

Thursday, 15 January 2015



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Military foils attack on two Borno communities, kills 41 suspected terrorists

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- Amnesty says victims of Baga assault exceed 150

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THE military in a co-ordinated intelligence sharing on terrorists' activities in North-East Wednesday prevented attack on Biu and Azare towns killing 41 suspects and recovered four Toyota Hilux vehicles, an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC), arms and

ammunition on Biu-Garkida road.

The thwarting, according to a field military officer in Biu yesterday, was successful with aerial support of two Nigerian Air Force (NAF) fighter jets from Yola and bombing of the convoy of

terrorists moving towards Biu and Azare by 6:35 a.m. to cause mayhem on residents and public buildings.

Meanwhile, the Amnesty International (AI) Wednesday said that those killed in Baga exceeded 150 contrary to the military's claim that 150 persons, including Boko Haram fighters, were killed. It insisted that those slain are more than the official estimate.

Amnesty International cautioned the Boko Haram fighters to stop killing civilians, as the deliberate killing of civilians and destruction of their property are war crimes and crimes against humanity that must be duly investigated.

The rights group, in statement made available to The Guardian yesterday based on satellite images it obtained, provided indisputable and shocking evidence of the scale of last week's attack on the towns of Baga and Doron Baga by Boko Haram militants. It insisted that these images, which it will make public today, together with the stories of those who survived the attack, suggest that the final death toll could be much higher than the 150 claimed by the government.

In another development, British Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Hugo Swire, has said that Nigerians living in United Kingdom (UK) can be proud of the level of his country's support for Nigeria in its fight against the terrorists group, Boko Haram.

Responding to an urgent question in the House of Commons from the Liberal Democrat MP, Sarah Teather, Swire said the UK's contribution to the UN's central emergency response fund and the European commission's humanitarian aid and civil protection programmes in 2014 was £1.7 million, and that the Department for International Development's budget for Nigeria was one of the biggest in the world, at about £250 million.

The field military officer said: "The terrorists had on Tuesday evening attacked the Divisional Police Headquarters in Azare town of Hawul Local Council and carted away many armouries before proceeding to Biu to attack our military post first, before proceeding to the township to cause mayhem on innocent citizens. But three hours after, two fighter jets arrived and cleared the terrorists' convoy of vehicles proceeding to this town, three kilometres away from our military post."

He said the insurgents could not make it as the military repelled the attack killing 41 terror suspects.

On how the insurgents infiltrated, a resident, Aminu Pulgwa, said: "We sighted the terrorists in a convoy of 20 Hilux vehicles between Dzur and Garkida road proceeding to Biu to attack us in the early hours of today (Wednesday).

"When the terrorists were overwhelmed with ground and aerial bombardments, they retreated and proceeded to Azare, the council headquarters of Azare before torching the police station,

chairman's office building and two houses belonging to serving police officers in the area.”

The Amnesty International stated that before and after images of two neighbouring towns, Baga (160 kilometres from Maiduguri) and Doron Baga (also known as Doro Gowon, 2.5 kilometres from Baga), taken on January 2 and 7 show the devastating effect of the attacks which left over 3,700 structures damaged or completely destroyed. Other nearby towns and villages were also attacked over this period.

A Nigerian researcher, Daniel Eyre, said: “Up till now, the isolation of the Baga combined with the fact that Boko Haram remains in control of the area meant that it has been very difficult to verify what happened there. Residents have not been able to return to bury the dead, let alone count their number. But through these satellite images combined with graphic testimonies, a picture of what is likely to be Boko Haram’s deadliest attack ever is becoming clearer.”

He further continued: “This week, Nigeria’s Director of Defence Information stated that the number of people killed in Baga, including Boko Haram fighters, ‘has so far not exceeded about 150’. These images, together with the stories of those who survived the attack, suggest that the final death toll could be much higher than this figure.”

Swire said that while the British government wished Nigeria’s institutions were stronger, “both the Nigerian government and the international community are absolutely certain that Boko Haram needs to be routed out, and quickly, before it does further damage within the country and to its vulnerable neighbours.”

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