom demands of N500,000 (\$363) to N1 million (\$727).

Cattle rustling is Lakurawa’s major revenue source. At any time, the group reportedly has around 1,000 cattle in Sokoto state alone, excluding cattle remitted annually to the group’s founder in Mali. According to group insiders, Lakurawa deliberately limits its cattle holdings to approximately 1,000 head at any given time. The group prefers not to abandon its cattle during a security force attack, but a large herd would slow any attempted escape. Maintaining the herd at around 1,000 strikes a balance between revenue generation and operational mobility.

Cattle are sold to butchers and middlemen at up to 80% below market price, with a cow worth N1.5 million (\$1,090) being sold for N300,000 (\$218). This creates a class of collaborators profiting from the arrangement. To prevent cattle owners identifying stolen cattle, Lakurawa sells cattle rustled in Sokoto in Kebbi state and vice versa.

In February 2026, Lakurawa mandated communities in Ngaski, Kebbi state, to pay N100 million before clerics would be allowed to conduct Ramadan tafsir. A similar letter was sent to communities in Sokoto state. On 12 March 2026, following negotiations, the affected communities from both states paid a combined sum of N50 million (\$36,000) to then Lakurawa’s Northwest leader, Sibū, in Sokoto. Sokoto communities raised N21 million (\$15,000), while Kebbi communities contributed N29 million (\$21,000).

The group has also eroded livelihoods to trap communities in dependency. In some communities, especially in Kebbi state, it prohibits mechanised farming (declaring it haram), forcing reliance on cattle-drawn ploughs, then rustles the cattle. Villagers are left tilling by hand, reducing cultivated fields. Locals believe this creates grazing areas for stolen livestock. Similarly, wood and charcoal production, major income sources, have been banned in multiple communities, ostensibly because logging could expose the group’s presence to security forces.



Figure 4: Dando Sibū, the late Lakurawa leader in Northwest Nigeria.

Leadership succession as criminal enterprise

The death of Northwest leader Dando Sibū on 31 March 2026 exposed Lakurawa’s internal logic. Shortly after burial, a dispute emerged over succession. Amir Tajudeen, head of Nigeria operations, wanted to install his brother-in-law, Mubarak Wada (Lakurawa’s chief imam for Niger state). Fighters in Kebbi and Sokoto favoured Abu Yazid, Sibū’s de facto second-in-command. (See Figure 4).

Even when founder Amir Tajje ordered from Mali that Yazid assume interim control, Tajudeen continued pushing for Mubarak. Sources say things became heated, with rifles cocked between Tajudeen’s 61 men and Yazid’s over 1,000 fighters. A call to Tajje with the phone on speaker resolved the issue: Yazid was announced as leader, and Tajudeen was ordered to return to Niger state.

