

# STALEMATE:

## BOKO HARAM'S NEW STRATEGY REQUIRES IT TO COMMIT FEWER ATTACKS

**AT ITS PEAK IN 2014,**  
THE BOKO HARAM  
INSURGENCY SAW AN  
AVERAGE OF 25 ATTACKS  
MONTHLY

IN MARCH 2015,  
BOKO HARAM DECLARED  
A CALIPHATE, PLEDGED  
ALLEGIANCE TO THE  
ISLAMIC STATE.

**IN 2018,**  
THERE WERE 166  
ATTACKS, AN AVERAGE  
OF 13 ATTACKS  
PER MONTH

# Disclaimer

The data contained in this report is only up to date as of Wednesday, 11 September 2019. Some of it is subject to change during the natural course of events. SB Morgen cannot accept liability in respect of any errors or omissions that may follow such events that may invalidate data contained herein.

Our researchers employed methods such as one-on-one interviews and desk research to collate the available data. Our editors sifted through the data and prepared the report, using various proprietary tools to fact-check and copy edit the information gathered.

Our publicly released reports are formatted for easy and quick reading, and may not necessarily contain all the data that SB Morgen gathered during a given survey. Complete datasets can be made available on request.

All forecasts were built using data from a variety of sources. A baseline of accurate and comprehensive historic data is collected from respondents and publicly-available information, including from regulators, trade associations, research partners, newspapers and government agencies.

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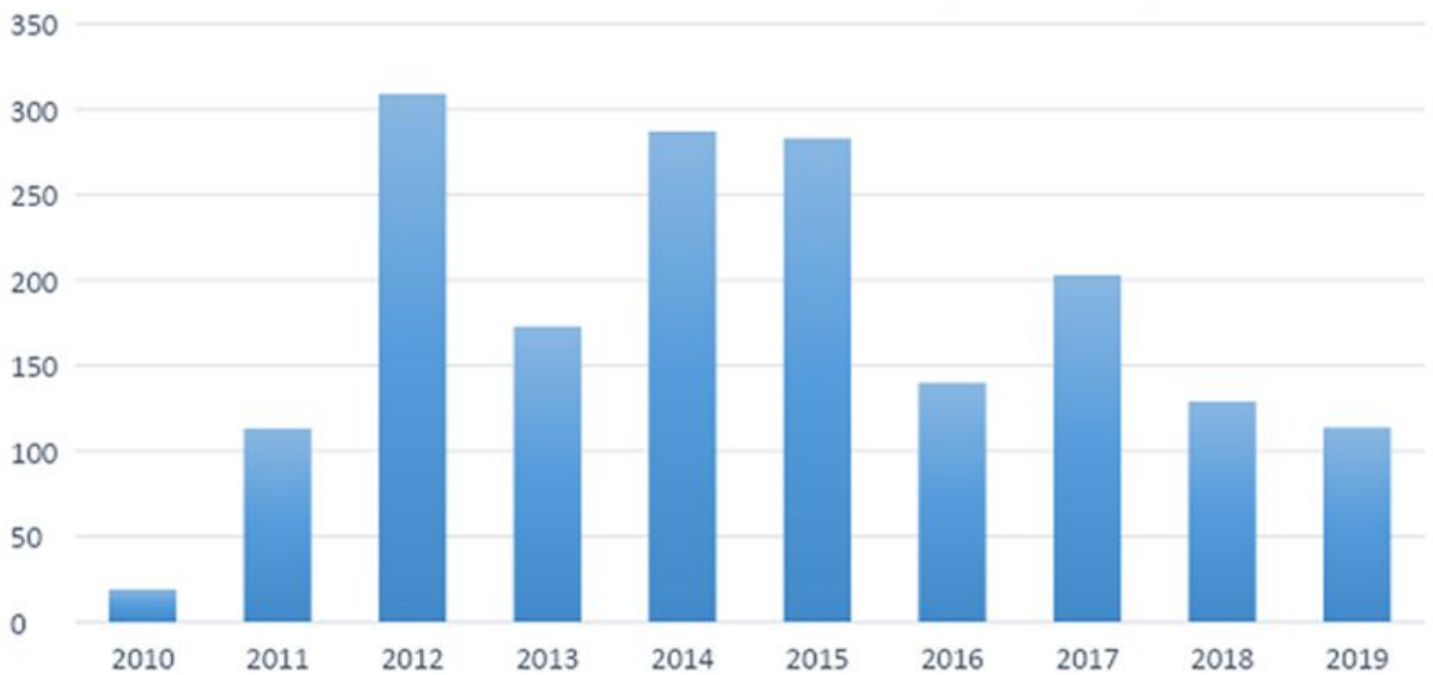
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At its peak in 2014, the Boko Haram insurgency saw an average of 25 attacks monthly <sup>[1]</sup> (this number consists both of attacks by Boko Haram on the military and civilians, and on Boko Haram by the Nigerian military).

