

Turji, Hunted By Military, Kills 11 Farmers In Sokoto



Bandit leader, Turji

By Our Reporters

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Notorious bandit kingpin, Kachalla Bello Turji, killed 11 farmers in Lugu town, Isa Local Government Area of Sokoto State, in the early hours of Wednesday.

Turji was said to be returning from a Sallah visit to a community in Isa, when he carried out the attack.

A resident of Isa, Basharu Altine Giyawa, told our reporter that locals had received intelligence about Turji's planned visit to the eastern part of Gatawa in Sabon Birni Local Government Area since Saturday.

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He said the information was promptly relayed to the authorities for action.

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"But yesterday, Turji and his men left his village, Fakai, in Shinkafi Local Government Area of Zamfara State, passed through some of our communities in Isa, held their Sallah celebration, and then killed 11 farmers on their way back to Fakai," he said.

Giyawa blamed the killings on security operatives' failure to act on the intelligence report.

Hon. Aminu Boza, a member of the Sokoto State House of Assembly from the area, acknowledged receiving the report but insisted that Turji did not visit any community in his area for Sallah.

"Yes, we were informed about Turji's planned visit to the eastern part of Gatawa, and we acted swiftly. We went to Sabon Birni and took security measures to prevent it. That could be why he took out his anger on innocent farmers in Isa," he said.

It was also gathered that Turji made a stop at Tozai village, where he killed the leader of the community's vigilante group.

When contacted, the spokesperson of the Sokoto State Police Command, ASP Ahmad Rufa'i, said only the military could confirm the attack, as they were the ones operating in the area.

Military's action on Turji

The military had declared Turji wanted for terrorising communities in Zamfara, Sokoto and parts of Katsina states.

The Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Olufemi Oluyede, in February 2025, had vowed that the Nigerian military would soon eliminate the bandit kingpin.

Briefing journalists at the headquarters of Operation Fansan Yamma, in Gusau, the Zamfara State capital, the army chief said the wanted terrorist has been on the run and should keep running.

“Bello Turji is on the run as we speak and for everywhere he goes, we follow him there. Let him keep running, it is just a matter of time before he would be removed from space,” the army chief had said.

Despite being pursued by the military, Turji continues his gruesome attacks on communities.



military during an operation against banditry, recently

Timeline of Turji's attacks

He was born Bello Usmana in 1994 in Shinkafi Local Government Area of Zamfara State. He later adopted Bello Turji Kachalla and became popularly known as Turji.

The bandit leader currently focuses his terror operations in the North-west region.

On December 2, 2024, Bello Turji in collaboration with Saidu Zango and Jammo Baki, attacked Dan Tudu, a community in Sabon Birni Local Government Area of Sokoto State, killing nine people and injuring one person.

The heavily armed terrorists also abducted several persons and looted valuables in the community, it was gathered.

Reports had it that intelligence sources confirmed the identities of the perpetrators and according to security experts and local sources, the bandits targeted homes, stealing livestock, money, and other belongings before retreating with their captives into the forest.

On December 7, 2024, bandits loyal to Bello Turji, abducted a newlywed bride and four bridesmaids at Kwaren Gamba near Kuka Teke in Sokoto State, a village known for repeated attacks by the bandits' leader and his men. The incident happened shortly after the wedding ceremony.

According to reports, the armed men stormed the area and forcefully took the victims.

On January 1, 2025, Turji's men abducted passengers and burnt their vehicle in Shinkafi Local Government Area of Zamfara State.

Daily Trust had reported that the incident occurred at Kwanar Jalab village in Zungeru Ward, Shinkafi LGA.

The notorious bandits' kingpin had threatened to launch attacks in response to the arrest of his relatives. It is not clear if this incident was as a result of the threat.

A resident of Shinkafi, who craved anonymity, said the bandits ambushed the vehicle, while conveying passengers to Shinkafi from Gusau, the state capital.

“The bandits abducted all the passengers on board the vehicle before they set the car ablaze. We are suspecting that the 10 people, including the driver, were abducted.