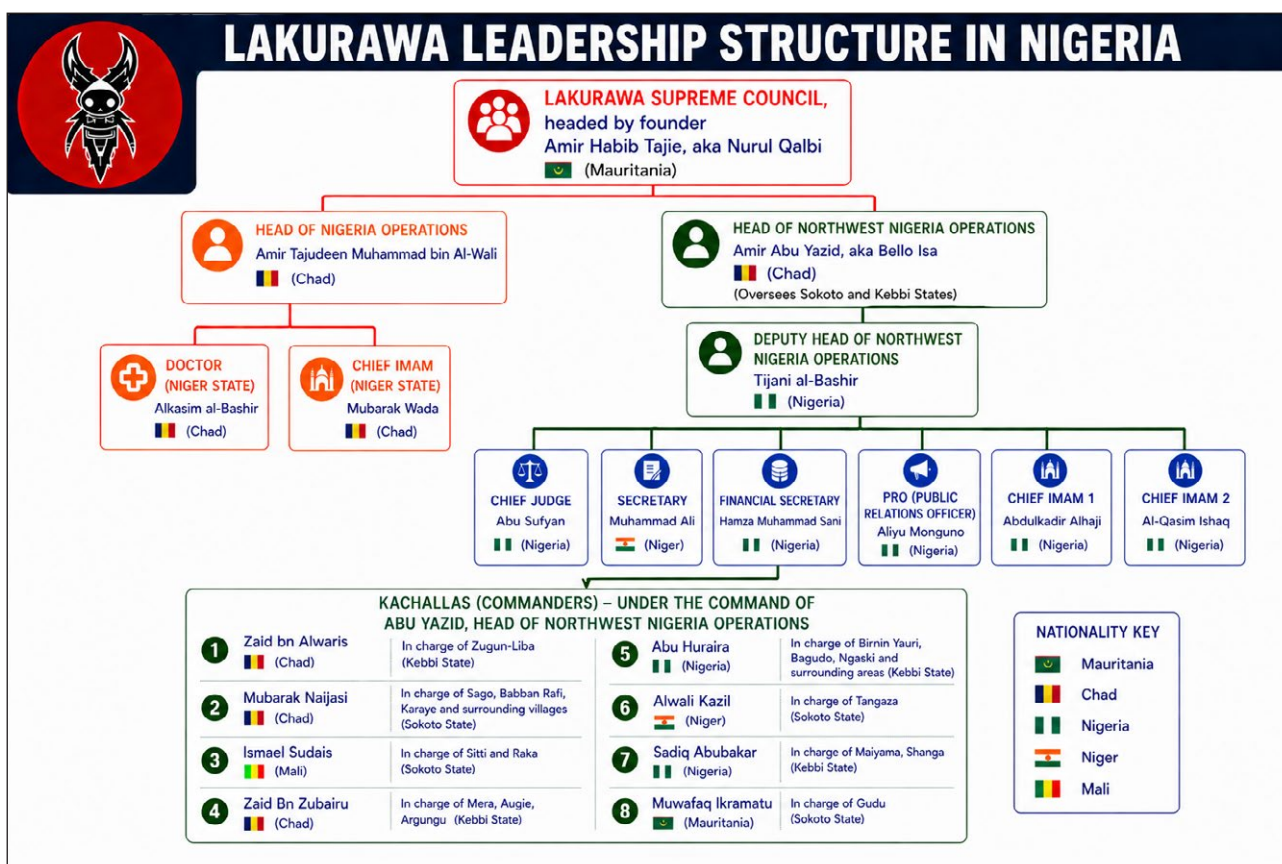


Figure 5: Lakurawa leadership structure in Nigeria.

This was not a theological succession crisis. It was a struggle over revenue streams. Those familiar with the group noted that Tajudeen had previously been forced to relocate from Sokoto to Niger state after being accused of underreporting revenue to the Mali leadership, selling cattle on the way and sharing proceeds with select fighters. Since his forced relocation, annual remittances to Mali have increased significantly. Before Ramadan 2026, Sibū reportedly sent N112 million (\$83,000) and 1,351 cattle to Mali from the Northwest alone. (See Figure 5).

The group’s reluctance to enter gold mining

Notably, Lakurawa has so far resisted entering gold mining in Kebbe local government area, where mining activities are expanding. In February 2026, fighters seized about 200g of gold from a miner but were ordered by Tajudeen to return it. Weeks later, another seizure was also forced to be returned. Group sources say the decision reflects fear of attracting the kind of attention that bandits have received

for participating in mining in the region, especially in Zamfara state. This restraint is strategic, not ideological, further evidence of the group’s criminal calculation.

The Lakurawa-JAS-JNIM nexus

An evolving Lakurawa-JAS-JNIM nexus reflects a widening arc of militant collaboration across Nigeria’s Northwestern and North-central regions. The porous tripartite border corridor of Nigeria, Niger Republic, and Benin, dense forests, protected reserves, and longstanding smuggling routes provide an enabling environment for cross-group interaction.

JNIM reportedly arrived in Nigeria in early September 2025¹⁷, with second-in-command Amadou Koufa visiting in December 2025 and spending 10 weeks. Before departure, he confirmed Amir Akibu Armia’u, a Mauritanian, as JNIM’s leader in Nigeria.

17 The group reportedly arrived via Niger Republic, entering Kebbi state and then moving on to Kwara.

In a letter dated 7 February 2026 addressed to “Lakur’s leader in Sokoto and Kebbi,”¹⁸ JNIM requested a loan of 100 fighters “so that we can join forces to establish the work of Allah.” The request was conveyed through Abu Yazid, who had been dispatched to Kwara earlier that month. By 17 February, Yazid had returned from the first trip. Six days later, he was on his way back to Kwara with 90 men, stopping in Niger state to pick up 10 more from Tajudeen. All 100 were recently recruited bandits, as the group reasoned that sending long-standing fighters would strip itself of loyalists essential for internal cohesion.

By the time fighters arrived in Kwara, the JAS commander for Northwest and North-central Nigeria, Sadiku, had also donated 50 men to JNIM. Unlike Lakurawa, JNIM reportedly sweetened its request to Sadiku with N8 million, six grenades, and 16 bowl-measures of ammunition. JNIM trained the combined 148¹⁹ men for two weeks in Moro local government area of Kwara state.

This convergence has profound implications. The cordiality between JNIM and Lakurawa was further displayed when JNIM sent a 21-man delegation and a letter on 4 April to condole Sibu’s death. By 13 April 2026, Abu Yazid sent a delegation and a letter to Kwara to thank JNIM, adding that “this message of sympathy you sent to us demonstrates the excellent relationship that exists between us.”²⁰

JNIM is now ramping up recruitment and revenue generation in Kwara state, with youth from Fulani, Hausa, and Yoruba communities joining. Recruitments are particularly taking place in Kaiama and Edu local government areas. Through da’wah activities, JNIM raises significant money from individuals and families. One family in Kaiama, which migrated from Taraba, reportedly donated N1 million during a February 2026 da’wah programme, earning a special recognition from JNIM.

The fragile, uneasy coexistence with bandits

Lakurawa, dominated by Sahelians (mostly from Mali), has recruited many Nigerians, but only few hold significant leadership roles. All Nigerians

in leadership positions, except three, are former Boko Haram members who joined from Borno.

Given overlapping operational space between Lakurawa and bandits, occasional clashes are inevitable, though bandits try to stay out of Lakurawa’s way. When Lakurawa extends to a new area, bandits either stop coming or relocate. Dozens of communities in Kebbi and Sokoto states have witnessed Lakurawa’s arrival coinciding with reduced banditry.

However, not all bandit leaders are afraid. In Zamfara state, bandits have pushed back against Lakurawa’s infiltration. Notorious leaders like Dogo Gide, Bello Turji, and Muhammad Gwaska have rebuffed Lakurawa’s overtures to abandon banditry and embrace jihad.