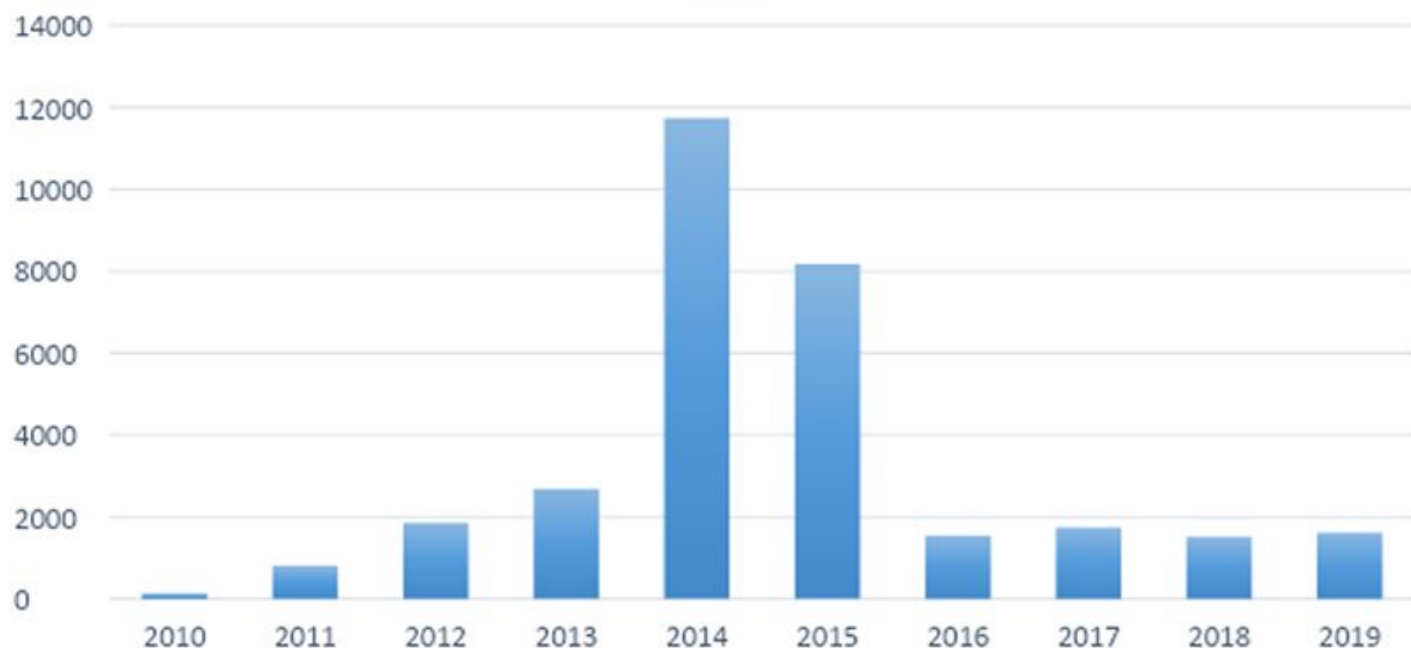
These attacks in total killed about 11,743 persons, almost evenly divided in fatalities between civilian victims and Boko Haram terrorists, with state actors making up about 500 of the casualties.

