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Boko Haram's Renewed Attacks Spread Fear in North-East

By Kabiru Hamisu Matazu (Damaturu), Uthman Abubakar, (Maiduguri), Hamza Idris, Fidelis Mac-Leva and Mui | Publish Date: Apr 30 2017 2:00AM

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Residents of Sabon Garin Kimba in Damboa Local Government Area of Borno State were about calling it a day after toiling the whole day on April

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16, when the strange but not unfamiliar sounds of relentless gunfire broke out some minutes to 6pm.

Instead of seeking the comfort of their beds, therefore, the frightened locals took cover in the bush to save their lives.

Suspected Boko Haram militants had invaded the military barracks in the town. True to the spirit and zeal to fight they displayed across the North-East recently, the soldiers in the barracks held their ground and engaged the terrorists in a gun duel that lasted over an hour.

Unfortunately, the troops were subsequently overwhelmed, given that the Boko Haram invaders were armed with Rocket Propelled Grenades, Anti-Aircraft Guns and backed up by two Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs).

Having gained the upper hand, the insurgents looted weapons, vehicles, fuel and food before setting the military base ablaze, a fashion reminiscent of Boko Haram's age-long style of acquiring arms.

Reports said eight soldiers, including an officer, were killed in the attack while others were injured.

The attack was the fourth in a string of deadly raids on military locations in April alone. In another attack, about 10 days earlier in Gubdori village, four soldiers were reportedly killed and five others injured.

Boko Haram fighters, who have been on the back foot since Nigerian soldiers recaptured territories they hitherto controlled, including Sambisa, recently stepped up attacks on the military, raising fears about the group's desperation to rearm.

Up to 30 soldiers have died in ambushes and raids by the group between January and April, reports show. The period has also seen a rise in suicide bombings, attacks on communities, as well as travellers, resulting in the death of many civilians as well.

The setbacks are prominent in Borno and Yobe states.

A retired Major Salihu Bakari described the return of the daring attacks as "appalling" and aimed at "unwinding the successes recorded by the Nigerian Army in the recent past."

January 7, 2017 was another sad day for the military and residents of Buni Yadi as suspected Boko Haram insurgents attacked the 27 Taskforce Military Brigade, killing a Captain and four other military personnel.

The attack came almost two years after the military recaptured Buni Yadi, which served as the stronghold of Boko Haram in Yobe in 2015 before the 27 Task Force Brigade relocated there from Damaturu.



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The memories of the incident had hardly died before the terrorists staged another attack on February 6, 2017 on a military base in Sassawa town in Tamuwa Local Government Area of Yobe State.

The insurgents, it was reported, stormed 6:00pm on the fateful Sunday and ambushed soldiers that were deployed there before setting the town ablaze.

A vigilante commandant, who confirmed losing a friend to the militants' explosive, said another security personnel was killed in an attack that lasted for over four hours.

Apart from outright attacks, the Boko Haram fighters are said to have devised a means of sneaking into villages like Barko Dejina, Dejima Bukurti, Jilli Fuchumeram and Aji Wango Kusir in Gaidam, to seize fuel and foodstuff from residents.

One of the villagers, who simply gave his name as Baana, told our correspondent that the militants usually intercepted motorists to collect fuel and foodstuff without harming them. He revealed that the insurgents were secretly cultivating rice farms in Buhari village under Yunusari Local Government Area, saying if the trend continued, the group would continue to launch deadly attacks.

Muhammad Isah, a resident in Goniri town said the recent surge in attacks in the area was affecting people's confidence in the security situation.

"Most of us sleep in fear because of these attacks. Although the military are doing their best, people are seriously afraid now. Many cannot sleep well," he said.

'This is how they started'

Frequent attacks on people in Gujba, Tarmuwa and Kanamma local government areas have equally made the inhabitants wary of the situation, despite successes in recent military operations.

Mala Goni, a returnee in Buni Yadi, said the spike in attacks on security formations were an indication that the militants were re-strategising. "These militants are not defeated. They only retreated to regroup and continue with their merciless attacks on innocent lives," he argued.

He said the insurgents had succeeded in destabilising the one year of relative peace that was being enjoyed by people in the town. "All these attacks, especially the one at 27 Task Force Brigade, have shocked everyone in the town because they are the least that everyone expected," he said.

Goni said the militants also kidnapped a vigilante group leader, Modu Yahajam, on his way to Buni Yadi, after which they planted an explosive

that killed another vigilante and injured seven others when they responded to a distress call on the militants' attack at Wulle village.

A vigilante, who confided in Daily Trust on Sunday, said the insurgents were a common sight in villages like Galmari, Wulle, Malumti and Gorgore, adding that many people were afraid of going to the farm due to fear of attacks.

"Weeks ago, the insurgents seized a vehicle in Wulle village, they rustled sheep and cattle in Galmari. The military should handle this with a lot of care because this is how it all started. Before we could do anything, they made Buni Yadi their stronghold. A serious action has to be taken to avoid a repeat," he advised.