Most bandits have resisted recruitment for two main reasons. First, they are motivated by profit and do not want to share spoils with a jihadi group. Second, and more significantly, they are unwilling to subject themselves to rigid rules, prohibition of drugs, alcohol, and extramarital sexual relations. Gwaska was particularly displeased about the alcohol consumption rule, claiming no one could stop him drinking.

Bello Turji is the one bandit leader Lakurawa seems genuinely wary of. Around April 2024, Lakurawa sent a threatening letter warning Turji to “stop the killing of members of the Muslim community” and join the jihad or be “destroyed.” A second letter dated 2 November 2024 employed a conciliatory tone, concluding with a prayer for God to “guide us.” Turji ignored both. However, Turji himself appears keen to avoid confrontation. Following the US airstrike in December 2025, Lakurawa fighters sought cover in Isa forest, as the group attempted to flee across the border into Niger Republic, but Turji’s men insisted they leave for fear of attracting security forces. With Lakurawa vulnerable, Turji and his men would have seen an opportunity, but he likely calculated that confronting a 3,000-strong group with potential Sahelian reinforcements was not worth the risk.

¹⁸ A copy of the letter was obtained by GGA

¹⁹ Two fighters from the Lakurawa contingent were killed by local vigilantes in a Niger State village.

²⁰ A copy of the letter was obtained by GGA

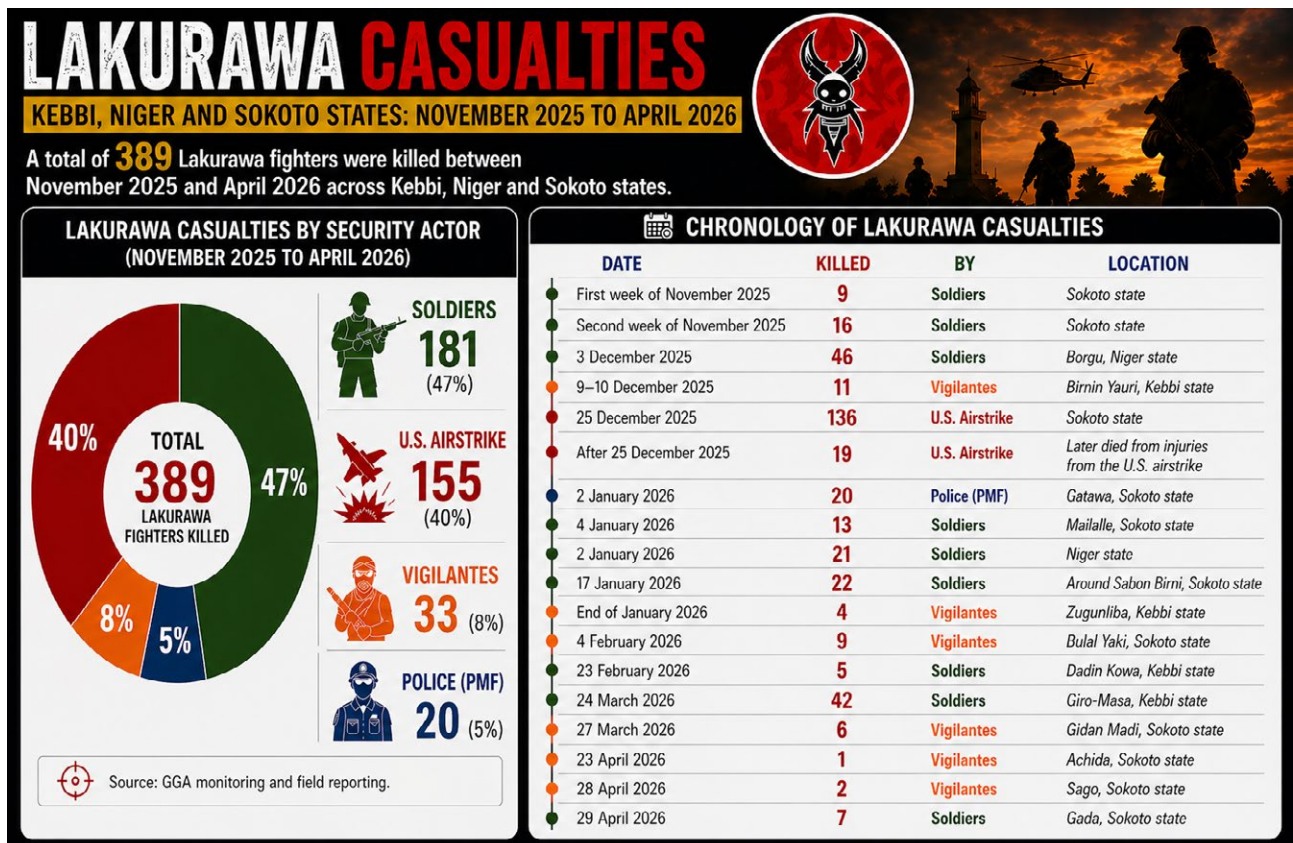


Figure 6: Lakurawa casualties.

Response against Lakurawa

Lakurawa’s control over rural communities is such that communities dare not disobey. The consequence for refusal is attack, most often without response from security forces. In many rural communities, security force presence is typified by sporadic daytime patrols. The military is engaged in internal security operations across all 36 states, with many soldiers deployed without regular rotation because the military is overstretched²¹. Permanent troop deployment in far-flung communities is a challenge.