### Annual Boko Haram Attacks (10Years)



[1] <https://www.cfr.org/blog/tracking-boko-haram-nigeria-security-tracker>

## Fatalities From the Boko Haram Insurgency (10Years)



This brutality coincided with the period when having been driven out of their former stronghold, Maiduguri, the terrorist group proceeded to overrun a large proportion of Borno State (21 out of 27 local governments fell under their control, a territory

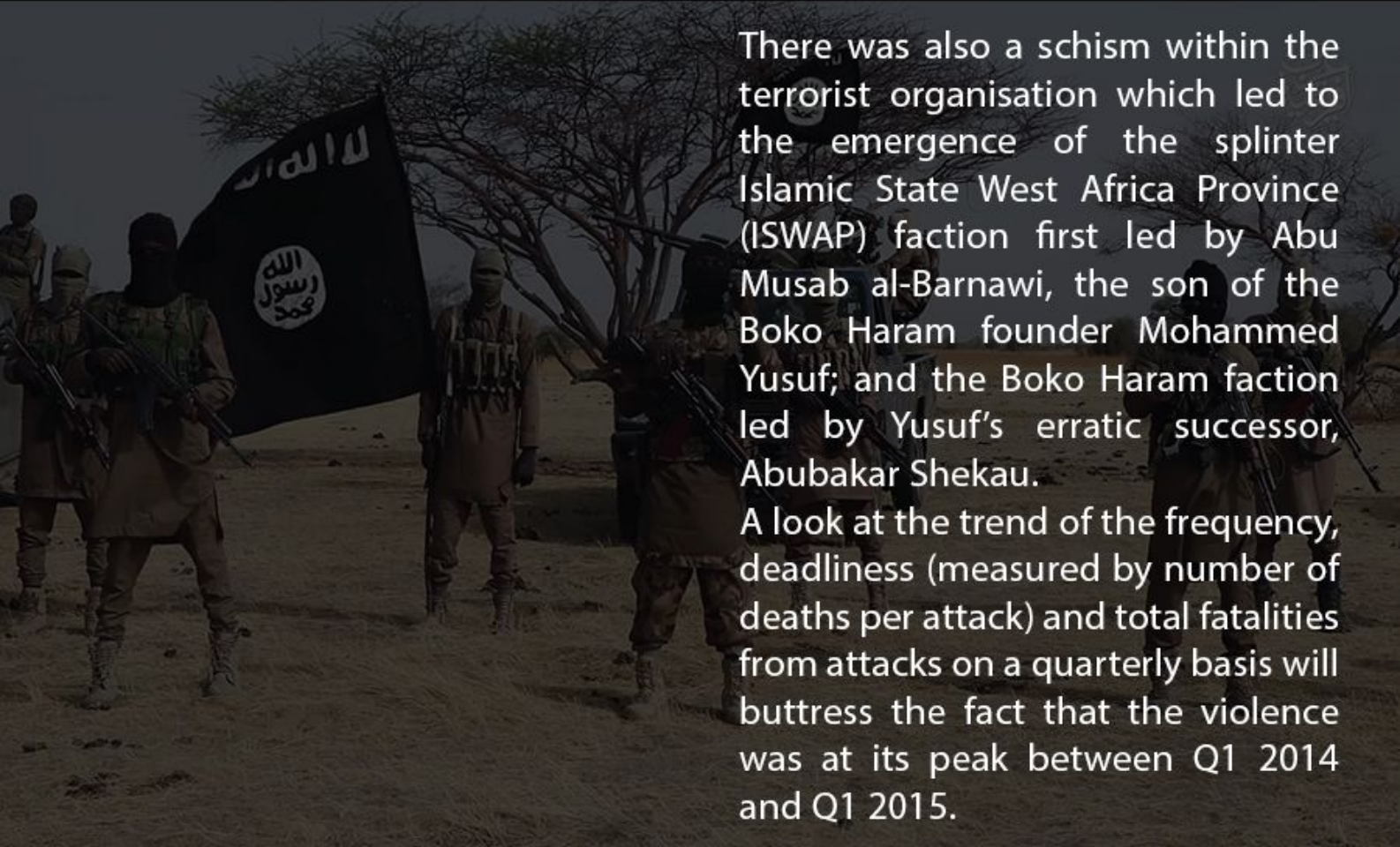
commonly compared to the size of Belgium), launching attacks on rural and semi-urban communities. In this period, Boko Haram declared a caliphate, and then in March 2015, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