“This is a strange method of operation in this area. Before this incident, bandits have never set a car ablaze after abducting its passengers. Of course, they kidnap people along the road, but they have never burnt vehicles after an operation,” the source lamented.

On January 10, 2025, a group of bandits linked to Turji attacked a mosque in Birnin Yaro village in Zamfara State and kidnapped several worshippers.

And on January 30, 2025, Bello Turji's men killed three people and abducted 24 others in a series of attacks on four communities in Shinkafi Local Government Area of Zamfara State. The attackers also rustled dozens of animals and ransacked the communities of the available foodstuffs.

We will subdue all security threats this year – Defence chief

The Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Christopher Musa, said the military high command has promised President Bola Ahmed Tinubu that all security threats ravaging the country would be subdued this year.

Musa also maintained that the contemporary security landscape in Nigeria presents a myriad of challenges that necessitate innovative and technologically advanced solutions.

The top military officer stated this shortly after the unveiling of attack UAVs (drones) and testing of locally-manufactured bombs produced by Briech UAS, an indigenous technology company specialised in drone production and bomb making.

“We have promised Mr President that this year, we want to make sure that we subdue the enemies critically. This is a good enabler that will help us to do that.

“For all the security agencies, I'm sure we're all proud of what is happening today because we are all going to key in and use them properly for the good of our operations,” he told the gathering.

Musa, who was flanked by the Commissioner of Police in the Federal Capital Territory, Ajao Adewale; Plateau State governor, Caleb Mutfwang and other top military operatives, lamented challenges they face when requesting military hardware from foreign countries.

The Defence Chief described the development of the Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles as “timely intervention”, saying the precision and efficiency of drones are critical in gathering intelligence and executing decisive actions against threats.

He lamented, “In a world where the global politics surrounding the procurement of advanced military hardware, particularly combat drones, have become more intricate, countries that do not produce such solutions are made to face bureaucratic bottlenecks and diplomatic hurdles in acquiring these critical platforms.

“It is in this context that the indigenous production of Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles becomes an invaluable strategic asset. By manufacturing these drones locally, Nigeria reduces its dependence on foreign sources, ensures prompt acquisition and strengthens its ability to respond swiftly to security threats.

“The cumbersome bureaucracy that has characterized the procurement of defence equipment, even when urgent needs arise, has been a source of concern.

“The development of locally made drones significantly mitigates this challenge by providing a seamless, efficient and responsive process that aligns with our operational imperatives.

“The Armed Forces of Nigeria welcomes this development as it enhances our ability to acquire the much-needed assets without the delays associated with international procurement.”

Also speaking at the event, the governor of Plateau State, Caleb Mutfwang, said Nigeria made a great mistake in allowing Boko Haram terrorists, members of ISWAP and other non-state actors in some parts of the country.

Mutfwang said it was time for all the leaders and critical stakeholders to ensure that no one operates within Nigeria’s borders with capabilities that compete, not to talk of exceed, the ones of state actors.

The governor said it was expedient for the stakeholders to enter into partnerships with local companies involving security technologies to avoid the bottlenecks attached with getting them from foreign countries.

“Indeed, we made a mistake as a nation when we allowed non-state actors to acquire capabilities that are almost overwhelming state actors, and it is time to address that disadvantage,” he said.

The governor also disclosed that all arrangements have been made in Plateau State to ensure that farmers return to their respective farms before this year ends, adding that they would be provided cover on air and ground.

Turji exploiting gaps in Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy – Dr Adamu

Dr Kabir Adamu, a security risk management and intelligence expert, has attributed the military's failure to apprehend Turji to gaps in Nigeria's security framework.

“He is exploiting the gaps in our security arrangement. The current face of our security strategy in the North-West is Operation Fansan Yanma, a military operation. However, the military is not adequately equipped—there is a shortage of personnel and resources. The vast expanse of the region exacerbates the challenge. Sokoto alone is larger than almost all South-East states combined. When you add Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Niger, the scale of the problem becomes clearer. The difficult terrain and porous borders further complicate the military's task.

“Yet, our national security architecture was not designed for the military to handle counter-terrorism alone,” he added.