This does not mean the government is unaware. Village heads send incidence reports to district heads, who report to paramount rulers, who report to state governments. However, the lack of response leaves communities helpless. When Lakurawa demanded payment before Ramadan tafsir, communities notified their paramount rulers, but nothing was done. They paid.

Since the military officially acknowledged Lakurawa’s presence in November 2024, responses have been reactionary and inconsistent. The most significant operation was the 2025 Christmas Day airstrike by the United States. Group insiders report that more than 150²² fighters were lost, with a further 55 killed by Nigerian security forces as the group attempted to cross into Niger Republic.

Lakurawa has suffered additional casualties. On 3 December 2025, 46 fighters were killed during military operations to rescue Papiri school children abducted by JAS. On 24 March 2026, at Giro-Masa in Shanga local government area, Kebbi state, a confrontation with soldiers resulted in 42 fighters killed, including Sibiu, who was shot in the right leg and later died from blood loss after all efforts to get medical help failed.

According to GGA monitoring, at least 389 Lakurawa fighters were killed from November 2025 to April 2026,

21 PR Nigeria (2026), Military deployment for internal security operations weakening police capacity – Buratai warns, [https://prnigeria.com/2026/01/12/military-deployment-internal/#:~:text=Buratai%20spoke%20on%20Monday%20while,defence%20resources%2C%20he%20said](https://prnigeria.com/2026/01/12/military-deployment-internal/#:~:text=Buratai%20spoke%20on%20Monday%20while,defence%20resources%2C%20he%20said,), Premium Times (2023), Nigerian military is overstretched – Defence Minister, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/581754-nigeria-military-is-overstretched-defence-minister.html?tztc=1>

22 The New Humanitarian (2026), Did the US military strikes in Nigeria hit the right target? <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2026/01/12/us-military-strike-nigeria-target>

with Nigerian soldiers responsible for 47% and the U.S. airstrike for 40%. (See Figure 6).

Despite these losses, Lakurawa has regrouped and extended its reach to previously unreached communities. In early February 2026, the group dispatched fighters to seven villages under Kebbe LGA to notify them of its control. A month later, three of these villages had their imams barred from conducting Ramadan tafsir, with the group appointing replacements.

Implications for policy

Before turning to specific recommendations, it is essential to state clearly why Lakurawa matters and what is at stake. Policymakers often confront armed groups with limited information, leading to generic counterterrorism responses that fail to address group-specific drivers. Four implications follow from this report's findings.

Misdiagnosis leads to ineffective response

Treating Lakurawa as a conventional jihadi group would prioritise military strikes and ideological counter-narratives. But because Lakurawa is primarily a criminal enterprise disguised as a religious movement, such responses miss the group's actual vulnerabilities: its reliance on local economic collaborators (butchers, middlemen, informants), its need for community acquiescence, and its systematic avoidance of state security forces. A criminal-jihadi hybrid requires a response that disrupts revenue streams and restores governance, not solely kinetic operations. The group's avoidance of state forces is not cowardice; it is a strategic vulnerability that can be exploited.

The protection-extraction cycle is replicable

Lakurawa's success formula, offering protection where the state is absent, gaining legitimacy, then monetising authority, can be and is being replicated. The *Mutanen Nijjar* episode demonstrated the pattern before Lakurawa perfected it. If left unchecked, this model could spread to other ungoverned spaces across Nigeria, creating a patchwork of predatory non-state authorities that extract from rural populations without providing any development or public goods beyond the absence of worse violence. JNIM's current expansion in Kwara suggests this replication is already underway.

The JNIM connection changes the regional calculus

Lakurawa is no longer a localised criminal group. Its deepening alliance with JNIM, including personnel transfers means that Northwest Nigeria is becoming integrated into the Sahelian jihadist theatre. If this convergence continues, Nigeria could face a multi-front insurgency linking the Northeast (ISWAP/JAS), Northwest (Lakurawa), and North-central (JNIM). This would fundamentally overwhelm current security architectures, which are already stretched thin. The forests of Kebbi, Niger, and Kwara risk becoming not merely transit routes but strategic nodes linking insurgent theatres across the Lake Chad Basin and the central Sahel.

State absence is the strategic vulnerability

Lakurawa exists because the state does not. Communities accept predatory governance because the alternative, no security at all, is worse. The protection-legitimacy-authority-extraction cycle is only possible where the state has abdicated its most basic function: providing physical safety as a public good. Until the Nigerian state can provide basic security in rural areas, new Lakurawas will continue to emerge. Military operations without governance reform are temporary fixes. Each operation may kill fighters, but unless the state fills the vacuum, the cycle will restart with new actors.

Recommendations

To the Nigerian federal government and security agencies

- **Differentiate responses by group typology:** Avoid treating Lakurawa, bandits, and other jihadist groups as identical threats. Lakurawa's hybrid nature, criminal enterprise disguised as jihad, requires responses targeting its revenue structures and local legitimacy, not solely military force. Operations should prioritise the extraction phase of the cycle.
- **Disrupt financial and logistical networks:** Prioritise intelligence-driven operations against collaborators who facilitate the group's access to communities. The group's vulnerability lies in its reliance on local economic actors. Disrupting these networks attacks the extraction-predation phase directly.