However, a lot changed going into the election year of 2015 with a resurgent Nigerian military, enabled by acquisition of new military hardware, the insertion of Special Forces trained in Eastern Europe, the 72 mobile strike force trained by South African private military contractor STTP, and a general improvement in morale of regular troops led to dislodgement of Boko Haram from the territory they held, driving them back to relying on guerrilla attacks and suicide bombings on soft targets (mosques, markets and civilian population clusters).

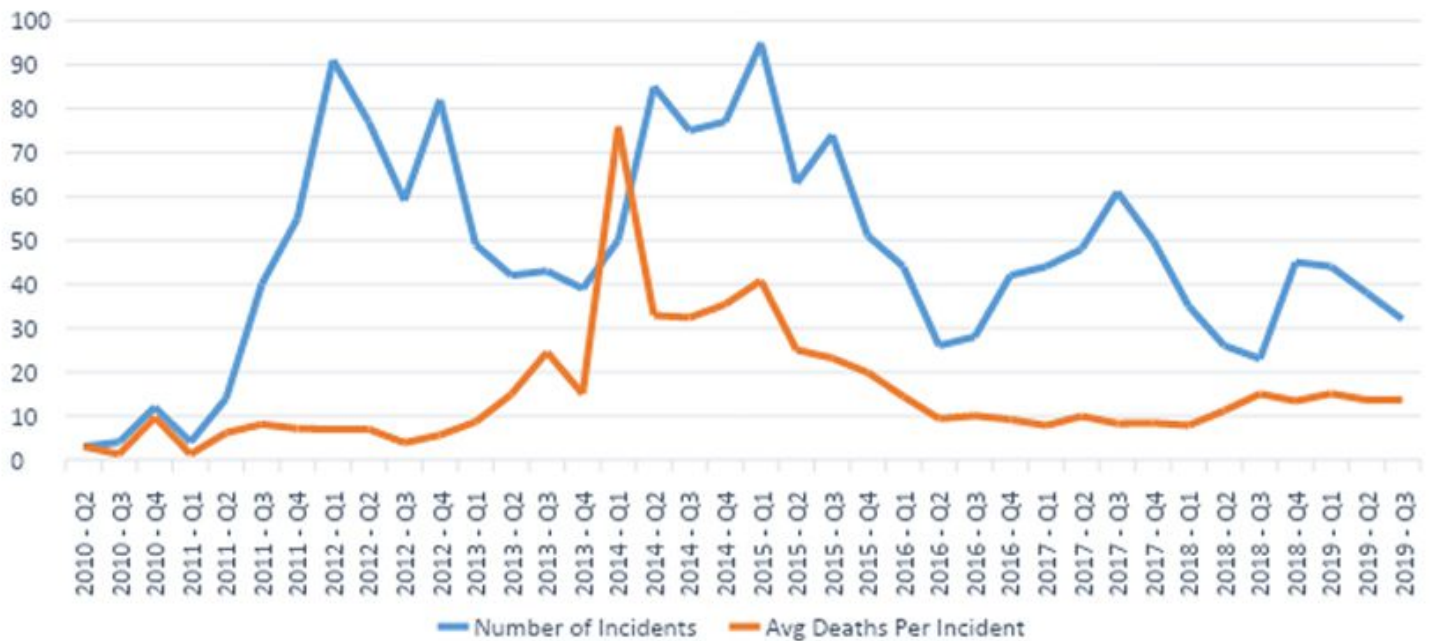


There was also a schism within the terrorist organisation which led to the emergence of the splinter Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction first led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the son of the Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf; and the Boko Haram faction led by Yusuf's erratic successor, Abubakar Shekau.

A look at the trend of the frequency, deadliness (measured by number of deaths per attack) and total fatalities from attacks on a quarterly basis will buttress the fact that the violence was at its peak between Q1 2014 and Q1 2015.



