

Nigeria: Boko Haram Attack - Military Deploys Six Fighter Jets

By Hamza Idris and Ronald Mutum

Maiduguri and Abuja — About 79 people including three soldiers were killed Wednesday when suspected Boko Haram militants advanced towards Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.

The military has deployed six combat helicopters to fight the insurgents and imposed a 24-hour curfew on the state capital.

Six vigilantes and an unspecified number of Boko Haram insurgents were also killed in Wednesday's attack.

Two villages including Bale Galtimari and Kayamla on the outskirts of Maiduguri, were also sacked by the suspected Boko Haram militants while on their way to the state capital.

Troops of the seventh Division stopped the insurgents overrunning the 21 Brigade, Giwa Barracks, which reportedly houses sophisticated military weapons.

Though the Nigerian Army said everything was under control the 24-hour curfew remained in place in the state capital.

Our correspondent saw at least six fighter jets land at the Maiduguri International Airport yesterday. Not long after, they took off and headed towards the direction of Konduga, Bama and the Sambisa Forest.

Abba Alau, a resident of Bale said they buried 25 people yesterday while many others that sustained injuries have been taken to the hospital.

"The terrorists attacked our village around 6.20pm on their way to get to Maiduguri. They killed 25 people who are mostly between the age of 20 and 40.

"They also burnt over 50 houses and many shops after carting away food items, toiletries, cows and many sheep," Alau said.

Musa Ahmadu Kumbo, a farmer in Kayamla, said the insurgents killed over 30 people in the village and surrounding settlements.

"They dealt with us severely and promised that they would come back after they subdued Maiduguri," he said.

Credible security sources said the insurgents, whose ability to strike had been allegedly reduced in the past two months, wanted to overrun the 21 Armoured Brigade Giwa Barracks.

Soon after launching the attacks on the two villages, the insurgents, armed with sophisticated weapons reportedly moved towards the Giwa Barracks where they met stiff resistance.

Sound of bomb blasts, artillery and sustained gunshots were earlier heard from the direction of the barracks and at a sugarcane orchard at Fouri, a settlement between Maiduguri town and the Giwa Barracks.

Mustapha Aji, a resident of the area said some of the insurgents hid inside the orchard to give rear cover to the group that advanced on the barracks from Bale Galtimare.

Sources reported fierce fighting between troops and the insurgents near the barrack, a development that brought about the imposition of the 24- hour curfew.

A statement signed by Colonel Tukur Gusau, Deputy Director, army public relations, said residents should remain indoors as troops continue to ensure their safety.

"In view of the recent development within Maiduguri metropolis, a 24hr curfew is hereby imposed on the city. This is done to protect lives and properties of innocent and law abiding people of Maiduguri.

Our correspondent gathered from credible sources that "dozens" of the insurgents, at least fifteen civilians, three soldiers and six vigilantes lost their lives in fight near the barracks.

"The six vigilantes were killed by female suicide bombers who pretended to be in distress while the fight was ongoing between troops and the terrorists," a senior official of the civilian JTF, who spoke in confidence, said.

"The three women were all suicide bombers because they strapped their bodies with explosives and pretended that they were trapped in the ensuing confusion. And out of sympathy, our members approached them with a view to taking them to safety but sadly, they (women) detonated their explosives," he said.

The vigilante added that about 12 of their members were injured.

He said three soldiers died during a fight with the insurgents but did not give more details.

"The good news is that dozens of the terrorists have been killed while they were advancing towards the Giwa Barracks from Kayamla village and a plantation near Fouri," he said.

A senior security officer confirmed that three soldiers died in the fight yesterday but added that it was a bad day for the insurgents.

"The terrorists did not succeed in getting into the barracks and many of them have been killed," he said.

Our correspondent reports that Maiduguri is now very quiet as movements have been restricted.

All the streets are empty while shops, motor parks, markets, malls, schools, federal and state secretariats and other public places are all closed.

A security expert, Timo Emmanuel said something must be wrong with the military operation in the northeast.

"I am always appalled when I hear the military top brass saying they Boko Haram terrorists are on the run... Why can't they follow them once and for all?"

"They said the insurgents are finished but look at how they audaciously brought the war to Maiduguri at the time we least expected them.

"If the army said they have killed many Boko Haram militants in and around Sambisa and other places, they should show the bodies to convince the public, just like what the Chadian troops and others are doing," he said.

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