Adamu, founder and CEO of Beacon Security and Intelligence Ltd, highlighted three key instruments for counter-terrorism in Nigeria: the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTS), introduced in 2016; the Policy Framework on Countering Violent Extremism (2017); and the Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act, amended in 2022.

“These instruments include the military as a component but do not assign it sole responsibility for implementation. The intent was for all elements of state power to contribute. Unfortunately, Turji's legal classification remains unclear—whether he is a bandit or a terrorist. If he were officially recognised as a terrorist, these instruments would have guided the approach to handling him. Instead, he exploits existing gaps,” he said.

Adamu pointed out that Nigeria lacks a documented counter-banditry or anti-banditry strategy.

“There is no official framework guiding the nation’s response to banditry. As a result, Turji continues to operate—he collects ransom, secures fuel for his motorbikes, hides in ungoverned spaces, recruits from local communities, and exerts influence over his areas of operation.”

He criticised the military’s approach, particularly the public focus on eliminating Turji.

“In counter-terrorism, you don’t single out an individual and repeatedly talk about them. Doing so inadvertently amplifies their stature. The military made this mistake, allowing Turji to attract more followers and evade capture. His businesses continue to generate revenue, funding his operations,” he said.

Adamu further noted that Nigeria’s porous borders allow Turji to procure weapons and other supplies.

On what needs to be done, he said, “We don’t need to reinvent the wheel. We must implement the provisions of the three counter-terrorism instruments and urgently develop a counter-banditry and anti-banditry strategy.

“A counter-banditry strategy will prevent the emergence of new bandits, while an anti-banditry strategy will address the current crisis. The latter must include an offensive military component, but also tackle root causes such as land governance, climate change, and the proliferation of small arms.

“These elements are outlined in the counter-terrorism strategies, but banditry differs from terrorism, requiring tailored policies. The Office of the National Security Adviser, Ministers of Defence, Interior, Police Affairs, Justice, and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation should collaborate to develop these strategies.

“For example, bandits still demand motorbikes. If they lack fuel, their mobility is restricted. Blocking such supply lines is crucial—and this is not solely the military’s responsibility. Other arms of government must support the security framework.

“I urge the National Assembly to strengthen its oversight functions and ensure the executive agencies responsible for security fulfill their duties. Currently, significant gaps remain,” he

added.

‘I don’t see Turji going beyond 2025’

Murtala Ahmed Rufa’i, a researcher and analyst specialising in banditry, on his part, said he does not foresee Bello Turji surviving beyond 2025, citing Nigeria’s renewed commitment and resilience in tackling security challenges.

According to Rufa’i, the nation’s security agencies have shifted from being reactive to adopting a proactive approach in combating armed bandits. “Unlike the disjointed efforts of the past, we are now witnessing improved cooperation and collaboration among various security agencies,” he added.

When asked why Bello Turji continues to elude military efforts despite being declared wanted, Rufa’i attributed it to Turji’s distinctive modus operandi and his Area of Operations (AOR), which set him apart from other bandit leaders.

He explained, “Bello Turji predominantly operates within the Shinkafi general area, which encompasses three local government areas straddling Sokoto and Zamfara states. These include Shinkafi, where he has established his base; Isa, which borders Shinkafi; and Sabon Birni in Sokoto State. In my view, Turji rarely goes beyond these areas.”

Rufa’i identified another critical factor: Turji’s immobility. “Unlike other bandit leaders who are mobile, Turji tends to remain stationed within his AOR. He strongly believes that venturing outside his familiar territory could mark his last day on earth.”

Analyzing past events, Rufa’i noted, “A significant pattern among eliminated bandit leaders is their mobility. Many were neutralised while travelling to or from an operation. Turji, however, consciously avoids such movements. In fact, he has warned his associates to minimise their travel and, if necessary, ensure it is done discreetly.”

He added, “On rare occasions when Turji moves, he does so either alone or with a small, tightly controlled group. This contrasts sharply with other bandit leaders who travel in larger bands or with fighters, often attracting attention and alerting security forces.”