## 10Year Quarterly Trend of Boko Haram Attacks vs Average Deaths Per Attack

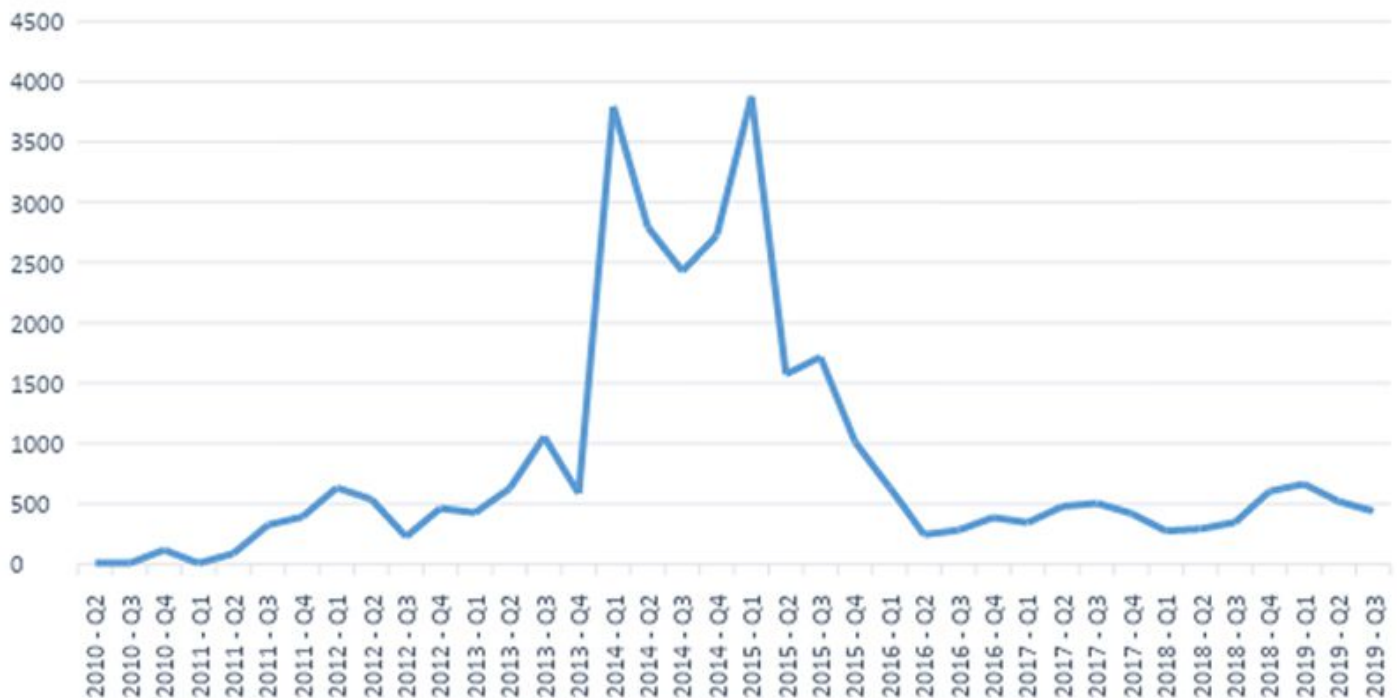


From the trend, while the number of Boko Haram attacks spiked from the third quarter of 2011, these attacks were not very deadly on the average, indicative of a general lack of effectiveness at the time as this was the period of reemergence under Shekau after the death of the group's founder, Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. However, as the group built up competence and strength, by the second quarter of 2013, while the number of attacks dropped by about 50%, the average number of casualties per incident began to rise. By Q3 2014, the average deaths per incident had increased by almost 150% - the group was now very deadly. To make matters worse at the same time, the number of attacks rose to 2011 levels. This was the period the aforementioned improvement in Nigerian military counter insurgency capacity and capabilities, and by the second quarter of 2015, both the number of attacks as well as deadliness of the attacks in terms of fatalities reduced.