- **Strengthen community-based intelligence reporting with feedback mechanisms:** Village heads already report Lakurawa activities through traditional hierarchies, but the absence of government response undermines these channels. Establish rapid-response protocols that demonstrate to communities that reporting leads to action. Without this, communities will continue to acquiesce.
- **Deploy permanent or semi-permanent forward operating bases:** The fleeting presence of security forces enables Lakurawa's control. Stationing troops in or near affected local government areas, particularly blocking transit routes, would disrupt the group's operational rhythm and break the protection-legitimacy cycle by providing an alternative security provider.
- **Counter performative religiosity with credible religious engagement:** Lakurawa's legitimacy derives partly from its pious posture. State governments should empower credible Muslim scholars and traditional leaders to publicly rebut the group's theological claims, particularly regarding zakat thresholds, the prohibition of mechanised farming, and the conditions for legitimate imam appointment.
- **Monitor and contain JNIM expansion:** JNIM's growing footprint in Kwara, including recruitment among Fulani, Hausa, and Yoruba communities, requires proactive surveillance and community engagement. Allowing JNIM to entrench further would replicate the Lakurawa trajectory in new geographies. Intelligence sharing with neighbouring states is essential.
- **Provide agricultural alternatives to logging and charcoal production:** Lakurawa's ban on logging in Kebbe and surrounding areas is eroding livelihoods. State governments should introduce alternative income-generating activities or negotiate regulated access to forests under security oversight. Economic desperation drives acceptance of predatory governance.
- **Support community vigilantes with legal frameworks and oversight:** Community vigilantes have been successful in pushing back against Lakurawa. Where formal security forces cannot be present, well-regulated community self-defence forces can break the protection-extraction cycle by providing an alternative protection source. However, these must be legally framed and accountable to prevent creating new predatory actors.

To international partners and donors

- **Support non-kinetic, governance-focused interventions:** Lakurawa's success is rooted in state absence and community desperation. Investments in rural security infrastructure, conflict resolution mechanisms, and economic livelihoods would reduce demand for non-state armed protection. Military assistance alone is insufficient.
- **Facilitate cross-border intelligence sharing:** Lakurawa's operational links span Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. International partners, the African Union, and regional bodies such as ECOWAS should support joint intelligence fusion cells targeting Sahelian and West African militant networks, with particular attention to Nigeria. The JNIM connection makes this urgent.
- **Support research on the Lakurawa-JAS-JNIM nexus.** This report identifies a growing convergence but cannot fully explain its dynamics. Further research is needed on how these groups coordinate, share resources, and resolve disputes. Without understanding the nexus, responses risk treating separate groups in isolation when they are increasingly operating as a networked ecosystem.

To state governments (Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Niger, Kwara)

- **Restore confidence in formal dispute resolution:** Lakurawa gains authority by resolving conflicts that traditional institutions fail to handle. Strengthening the capacity and accountability of local courts and traditional councils is crucial. When communities have accessible, fair, and timely dispute resolution, the demand for Lakurawa's authority, or other non-state armed actors, diminishes.

Conclusion

Lakurawa is not what it claims to be. Neither a spontaneous community protection force nor a conventional jihadist movement, the group represents a criminal enterprise that has learned to speak the language of piety while building a predatory economic machine. For more than a decade, it has operated beneath national attention, evolving from an al-Qaeda-linked foreign fighter cohort in Borno into a hybrid authority structure that taxes, judges, and protects across hundreds of square kilometres in Northwest and North-central Nigeria.

The group's success stems not from superior firepower but from state absence and community desperation. Rural Nigerians, abandoned by security forces and failed by successive governments, accepted Lakurawa because it offered what the state could not: safety. That acceptance, once given, became difficult to revoke. Protection shaded into predation. Piety revealed itself as performance. Today, communities that once welcomed Lakurawa now pay it zakat under threat of violence.

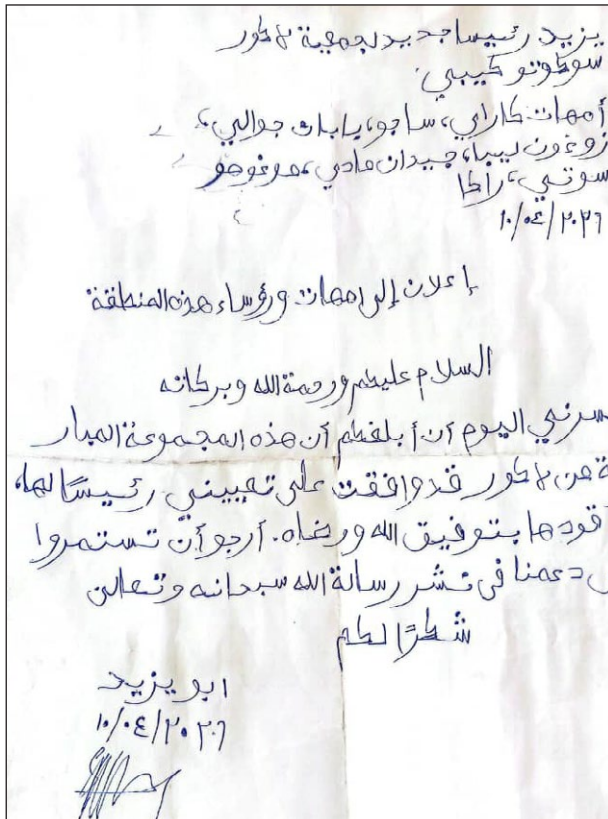
Yet Lakurawa is not invincible. The death of Sibul, the internal leadership crisis that followed, and the group's heavy casualties expose its vulnerabilities. Its reliance on criminal networks for revenue, its distrust of Nigerian recruits in leadership positions, and its uneasy coexistence with bandits all represent pressure points. The protection-legitimacy-authority-extraction cycle, while resilient, can be broken at each stage: by providing alternative security, by restoring accountable dispute resolution, by disrupting financial networks, and by demonstrating that the state can deliver what Lakurawa only promises.

