

# Fear heightens over bandits' alliance with terrorist groups

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This is in addition to others like Dogo Gide, who has had a long standing relationship with Ansaru elements in Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna State, led by one Malam Abba.

Elsewhere in Niger State, jihadi groups are said to be expanding their reach and influence, displacing communities and establishing a network with local bandits.

The Niger State Government had, at different times announced the presence of ISWAP elements in Shiroro and Borgu LGAs.

In late November, the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Alhaji Ahmed Matane, said the terrorist group was trying to establish a caliphate around the Kainji National Park located in Borgu, and that the group was responsible for the kidnapping of the Dodo of Wawa.

"They claim that they are not bandits, but poised to set up a 'caliphate' at the Kainji National Park. They claim they are not bandits but that they are Godsend and they are operating from the border of Niger, Benin Republic, and Nigeria. Though Benin Republic has closed its borders, the ISWAP is operating around the periphery trying to indoctrinate communities there to accept their teaching and forget about what government is doing," Matane said.

According to him, the terrorists have been preaching against education and discouraging parents from sending their children to school.

## Kano used as haven

In the security report released last week, the nation's intelligence architecture also raised alarm on the bandits' infiltration towards Kano State in search of a haven.

"Furthermore, Kano State, previously without any significant presence of bandits, has in recent weeks emerged as a haven for the criminal elements. Two notorious bandits were recently apprehended by security forces in Kura LGA, with indications that many more are now hibernating in various locations across the state," reads a report in part.

According to the report, "This development has necessitated immediate simultaneous ground and air operations to dislodge these bandits and prevent them from carrying out deadly attacks in these frontline states."



Passengers stranded on Abuja Kaduna Road during an attack by bandits

## Why alliance may not work well - Experts

But two researchers on the security situation in the region interviewed by *Daily Trust Saturday* were unanimous in doubting the formidability and sustainability of the relationship between the two sides.

According to Dr Adamu, "A couple of factors will make the relationship between the sides a contentious one: first, the North West bandits are largely uneducated in Islam; second is the cultural and ethnic difference. The bandits are mostly Fulani while JAS and ISWAP are mainly Kanuri. This will pose a challenge when it comes to leadership arrangement.

"Despite these difficulties, it is likely that the JAS and ISWAP elements may successfully transfer their tactics, techniques and procedures to the bandits. So we may see more targeted abductions and use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)."

On his part, a researcher with the University of Lagos and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), James Barnett, said, "Gauging the precise nature of ties between bandits and jihadists is incredibly difficult as so many rumours circulate and jihadist organisations are generally pretty opaque.

"From what I have seen, bandits will accept tactical assistance from jihadists, be it in the form of weapons or possibly training in particular skills where jihadists have a comparative advantage such as IED usage, but the bandits are mostly not interested in subordinating themselves to a jihadist organisation and its rules about who you can and can't steal

from and such.

"So while cooperation is always on the table, a more wholesale conversion of bandits into jihadists is quite unlikely in my opinion. The bandits have already gotten so rich and powerful by terrorising many Muslim communities, so why would they change now?"

## Military kill many in Sokoto, Zamfara operations

Meanwhile, several bandits were killed during a gun duel with the military at Katanga village in Isa Local Government Area of Sokoto State on Thursday.

*Daily Trust Saturday* gathered that the village was under the control of bandits before the confrontation.

A local told *Daily Trust* that Katanga and Satri were hitherto under the control of bandits loyal to Bello Turji.

In another operation, many bandits from the camp of the warlord, Halilu Sububu, were also killed in an airstrike by the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) in the Sububu forest of Shinkafi LGA.

A vigilante, who was part of the operation in Sokoto, said it was led by the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 8 Division of the Nigerian Army.

"Over 20 vehicles stormed the enclave, we fought them for several hours. In fact, it took the intervention of fighter jets to force them to retreat and succumb to our might.

"It's too early for me to tell the number of the terrorists killed during the encounter, but there is no single casualty on our side. So the operation was successful," he said.

A resident of Isa town told our reporter that several bandits were sighted moving towards the area to support their men during

the encounter.

"But from the information that has been reaching us, they were dealt with mercilessly by the military. As I am talking to you, the GOC and his men are still combing our bushes in search of the bandits' hideouts," he said.

According to a military source, the GOC has vowed not to come back until they clear all their enclaves in the Eastern parts of Sokoto.

"He is a man of commitment who doesn't want a blemish record. He is there leading the troops in the bush," the source added.

## Police vow action on threat letter to Zamfara Christians

The police in Zamfara State have said they are taking action to contain an anonymous threat sent to the Christian community in the state.

The leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Zamfara State confirmed to *Daily Trust Saturday* receipt of the threat letter from a group asking Christians to leave the state with immediate effect.

Speaking to our correspondent, the Secretary General of CAN in the state, Reverend Father Iliya Tsiga, said they received the said letter through the state police command as it was not directly issued to them or to any church.

The police did not reveal how they got the letter, but the CAN secretary said they learnt the letter might have been delivered to the command through a boy.

Fr Tsiga further said they were called by the Commissioner of Police (CP), Mr Ayuba Elkanah, who intimidated them about the letter and even gave them a copy.

He explained that, "We



Zamfara State Commissioner of Police, Elkanah

are talking about a Fulani association, we only know Miyetti Allah. We had earlier met with DSS; even though I was not at the meeting."

He said the association had instructed its members to be shortening their activities in churches and other places.

"The CP earlier told us that whether the threat is real or it is being issued by some unscrupulous elements to create unnecessary tension they would not take it lightly," Fr Iliya said.

"The CP also assured that not only the Christian community, but all adherents of other religions would be protected because it is an issue that has to do with security of lives and property," he added.

The spokesman of the state police command, SP Muhammad Shehu, said the command was aware of the letter and that the commissioner had already deployed several squads to all worship centres in the state, but that no arrest had been made yet.

"CP Ayuba Elkanah has directed all the area commanders and the DPOs to be on alert, and there is no cause for alarm. The command is on top of the situation," Shehu said.

The state's Commissioner for Information, Alhaji Ibrahim Dosara, could not be reached at the time of filing this report.