Since 2015, the group's deadliness has continued to decline. However, the number of attacks rose in 2017, declined in 2018 and has risen again in 2019. This rise and fall is influenced by several factors including but not limited to offensive military operations by Nigerian troops acting under Operation Lafiya Dole and the Lake Chad Basin Multinational Joint Task Force, and the insurgents's tactics of withdrawing into enclaves to avoid military advances until pressure from government forces eases, after which the terrorists reemerge to launch new attacks.

Without doubt, there has been a huge decline in attacks by Boko Haram and casualties from those attacks – in 2018, there were 166 attacks, an average of 13 attacks per month. The number of casualties also dropped by 83% from 2014 to 1842 persons. Overall, the Nigerian government has succeeded in bringing down the total number of deaths due to Boko Haram to pre 2014 levels.

**10Year Quarterly Trend of Number of Deaths from Boko Haram Attacks**

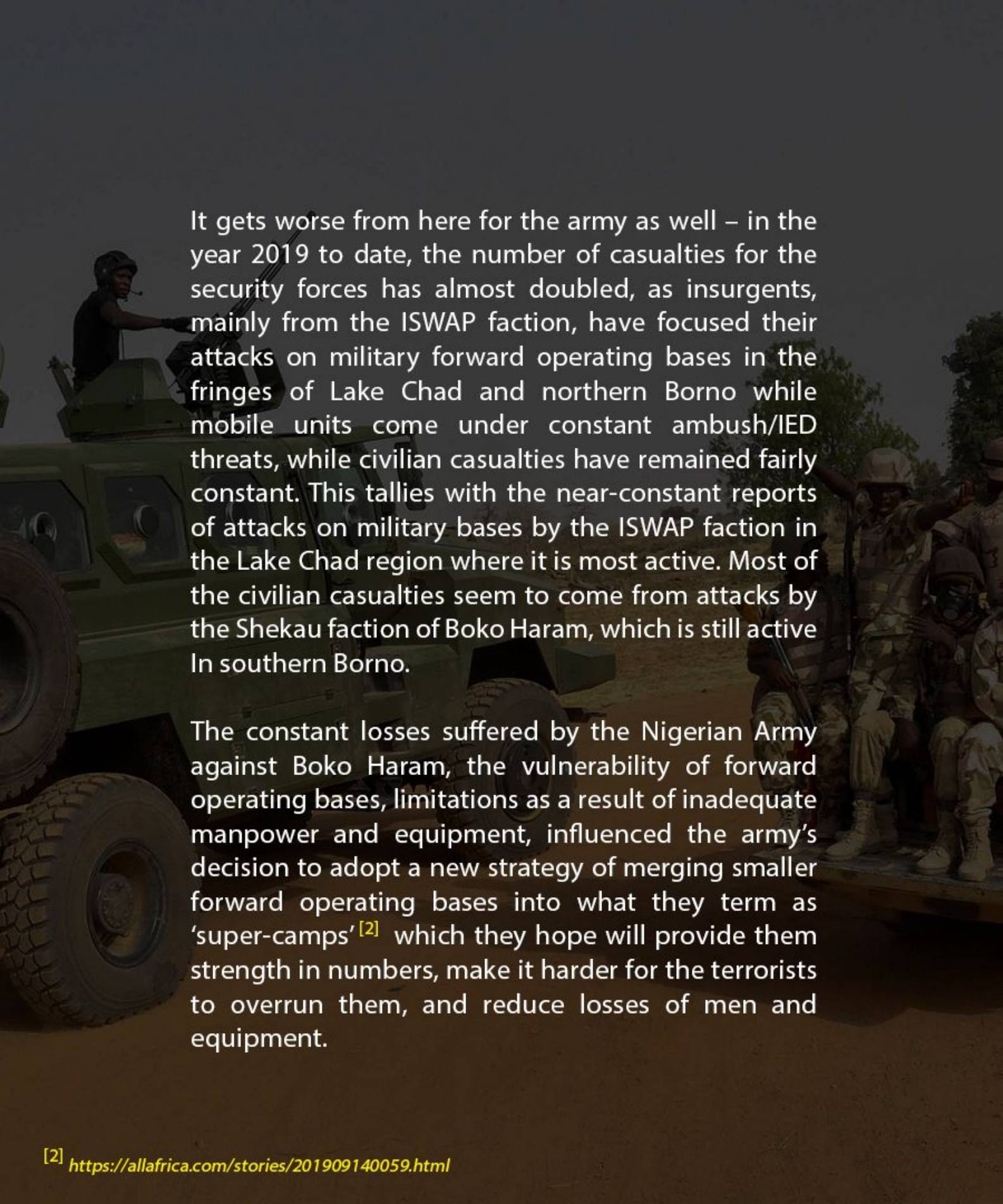


When these numbers are disaggregated, the biggest decline is in civilian deaths which have dropped to 587 deaths from a high of 4147 deaths in 2014 – not unsurprising as one of the reasons for the split of the ISWAP faction from the main Boko Haram organisation was what al-Barnawi termed as the indiscriminate targeting of civilians. This ideological position by al-Barnawi, and ISWAP’s adjustment of its strategy to fit his position played a crucial role in reducing the number of civilian casualties. The terrorists themselves have seen a reduction in their casualty rate – 876 deaths in 2018 was an 87% decline from the 6,727 deaths in 2014.

However, Nigerian security forces have not been as lucky, as there was only a 22% decline in their casualties compared to 2014.

Year	Number of soldiers killed
2011	85
2012	229
2013	71
2014	2789
2015	189
2016	287
2017	472
2018	661
2019	873