The greater danger lies in the group's evolving relationships. The Lakurawa-JAS-JNIM nexus signals a convergence between local armed actors and transnational jihadist organisations that could fundamentally reshape Nigeria's security landscape. If left unchecked, the forests of Kebbi, Niger, and Kwara may become not merely transit routes but strategic nodes linking insurgent theatres across the Lake Chad Basin and the central Sahel.

Understanding Lakurawa for what it is, a criminal-jihadi hybrid whose core logic is extraction, not jihad, is the first step toward responding effectively. The second step requires admitting that military force alone cannot dislodge an organisation that has embedded itself within the social and economic fabric of rural communities. Without governance, without accountability, and without the restoration of basic security as a public good, Nigeria will continue to produce new Lakurawas. The question is not whether they will emerge, but whether this time, the state will be ready.

Appendices

Appendix A: Selected letters analysed and their translations



Sokoto community notification of Yazid as new leader

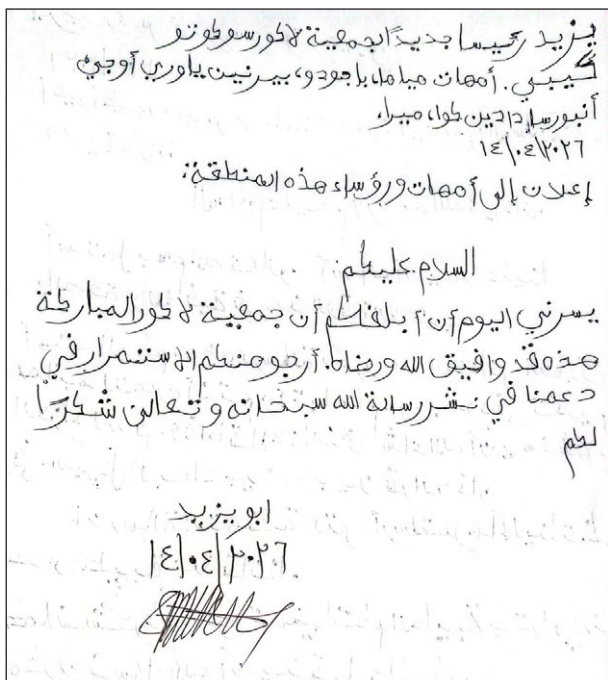
Yazid is the new leader of Lakur Sokoto Kebbi.

Community leaders of Karaye, Sago, Babban Rafi, Gwalli, Zugun-Liba, Gidan Madi, Magoho, Sutti, Raka. 10/04/2026

Announcement to the community leaders of this region
 Peace be upon you

Today I am pleased to inform you that this blessed Lakur group has approved my appointment as the leader to lead this group by the grace and will of Allah. I hope you will continue to support us in delivering the message of Allah SWT.

Thank you
 Abu-Yazid



Kebbi community notification of Yazid as new leader

Yazid is the new leader of Lakur Sokoto Kebbi.

Community leaders of Maiyama, Bagudu, Birnin Yauri, Augie, Ambursa, Dadin Kowa, Mera. 14/04/2026.

Announcement to the community leaders of this region.
 Peace be upon you

Today I am happy to inform you that this blessed Lakur group has approved my appointment as the leader to lead this group by the grace and will of Allah. I hope you will continue to support us in delivering the message of Allah SWT.

Thank you
 Abu-Yazid

من داندو، رئيس مجموعة لاكور،
 سوكونو/كبي، أو بقل سارا، كاراي،
 بابان، رافي، ساغو.

نعلمكم بأننا سنشارك في الدعوة يوم الجمعة
 ٢٠/٠٢/٢٠٢٦

السلام عليكم.

بعد تحياتنا بالدين الإسلامي وتمنياتنا لكم
 بالخير، أنا رئيس مجموعة لاكور سوكونو
 كبي. أعلمكم بأننا سنلتقي بكم يوم الجمعة
 لتقديم المعلمين الجدد المسؤولين عن
 خدمة الله

نشكركم على تعاونكم في نشر
 ديننا

داندو
 رئيس مجموعة لاكور

Da'awah letter

From Dando, head of the Lakur Group, Sokoto/Kebbi.

Community leaders: Karaye, Babban Rafi, Sago.

We inform you that we are coming for Da'awah on Friday
 20/02/2026.

21/01/2026

Peace be upon you.

After greetings in the Islamic religion and wishing us well.
 I am the Head of the Lakur Group Sokoto Kebbi. I inform
 you that we will meet with you on Friday to introduce new
 clerics who will be in charge of the work of God.

Thank you for your cooperation in the development of
 our religion.

Dando
 The head of Lakur

من داندو
 رئيس مجموعة لاكور.
 إلى
 أم الوطن، جيدان مادي، ماغوهو، سوتتي، رাকা،
 ساغو، بابان رافي، كاراي

السلام عليكم.

