



MAIDUGURI'S WEEK OF BLOODBATH, UNCERTAINTY



Category: News Published on Saturday, 06 June 2015 05:00 Written by HaHamza Idris, Maiduguri Hits: 236

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Ruined of a mosque at Ali Kotoko area where a suicide bomber killed at least 26 worshippers

Boko Haram insurgents had a field day in the last one week in Borno State as they unleashed terror on hapless citizens, leading to the death of over 120 people from at least seven separate attacks.

The first attacks started on May 29, the day President Muhammadu Buhari took the oath of office.

Since their debut in 2002, part of the mission of the group is to cripple democracy, Western education and popular opinion in an effort to establish what they called "Sharia State." And since the time they

took up arms against the state in 2009, the insurgents have caused the death of thousands of people and destroyed symbols of authority, homes, markets and places of worship.

Even before the election of President Buhari, Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, had vowed in a video that they would ensure that there was no election in Nigeria.

He made the declaration when his group had captured large swathes of territories in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states and successfully chased away over two million people from their towns and villages.

However, the general elections were shifted by six weeks at the instance of former president Goodluck Jonathan, a development that paved the way for the recovery of almost all the places the group had captured Boko and the subsequent holding of elections even though most of the internally displaced persons cast their votes in IDP camps.

With the elections over, onslaught against the group by Nigerian troops, especially at the famous Sambisa Forest.

But sadly, while millions of Nigerians in other parts of the country marked the inauguration day with pomp and pageantry, the 'Change' began with renewed attacks from the Boko Haram, especially in Borno State. Skirmishes were also recorded in parts of Adamawa and Yobe.

Observers opined that the terrorists were "provoked" by the clear signals from the new president that their era of impunity was over.

"Buhari was very categorical in his speech that he will decisively deal with the terrorists and from all indications, nobody, including the international community, has doubt about the commitment of the president," said Japheth Malgwi, a retired officer of the Department of State Service.

"You see, for those who know the modus operandi of Boko Haram, it is a group that always wants the world to believe that they are capable even when it is evident that they have their limitations," he noted.

"They always respond to any threat with bloodbath, they have been doing this since 2009 and this is exactly what we noticed soon after the declaration of President Buhari," Malgwi added.

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From the day of the inauguration, nowhere was immune from the ravaging attacks of the terror group, especially in Maiduguri as important landmarks like places of worship, motor parks, markets, slaughter houses, security formations, farms, suburbs and even residential areas of the affluent, all became susceptible to attacks.

Observers believe that the development is reminiscent of the pre-2013 era when Maiduguri was synonymous with a theatre of death.

The first salvo penultimate Friday was fired at about 6.30 am, hours before the swearing in of the president when a suicide bomber stormed a wedding venue in Tashan Alade, a village in Hawul local government area of Borno State.

Witnesses said at least seven people died in the attack, as families and friends of the bride and groom gathered to witness the solemnisation ceremony. Tashan Alade had in the last one year suffered countless attacks from the terrorist group.

"We are sure the devil work was carried out by Boko Haram terrorists because they have done this several times," said Altine James, a politician from the area. "They have thrown us into mourning because we lost our loved ones and many others are now in hospitals."

A youth vigilante in the area, Mato Makatara, said a suspect was arrested and handed over to the police.

Just hours after the Tashan Alade incident, hundreds of insurgents, in a convoy of vehicles thronged to Maiduguri at about 11:47 pm and tried to force their way into the state capital.

Most residents had a sleepless night when suspected terrorists freely used rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and fired dozens of grenades into residential areas.

Thunderous blast sounds made it difficult for people, especially those living in the direction of the approaching invaders could not sleep because they were afraid and devastated. About 20 people were killed in the attacks, some in their homes while others in hospital.

A family of seven was wiped out by one of the RPGs at Dala, behind Gomari area, along Maiduguri-Damaturu road, witness Khalil Ahmad said.

Yusuf Sani, a vigilante, said one civilian was also killed by a RPG at another house at Gomari while four people died in another house near Ngazargamo Cinema.

"The terrorists wanted to enter Maiduguri through Dala Alamdari because there was no way they could come in through any of the recognised highways," a top security source said.

"And the trenches that we dug around the whole of Maiduguri also served as serious impediment for them to move with their vehicles and arms. They therefore tiptoed from the bushes and fired several RPG bombs into residential areas. We confronted them frontally for over three hours," the source said.