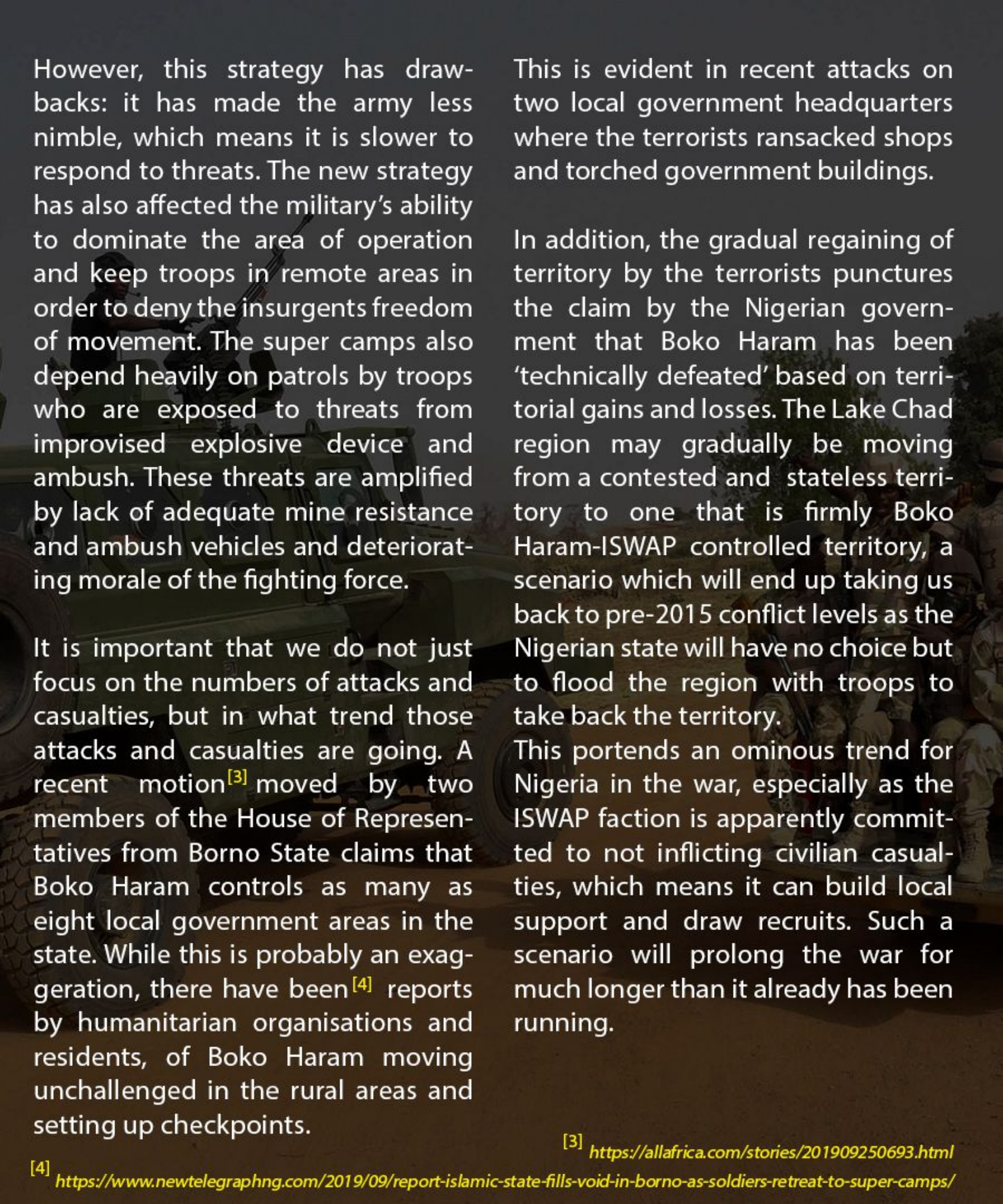


A soldier is operating a machine gun mounted on a military vehicle. In the background, several other soldiers are visible, some sitting on the vehicle. The scene is set in a dry, outdoor environment.

It gets worse from here for the army as well – in the year 2019 to date, the number of casualties for the security forces has almost doubled, as insurgents, mainly from the ISWAP faction, have focused their attacks on military forward operating bases in the fringes of Lake Chad and northern Borno while mobile units come under constant ambush/IED threats, while civilian casualties have remained fairly constant. This tallies with the near-constant reports of attacks on military bases by the ISWAP faction in the Lake Chad region where it is most active. Most of the civilian casualties seem to come from attacks by the Shekau faction of Boko Haram, which is still active in southern Borno.

The constant losses suffered by the Nigerian Army against Boko Haram, the vulnerability of forward operating bases, limitations as a result of inadequate manpower and equipment, influenced the army's decision to adopt a new strategy of merging smaller forward operating bases into what they term as 'super-camps'<sup>[2]</sup> which they hope will provide them strength in numbers, make it harder for the terrorists to overrun them, and reduce losses of men and equipment.

[2] <https://allafrica.com/stories/201909140059.html>



However, this strategy has drawbacks: it has made the army less nimble, which means it is slower to respond to threats. The new strategy has also affected the military's ability to dominate the area of operation and keep troops in remote areas in order to deny the insurgents freedom of movement. The super camps also depend heavily on patrols by troops who are exposed to threats from improvised explosive device and ambush. These threats are amplified by lack of adequate mine resistance and ambush vehicles and deteriorating morale of the fighting force.