'Boko Haram freely roams Borno outskirts, bushes'

Before overrunning the military base at Sabon Gari Kimba in Borno State, the terrorists also attacked the military base of Gaji-Gonna town, where unconfirmed reports stated that two soldiers were killed, and after that, they reportedly attacked another base between Alau and Konduga at the outskirts of Laujeri village on April 23.

The Boko Haram militants also extended their raids on the military to Darajamal village, where they thrice attacked a military base in a week, reportedly killing two soldiers in the first attack and injuring five in the second and third. Within the same period, a military base protecting the Alau dam at Jetete village in Konduga Local Government Area, also came under a rampaging attack of the group.

Daily Trust on Sunday learnt that at the Mayinti village attack, one soldier was reportedly killed. At the Koshimiri village military base, near Bama, the militants were said to have injured another soldier. At Kofa in Konduga, they attacked the military base where they reportedly killed another soldier, it was also gathered.

Like in Yobe, the civilians in Borno were equally victims of the militants' terror. At Kayamla near Molai, just about a couple of kilometers away from the 'Welcome to Maiduguri' gate, along Maiduguri-Damboa road, they waylaid firewood-carrying pickups, dragged down the nine passengers onboard, shot all of them in the head and removed their brains, according to eyewitnesses.

It is said that majority of communities in the state have resigned to the painful fate that whatever military victory over Boko Haram means, the insurgents are still very much around as masters of the outskirts and bushes, and with any laxity on the part of the military, they can always invade wherever they want to, and possibly regroup.



Bunu M. Bukar, the Borno State secretary of the Hunters Association and Vigilante Group, painted an eerie picture of what the situation, if not arrested, may portend. "I can remember that this is how it started years back when they started their perilous endeavours. They were ignored, and before anybody could realise it, they had constituted a formidable force that was strong enough to challenge the Nigerian state.

"The terror group has now split into two - that of Shekau and that of Mamman Nur. The Mamman Nur faction has vowed to kill soldiers, police, hunters and the Civilian JTF. The Shekau faction has vowed to kill everyone except its members. So the Mamman Nur faction attacks military bases more, because when we accompany soldiers on a raid on their bases after their attack on military bases, and we succeed in killing some of them, we identify members of the Mamman Nur faction by some of their distinguishing features. They are clean-shaven and their uniforms are well starched, and they wear full military uniforms, unlike the Shekau faction members who even wear slippers, look like madmen, with unkempt hairs.

Bukar Idrisa, a displaced resident of Bula-bulin, a town between Maiduguri and Damboa which was completely sacked by the insurgents, advised that the terrorists should not be given the breathing space to regroup.

"I am afraid the terrorists are still everywhere. And what is most frightening now is the fact the military seems to have stopped attacking them. This is giving the insurgents the effrontery to be attacking the military. My fear is: What if they feel the military is afraid of them and regroup to attempt retaking the territories they lost?' The thought of that is very scary," he said.

A Bulama (community leader) in Jere Local Government Area, who doesn't want to be named, shared views with Bukar, saying that although the terrorists have successfully been sacked from towns and big villagers, they are still roaming the outskirts.

The terrain at the outskirts of towns and villages are still infested with the insurgents, so that apart from Maiduguri-Damaturu road, to ply most other roads out of Maiduguri, like Maiduguri-Damboa, Maiduguri-Monguno and Maiduguri-Bama, vehicles have to form a convoy of about 100 cars or more to be escorted by soldiers, police, civilian JTF and the men of the Nigerian Civil Defence.

Don't be complacent

Retired Major Bakari said the reason Boko Haram members were on the offensive was because both the military and civilian authorities had been "disarmed by the euphoria of the success recorded between May 2015 and December 2016."

"For me, they simply relaxed after the initial successes, thinking that the Boko Haram fight is over. And even the media is complicit because its



practitioners simply ignore the fact that you need to always challenge the authorities to sit up,” he said.

Some military personnel at the frontline agreed that Boko Haram was having some breathing space. Most of them who spoke in confidence, said they only shared their experiences, but the tide could be turned against the terrorists.

“For now, they’ve regrouped and they have succeeded in amassing enough weapons to cause collateral damage,” an officer leading some troops in southern Borno, said.

Other daring attacks by Boko Haram

On April 18, a devastating device that exploded along Bokotimta-Pulka road, near Ngoshe in Gwoza LGA, killed troops and destroyed the main military fighting vehicle there, as well as one gun truck, four AK47 rifles and a mine detector.

On April 6, four soldiers were killed, nine others injured and heavy fighting equipment stolen by the Boko Haram after an attack on Masa village and Dikwa.

March 17, there was a brazen Boko Haram attack in Magumeri, leading to the death of some soldiers, policemen and civilian JTF.