تحية من الدين الإسلامي، نرجو انخير لنا، آمين.
 بعد ذلك نعلمكم أن على كل أب في وطننا أن يرسل
 لشخصاً خبيراً في علاج القدم لئلا تصيب. شكر الله على
 نعمة الصحة والعافية

Letter asking for medical worker

From Dando,

Head of the Lakur group.

To,
 Community leaders: Gidan Madi, Magoho, Sutti, Raka,
 Sago, Baban Rafi, Karaye.

Peace be upon you

Greetings according to the Islamic religion, we pray for
 goodness upon us, Amen. Furthermore, we inform you that
 in every village in our area, we want you to send someone
 skilled in treating leg injury, such as fracture or dislocation,
 to work for our leader. We thank God for the blessing of
 health and well-being.

سر داندو
 رئيس جماعة لاكورا
 15/02/2026
 لمول رئيس بلدية غوغوهو وسوتتي

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

أرجو أن تصلكم رسالتى هذه وأنتم في أمان ورضا
 الله. أنا رئيس جماعة لاكورا داندو. لقد أمرت
 أن تأتي إلى المناطق القريبة من منطقتي، عند إجراء
 تفسير فلم بما أمر الله تعالى بتلاوته. ثم
 على كل هذه القرى أن تساهم بمئة مليون
 (100,000,000) نaira! لخدمة دين الله.

داندو
 رئيس جماعة لاكورا

Letter demanding Tafsir payment

From Dando,
Head of Lakur group, 15/02/2026

To the community leader of Magoho, Sutti, Raka.

Peace be upon you

I hope this message of mine will reach you in the safety and pleasure of Allah. I am the head of the Lakur group named Dando. I have ordered that every village in my area, when conducting Tafsir for the fast of Ramadan, must come to us and we must ensure that the cleric who will be conducting the Tafsir knows what Allah SWT has said to be recited. Then all these villages must contribute one hundred million (100,000,000) naira to serve the religion of Allah.

Dando
Head of Lakur Community.

JAMA'AT NUSRAT AL-ISLAM WAL-MUSLIMIN
 (JNIM)

Daga Jagoran Kungiyar
 (JNIM)
 Zuma ga
 Shugaban Kungiyar Lakur
 a Yankin Sokoto/Kebbi
 07/02/2026

Assalamu Alaikum,

Ina fatham kana cikin koston lafiya. Ina rakan
 alhama daga zare ka. Idan zai yudu, ka bama
 aron jaga-orinka mutum dari (100) mayaka masa
 jini a jika domin mu hana kwarfi wajen tabbatar da
 aikin Allah (SWT).

Ina mai tabbatar maka cewa zasu samu
 kulawa da kasan cewa cikin koston lafiya da
 kucalala. Bayan haka ga sakan kuolin nari naira
 million goma sha tara hannun Babban Kulamancin
 -19,000,000.

Nagace sosai da fahimtar da ke tafaminow
 da kuma taimakon da muke samu ta hannun

Daga Abokin Ka,
 Amir Akibu Armiya'u

JNIM's letter to Lakur

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)
From the Leader of the group (JNIM)

To the Head of the Lakur group
In the Sokoto/Kebbi Region
07/02/2026

Peace be upon you

I hope you are in good health. I beg your favour. If possible, lend me a hundred (100) battle-hardened fighters, so that we can join forces to fulfil the mission of Allah (SWT).

I assure you that they will be taken care of and that they will be safe and sound. After that, here is the message of the sum of nineteen million naira with the senior commander Yazid. N19,000,000.

Thank you very much for the understanding between us and the assistance we receive through you.

From your friend,
Amir Akibu Armiya'u

رسالة نصيحة و دعوة
 الى السلام من آخبر حبيب
 عبر سيبو.

الى زعيم قطاع الطرق
 السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،
 اخي بطريم صهلا بيلونورجى نبياتى لك،
 واسأل الله ان تطوّر خير وصحة.
 . ٢٤/١١/٢٠٢٤

رسالة تطلب السلام
 آتمنى ان تكون في كامل الصحة والعافية. بعد ذلك
 آنا سيبو آحذرنا من التوقف عن هذا العمل الشره الذي
 هو قتل آبناء امة نتمتع.
 انضم الينا في الجهاد في سبيل الله ولا تستصرا -
 اسأل الله آيهدينا جميعا الى الصراط المستقيم:
 والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

Salkan Kira G9 Sasinci
 da Sulhu, Daga Sibuy, 02/11/2024

SAKOL NEMAN SULHU
 Fatan kana cikin Koshin Lafiya, Bayan Haka
 ni Sibuy, Ina kiransa da ka daina duk wani aiki
 da ke cutar da all'umma da zubar da jini.
 Mu haɗa kai mu yi aiki domin gata, da
 Zaman Lafiya Saboda Allah
 Muna Rokon Allah fashir-farokama Hanya Maolai-
 da Gata Allah Yasi Haka

Second letter to Bello Turji

An appeal for mediation and reconciliation

From Sibuy,
 02/11/2024

APPEAL FOR PEACE

I hope you are in good health and peace. From Sibuy,
 I call on you to stop all acts that harm the public and
 cause bloodshed.

Let us work together for reform and peace for the sake
 of God.

We pray that God guides us to the right path.

May God make it so.

