

Boko Haram Fighters Kill Soldiers, Abduct Hundreds In Borno

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OLATUNJI OMIRIN (MAIDUGURI) & RONALD MUTUM (ABUJA)



Boko Haram fighters loyal to the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) on Tuesday killed at least eight soldiers and injured three others in an ambush in Kukawa town in the northern part of Borno State, Daily Trust reports.

They also, in the last ten days abducted about one hundred people including young men and girls from Kukawa and adjoining communities, security sources, vigilantes and locals said.

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Elsewhere in Magumeri, the terrorists on Monday raided a general hospital in the town, killed a nursing mother and stole drugs and medical equipment before they burnt the facility to ashes.

It was gathered from credible sources that the insurgents stepped up offensive because they were looking for food, additional weapons,

more fighters and money to finance their activities.

“The terrorists resolved to continue attacking villages with a view to getting logistics,” a source with deep knowledge of happenings in the war ravaged Borno told our correspondent on Wednesday.

“Considering that it is the rainy season, it is a tough time for both the military and terrorists,” the source said.

Efforts to get the military to comment on the latest attack was not successful as the Coordinator, Defence Media Operations, Major General John Eneche, did not reply to a text message sent to him by our reporter.

However, he had earlier yesterday stated that about 20 terrorists were killed in an ongoing onslaught in the area.

Meanwhile, a security expert said that the spike in attacks could be as a result of the rains, as the military did not have the appropriate equipment to fight under that condition.

How soldiers were killed in Kukawa

One of our sources said troops were asked to move to Kukawa on Tuesday to address increased Boko Haram activities occasioned by raids for food and abduction of child soldiers and girls for Boko Haram commanders.

They were, however, ambushed by the terrorists who had prior knowledge of their movement.

There were claims in some quarters that the terrorists have taken over Kukawa, but this could not be verified at press time.

According to the source, “troops of 401 Special Forces Brigade were ambushed at Kukawa (on Tuesday).

“The terrorists dressed in camouflage and red barrette ambushed a team of two officers and 28 soldiers. Eight soldiers were killed, three were wounded and two officers got missing, but they were later found,” our source said.

“One MRAP, 4GTs and one ambulance were taken away by the terrorists. In fact, they carried everything. They also burnt one APC (armoured personnel carrier),” the source added.



Sympathisers visit the General Hospital at Magumeri in Borno State, after the attack by ISWAP fighters on Monday

Another source said the troops were ambushed while they were supervising the excavation of trenches around Kukawa to provide cover for the people.

“There was an attack on our soldiers protecting the people digging trenches in Kukawa town on Tuesday; we lost some soldiers... It was disheartening and unfortunate,” the source who is a top security official, said.

Civilian Joint Task Force member Baba Modu Kukawa said many soldiers were killed and three gun trucks were carted away by the insurgents.

“The whole incident took less than ten minutes. Unknown to the soldiers, the insurgents were very close to where the trenches were

being dug. They opened fire on them,” he said.

An indigene of Kukawa who lives in Maiduguri, Masa Alhaji also confirmed the attack but claimed the town was not captured by insurgents.

Locals in captivity

Daily Trust learnt that over one hundred people have been abducted by the terrorists in Kukawa, Magumeri, Abadam, Marte and adjoining communities either for ransom, or conscription into the sect.

It was gathered that over 100 people were taken away around 4pm on Tuesday when the attackers drove into the town in a convoy of vehicles armed with sophisticated weapons.

A community leader said, “It is difficult to give an actual number but what I can tell you is that hundreds of boys and girls have been abducted. Young boys are being forcefully tasked to carry arms. Some parents are being forced to pay ransom to get their children back.

“Similarly, many girls abducted have been turned to sex slaves while the elderly who refused to surrender to the dictates of the terrorists are being killed. It is a sad development at a time when locals are being asked to go back home after living in IDP camps for years,” he said.

Daily Trust reports that residents of Kukawa were taken back to their ancestral home on August 2, this year after spending over two years as IDPs in Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.

This was after Governor Babagana Zulum reconstructed their homes and provided them with farm implements and other basic necessities.

The residents were escorted by the military during the relocation as part of the resettlement plan of the state government.

“The Boko Haram fighters that keep disturbing Kukawa are after the goodies provided to them by Zulum. They are also looking for new recruits, fresh women for their commanders and to raise money from payment of ransoms,” a source said.