Despite the setbacks, Nigerian soldiers had an upper hand on Friday, April 29 when they launched a surprise offensive at a Boko Haram location in Talala, southern Borno, killing many.

A credible source said the leader of the terrorists in the area, one Abu Fatima and four Amirs, among many others, were killed.

New sanctuaries for Boko Haram leaders

Credible sources said though a substantial number of Boko Haram terrorists has been forced out of the 60,000Sqkm dreaded Sambisa forest, the remnants, including their famous leaders have found new sanctuaries.

“Mamman Nur and the de facto leader of the factional Boko Haram, Mus’ab Albarnawi and their large followership have an active camp located between Biu, Buni Yadi and Biu,” a source said.

“It’s called Kauju forest, and honestly speaking, it’s the Sambisa of Mamman Nur and his cohorts,” he said.

A member of the vigilante, Mahmood Umar, said the area was deadly.

“It’s from there that they are launching attacks on places like Talala, Buni Yadi, Sabon Gari, Warijoko, and Buni Yadi,” he said.



He added that on the other hand, Shekau operates from the rocky areas of Mandara mountains, around Gwoza.

According to him, Shekau's fighters also hold sway around Balla Bakin Kogi.

"In fact, they held Friday prayers in the place today (Friday, April 29).

We must win the ideology front to defeat Boko Haram - Dr. Nwaokolo

For a terrorism expert and scholar, Dr. Amaechi Nwaokolo, the renewed attacks by insurgents in the North-East, mostly targeted at military targets, are a statement by the terrorists that they are still very potent.

"The terrorists make a statement to the military and the country, using the attacks to prove that they are still very potent. They are also using the attacks to acquire more weapons for further attacks," Nwaokolo said.

He said even though the military had done their bid in the counter-insurgency efforts, "We have not totally, and may not totally defeat terrorism.

"They said they had cleared Sambisa Forest but even in advanced countries, you have to go beyond rhetoric to address the basics," he said.

According to the expert, the use of force alone cannot defeat terrorism but rather a holistic look at the root causes of insurgency. "For instance, what are we doing to counter their ideology? We must revisit the school system using the clerics. Recruitment has moved from places of worship to the internet," he said.

Nwaokolo also said the terrorists were regrouping because their source of funding was still strong, adding that it also needed to be addressed. He also listed social inclusion through youth empowerment initiatives as another way of addressing the root causes of terrorism.

"Development and empowerment are key. The government has to take the bull by the horns by providing jobs to address youth unemployment," he said.

While stressing the need for education, Nwaokolo called for adequate intelligence gathering among the security services. "Intelligence is very important in curbing terrorism. You can see what happened in some of these advanced countries. Sometimes these guys are able to strike, but within a couple of days, information about the suspects are obtained," he said

Military should adopt non-battlefield tactics - Kontagora



But the former military administrator of Kano and Benue states, retired Col Aminu Isah Kontagora is of the opinion that the recent attacks by Boko Haram are not strange, especially to military strategists.

“It’s not a cause for so much worry. The military won the battle of territory. What I mean is that the military will want to refuse the insurgents, the Boko Haram, to occupy territory. But they have not won the war on Boko Haram yet. So, the war still continues. The insurgency will last very long before it can disappear,” he said.

The retired military officer explained reasons behind the group’s continuous existence despite the recent victory against it.

“From my personal assessment, Boko Haram fighters are not yet inclined to peace. It is either they have not yet seen the incentives for peace or their sponsors are still maintaining the goal of the insurgency when it started. So there is a lot of homework to be done, be it political, economic and social, to get to the ultimate destination of peace.

“The government has started. But as I told you, the insurgency is a very difficult war. You can kill the field commanders, but there can be renegades that will continue the fight. The fight will continue based on the ideology of the group. Once there is justification for that ideology in the mind of the insurgents, a few will continue to fight,” he said.

On the group’s renewed onslaught against the military, he said: “Definitely, the military are their targets because they have displaced them. They have separated them from the people. So, the only target available is the military, which will be as a form of taking revenge to destabilise the army and try to force them to take some actions that can lead to public cry of human rights violation and so forth. That is insurgency for you. So, the war on Boko Haram is still going on and people should still brace up to support the military.”

He advised the military to sustain the tempo against the insurgents. “They should now change their tactics to conform to an insurgency without a battlefield. They know what I mean. The military know what to do because this is the time the information gathered in the battlefield should be analysed and actions taken. Through that, you could be lucky to get to the sponsors.

“The role of the government is to encourage not only the military but also the general public to be forthcoming. Now, Boko Haram is resident within the community. They are no more in the bush of Sambisa. It is now the community that can report funny and suspected movements and maybe take part in some of the clandestine meetings to give reports,” he added.

But the Defence spokesman, Major-General John Enenche, at a news conference in Abuja on Friday, said what appeared to be a resurgence of