Appendix B:
Lakurawa footprint in Northwest and North-central Nigeria (state-LGA-village)

STATE	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)	VILLAGE
Kebbi	Arewa Dandi	Dalijani
Kebbi	Arewa Dandi	Haske
Kebbi	Arewa Dandi	Sabon Gari
Kebbi	Arewa Dandi	Bingel
Kebbi	Argungu	Natsini
Kebbi	Argungu	Yammawan Dutsi
Kebbi	Argungu	Madanfara
Kebbi	Argungu	Gulma
Kebbi	Argungu	Dangandu
Kebbi	Argungu	Kurhiyawa
Kebbi	Argungu	Bagiza
Kebbi	Argungu	Tsamia
Kebbi	Augie	Garu
Kebbi	Augie	Nasarawa
Kebbi	Augie	Tuwon Tsoro
Kebbi	Augie	Mera
Kebbi	Augie	Dundaye
Kebbi	Augie	Balela
Kebbi	Augie	Kwaido
Kebbi	Augie	Yola
Kebbi	Augie	Morai
Kebbi	Augie	Tungan Rafi
Kebbi	Augie	Zaggi
Kebbi	Augie	Tungan Tudu
Kebbi	Augie	Sattazai
Kebbi	Augie	Illela
Kebbi	Augie	Tiggi
Kebbi	Augie	Jarkuka
Kebbi	Bagudo	Maje
Kebbi	Bagudo	Bagudo
Kebbi	Birnin Kebbi	Ambursa
Kebbi	Dandi	Masama
Kebbi	Dandi	Dukushi
Kebbi	Suru	Nasarawa
Kebbi	Shanga	Giro-Masa

STATE	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)	VILLAGE
Kebbi	Jega	Sabon Gari Agwada
Kebbi	Kangiwa	Heske
Kebbi	Koko	Maikwari
Kebbi	Maiyama	Zugun-Liba
Kebbi	Maiyama	Aroka
Kebbi	Maiyama	Kanaru
Kebbi	Maiyama	Andarai
Kebbi	Maiyama	Saran Dosa
Kebbi	Maiyama	Arausaya
Kebbi	Maiyama	Dadin Kowa
Kebbi	Maiyama	Geza
Kebbi	Maiyama	Gubba
Kebbi	Maiyama	Kuitane
Kebbi	Maiyama	Liba
Kebbi	Maiyama	Danyen Gari
Kebbi	Maiyama	Kurungurki
Kebbi	Maiyama	Sagwarada
Kebbi	Maiyama	Gudaje
Kebbi	Ngaski	Utono
Kebbi	Yauri	Birnin Yauri
Sokoto	Tangaza	Magoho
Sokoto	Tangaza	Sitti
Sokoto	Tangaza	Gidan Madi
Sokoto	Tangaza	Sira
Sokoto	Tangaza	Ruwa Wuri
Sokoto	Tangaza	Balle
Sokoto	Tangaza	Gilmo
Sokoto	Tangaza	Dan Tsahi
Sokoto	Tangaza	Sabaru
Sokoto	Tangaza	Bowade
Sokoto	Tangaza	Alhassan
Sokoto	Tangaza	Tsohon Nade
Sokoto	Tangaza	Karfen China
Sokoto	Tangaza	Rijiyar Zobe
Sokoto	Gudu	Kurdula

STATE	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)	VILLAGE
Sokoto	Kware	Matisgi
Sokoto	Kware	Tungan Ruwa
Sokoto	Sabon Birni	Masallata
Sokoto	Sabon Birni	Gatawa
Sokoto	Sabon Birni	Ronu
Sokoto	Kebbe	Jonga
Sokoto	Kebbe	Sangi
Sokoto	Kebbe	Kuchi
Sokoto	Kebbe	Barikin Daji
Sokoto	Kebbe	Lanke
Sokoto	Kebbe	Babban Rafi
Sokoto	Kebbe	Yar Gusau
Sokoto	Kebbe	Tudun Bashi
Sokoto	Kebbe	Marna
Sokoto	Kebbe	Kwado
Sokoto	Kebbe	Loni
Sokoto	Kebbe	Rafin Galla
Sokoto	Kebbe	Karaye
Sokoto	Kebbe	Dogon Fako
Sokoto	Kebbe	Rayya
Sokoto	Kebbe	Gau
Sokoto	Kebbe	Mahuta
Sokoto	Kebbe	Sabon Birni
Sokoto	Kebbe	Ungushi
Sokoto	Kebbe	Fakku

STATE	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)	VILLAGE
Sokoto	Kebbe	Girkau
Sokoto	Kebbe	Jabga
Sokoto	Kebbe	Dukura
Sokoto	Wurno	Achida
Sokoto	Wurno	Marnona
Sokoto	Wurno	Sisawa
Niger	Mashegu	Tshon Rami
Niger	Mashegu	Gidan Malan
Niger	Mashegu	Mutum Daya
Niger	Shiroro	Gurmana
Niger	Shiroro	Bagna
Niger	Shiroro	Erena
Niger	Shiroro	Allawa
Niger	Shiroro	Manta
Niger	Shiroro	Bassa-kokki
Niger	Shiroro	Kushaka
Niger	Borgu	Kainji
Niger	Borgu	New Bussa
Niger	Borgu	Damala
Niger	Borgu	Wako
Niger	Borgu	Wawa
Niger	Borgu	Tungar Makera
Niger	Rafi	Tegina
Zamfara	Gummi	Gwalli



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