The governor was attacked on July 29, 2020 in the Kukawa Local Government Area of the state.

Zulum said the attack on his convoy was sabotage by the military.

Last weekend, the Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole said the allegation was baseless.

Farmers, fishermen pay tax to access farms, rivers

Daily Trust findings revealed that farmers and fishermen in many communities in northern Borno now pay money to terrorists to have access to their farms or be allowed to fish.

Local government areas in northern Borno include Abadam, Guzamala, Magumeri, Gubio, Kaga, Kukawa, Marte, Mobbar, Monguno and Nganzai.

“Farmers in communities not far from LGAs that are accessible can only go to their farms after buying their way,” Bana Mohammed, a farmer Magumeri, said.

“You pay money to the terrorists before they would allow you to have access to your farm. And this depends on the size of the farm.

Anybody who refuses to pay will be killed,” he said.

Another source who does not want to be named said gaining access to the waters along the shores of Lake Chad is strictly after gaining clearance from ISWAP leaders.

“The ISWAP commanders believe northern Borno is their territory. Any fisherman who wants to fish must pay tax. They collect the money in Nigerian, Chadian, Nigerien and Cameroonian currencies,” he said.

A source close to Nigerian security forces corroborated the claim.

“All the islands after Doron Baga carry out controlled fishing activities. Dozens of Islands are under the control of Boko Haram,” he said.

Terrorists attack Magumeri, destroy hospital

Boko Haram fighters also went on rampage on Monday and attacked Magumeri in northern Borno where they stole medicines and destroyed a General Hospital.

Magumeri is 42km from Maiduguri, the state capital.

They completely destroyed vehicles and tractors provided by the state government as part of efforts to restore civil authority in the area.

20 terrorists killed in air strikes

The Nigerian Military did not respond to questions on the abduction in Kukawa.

The Coordinator, Defence Media Operations, Major General John Eneche did not reply to a text message on the attack in Kukawa and the general situation of things in the area at the time of filing this report.

However, Daily Trust received an invitation for a press briefing on military operations slated for today (Thursday) at the Defence headquarters.

Earlier, the military in a statement from Major General Eneche said the Air Force cleared terrorists' commanders at Bukar Meram area of Borno State.

He said 20 insurgents were killed in the operation.

Eneche further stated that the military air strikes being conducted under subsidiary Operation Hailstorm of the Operation Lafiya Dole, neutralised some Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) commanders and knocked out logistics facilities at Bukar Meram, on the fringes of the Lake Chad in Borno State.

He said several terrorists were neutralised at Dole, a settlement in the southern part of Borno State.

Eneche maintained that the air interdiction missions were executed on 17 August, 2020 on the heels of credible intelligence reports, indicating a resurgence of terrorists' activities in the two settlements.

He said, "Bukar Meram, a major ISWAP logistics hub linking other Island settlements of the Lake Chad, which also houses several of their fighters and some of their key leaders, was attacked by an enhanced force package of Nigerian Air Force (NAF) fighter jets and helicopter gunships which hit designated targets in the area leading to the destruction of the logistics facilities and neutralisation of several of the terrorists and their leaders."

He said the attack at Dole was carried out after Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions showed a build-up of activities in the area after the relocation of some terrorists from nearby settlements of Kokiwa and Yale.

He said, "Overhead the area the ISR aircraft spotted no fewer than 20 terrorists in the area, which were taken out by the NAF attack

aircraft.”

‘Why insecurity persist’

Salihu Bakhari, who is a retired security military personnel and now a security expert, said the rainy season is partly responsible for the spike in attacks, especially in northern Borno.

“Our troops don’t have the requisite fighting equipment that can navigate the vast northern Borno during the raining season,” he said.

“I advise that they should intensify aerial reconnaissance and prepare adequately to confront the terrorists during the dry season beginning from October,” he said.

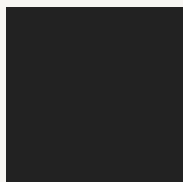
Another security source said the federal government should consider asking the police, customs, immigrations and civil defence to take over liberated communities.

“Soldiers alone cannot win this war. Once they liberate a community, they should be allowed to move on while the paramilitary establishments should take over,” he said.

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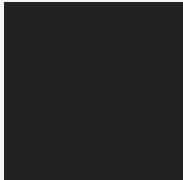
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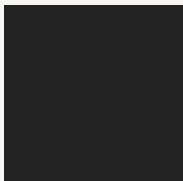
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