Residents of Dala Alamdari, Dala Ajilari, Silimanti, Bulumkutu and Gomari among others said they heard sounds of more than 40 different explosives fired by the insurgents from a distance because they could not enter the town.

Musa Kaka, a school teacher, said he narrowly escaped death when one of the arsenals landed in his house.

"My wife was not that lucky because the shrapnel from the bomb chopped off one of her toes. When the blasts started, I and some of my neighbours went out to see what was happening. Few minutes later, we saw something like a missile flying over our heads and we all rushed back to our homes," he said.

"It was when I was about entering my house that another missile hit the building and brought it down. I am glad that my wife is still alive," Kaka added.

Respite came around 2.50 am when dozens of soldiers, supported my armoured personnel carriers (APCs) chased the assailants away.

On Saturday, a day after Buhari's inauguration, a male suicide bomber stormed a mosque at Ali Kotoko area, near the Maiduguri Monday Market and blew up himself, killing 26 worshippers and injuring more than 30, while the mosque was completely destroyed by the explosion.

Governor Kashim Shettima who visited the scene said the terrorists are not Muslims and called on residents to be vigilante and not to allow the insurgents hold them to ransom again.

But the terrorists remained undaunted as their spate of bombings continued in Maiduguri last Sunday when a bomb that was buried at Gamboru market, the second to Monday Market in terms of size and patronage, exploded and chopped off the hands of a trader and injured three others.

The blast, which occurred around 1pm <[http://1.pm/](#)>, abruptly led to the closure of the market for some hours before it was reopened. Market official Ustad Babakura said it was a "low profile" explosive device, otherwise the casualty would have been much higher.

The Gamboru market had been attacked more than 12 times by Boko Haram, and dozens of people killed while property worth millions of naira was destroyed.

On Tuesday, another suicide bomber rode on the popularity of President Buhari and the wreaked havoc at an abattoir in Maiduguri after pretending to be selling herbal drugs at a discount.

At least 53 people died in the incident even though the state police commissioner, Aderemi Opadokun, who

confirmed the incident said only four people were killed. Market officials said the victims included butchers, animal dealers, labourers, customers who went to buy meat and passersby.

Modu Kabiru, an official of the abattoir, told our correspondent that 25 dead bodies were evacuated at the spot.

"The terrorist disguised as someone selling herbal medicine and took a strategic position in the abattoir in order to attract many people. He stood in between the place where animals are sold, the place where they are slaughtered and dressed and the commercial toilet facilities where most butchers normally ease themselves or take bath after the day's work," he stated.

"The terrorist was carrying a basket loaded with some assorted drugs, he also covered the basket with the poster of President Muhammadu Buhari and then held a tape recorder that was playing songs of the president," Kabiru said.

Another witness, Kareem Waksa, said the insurgent attracted a large crowd before blowing himself up.

On Wednesday, the insurgents took their offensive to a mechanic's garage where they buried explosives that killed seven people and injured more than 20 others. The dead included three mechanics, two panel beaters and two apprentices.

The incident happened around 5.20 pm at a multipurpose garage along Baga road which houses mechanics of small and articulated vehicles, painters, panel beaters and electricians.

The garage is less than 500 metres away from the Sector One of the 7th Division of the Nigerian army.

Jamilu Kasim, a mechanic, who narrowly escaped death, said the IED was planted at the garage and remotely controlled by somebody who must have stood at a comfortable distance from the scene.

"We were all rounding up our work for the day, discharging our customers so as to close because of the prevailing curfew when the terrible incident happened...in fact I am among those that were directly affected," Kasim said.

"I fainted when I was hit by shrapnel and only recovered after almost an hour and discovered that some of my colleagues died," he added. "We discovered five bodies initially but later found two additional bodies behind a rickety van. At least 13 other people sustained serious injuries."

A later, a female suicide bomber killed at least six soldiers and some vigilantes at a checkpoint near the 7 Division Maimalari barracks.

Civil activist Hussaini Shehu said he was in support of Buhari's trip to Niger and Chad in order to renew collaboration towards taming the Boko Haram monster as well as the planned relocation of the military top command to Maiduguri.

"Buhari must consistently come to Maiduguri to personally see how the operation is being executed. The terrible things that the terrorists did in the last one week are a clear indication that we still have a long way to go," he said.