It is important that we do not just focus on the numbers of attacks and casualties, but in what trend those attacks and casualties are going. A recent motion<sup>[3]</sup> moved by two members of the House of Representatives from Borno State claims that Boko Haram controls as many as eight local government areas in the state. While this is probably an exaggeration, there have been<sup>[4]</sup> reports by humanitarian organisations and residents, of Boko Haram moving unchallenged in the rural areas and setting up checkpoints.

This is evident in recent attacks on two local government headquarters where the terrorists ransacked shops and torched government buildings.

In addition, the gradual regaining of territory by the terrorists punctures the claim by the Nigerian government that Boko Haram has been 'technically defeated' based on territorial gains and losses. The Lake Chad region may gradually be moving from a contested and stateless territory to one that is firmly Boko Haram-ISWAP controlled territory, a scenario which will end up taking us back to pre-2015 conflict levels as the Nigerian state will have no choice but to flood the region with troops to take back the territory.

This portends an ominous trend for Nigeria in the war, especially as the ISWAP faction is apparently committed to not inflicting civilian casualties, which means it can build local support and draw recruits. Such a scenario will prolong the war for much longer than it already has been running.

<sup>[3]</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/201909250693.html>

<sup>[4]</sup> <https://www.newtelegraphng.com/2019/09/report-islamic-state-fills-void-in-borno-as-soldiers-retreat-to-super-camps/>