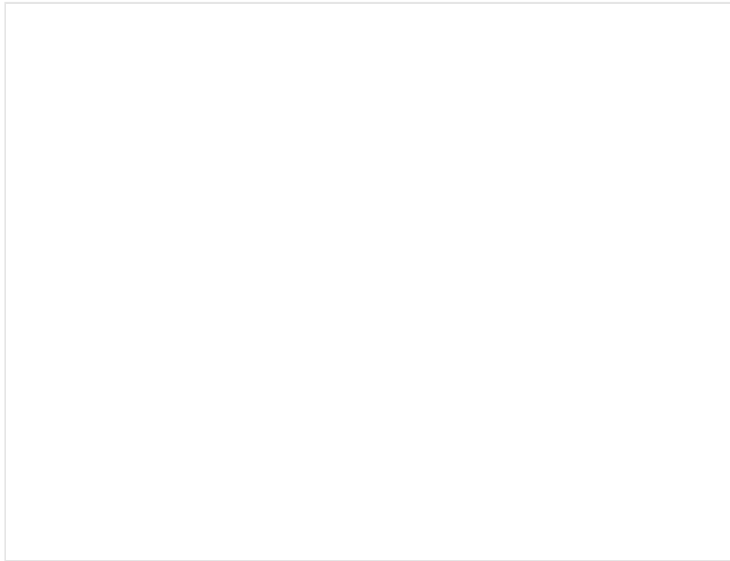


Boko Haram infiltrates herdsmen

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•Again, Fulani herdsmen kill 6 in Taraba

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Indications have emerged that some of the crimes being committed by Fulani herdsmen could be the handiwork of the fleeing Boko Haram terrorists.

Sunday Tribune gathered that some of the fleeing terrorists, who were being smoked out by the military in the North-East, had penetrated many parts of the country by disguising as cattlemen and using herds of cattle as a decoy.

This is just as another group of suspected Fulani herdsmen, on Saturday, killed six people in Korum, Orawua and Gidan Bature villages in Gassol Local Government Area of Taraba State,

barely two weeks after they killed 19 in Donga and Bali local government areas of the state.

A top security source told Sunday Tribune that the clinical manner villages were ransacked and the type of sophisticated weapons by the criminals had caused security officials to conclude on the possibility of a fresh organised assault by the terror elements.

The source, while sharing some of the new tactics, disclosed that during their investigation of recent abductions carried out particularly in Kogi State and the herdsmen attacks in some parts of the country, it was discovered that the clinical manner the perpetrators executed their acts had a semblance of terrorists' operations.

According to the source, the fleeing terrorists, knowing that herdsmen had thoroughfare in all parts of the country, would rustle their cattle, kill their owners and herd the animals towards the South to escape being arrested by the troops.

While not exonerating the ordinary cattlemen of some of the crimes, the security source said "some of them are innocent. But what we are worried about is the professional manner the

crimes were committed, which many of us believe is beyond the ordinary herdsman. We are looking beyond mere communal clashes,” the source stated.

A highly placed Presidency source also confirmed the claim of the security source. The source told Sunday Tribune in Abuja that the scales of attacks and possibility of external penetration had caused President Muhammadu Buhari to order immediate crackdown on the criminal elements. The likely connection of Boko Haram terrorists or other incendiary groups to the attacks, it is said, is not being overlooked.

“I can categorically tell you that President Buhari has directed all the security agencies to immediately swing into action and unmask the masterminds of the herdsmen clashes around the country before the nation is thrown into another round of crises.

“The president is worried and will not want to jump into a conclusion on the matter; he needs accurate information on the matter before taking appropriate and decisive action in order to stop the madness.

“The Fulani herdsmen have been operating in the nooks and crannies of the country carrying out their activities without clashing with their host communities. They move around with their cows in numbers and the most offensive weapons you can see with them was either knives or cutlasses with their sticks to direct their cows. But now the reverse is the case as most of them now move around with weapons like AK-47 rifles, double barrels, pistols and what have you?

“If you see the way these herdsmen attack their victims now, you will think you are watching the film of something happening in other land. At times, they kidnap and kill. They maim and do all sorts of things alien to the ordinary Fulani herdsman,” the presidency source explained..

“The thinking now,” he stated further, “is that the herdsmen might have been infiltrated by criminal elements from the Boko Haram group which is now under heavy military attacks or infiltrated by foreign mercenaries fighting similar cause to that of the group because of the types of weapons being used to carry out their activities.

“We believe that at the end of the investigation, the security agencies will be able to come up with something tangible to address the situation at hand. We want to know the people behind them, whether it is religion or politically motivated or just natural. All we can say now is that the clashes are not ordinary.”

According to the source, the president had ordered inter-agencies collaboration to unravel the mystery. “The security forces involved are the Department of State Service (DSS), Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), Nigeria Intelligence Agency, the police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, among others and the assignment regarded as top secret will be coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser,” the source added.

A senior personnel of the DSS, who also spoke with the Sunday Tribune over the matter and who craved anonymity, confirmed that the service was already carrying out investigations even before the presidential directive came.

The source, however, declined further enquiries on the level of their investigation, saying “all I can tell you is that we are working along with other sister security agencies to unravel the

mystery behind the herdsmen's bloody clashes with their host communities.”

6 killed in Taraba

The village head of Korum, one of the villages affected by the latest attack in Taraba State told Sunday Tribune that the armed herdsmen launched attack on the villages around 2:00 am, killing six people.

He added that eight cars were burnt by the herdsmen who razed the entire community comprising over 500 households, even as dozens of people who sustained injuries are receiving treatment at the MDGs clinic in Yerima, First Referral Hospital, Mutum Biyu and Ityav Clinic, a private hospital in Yerima.

Residents told Sunday Tribune that trouble started when the displaced Tiv people returned to the area on the order of Governor Darius Ishaku.

According to the residents, the Emir of Gassol Alhaji Idi Ciroma and his chiefs sold the farmlands belonging to the Tiv people who were displaced during the crisis that engulfed the state between 2013 and 2015.

“The Emir and his local chiefs sold our farmlands to the Fulanis who came from other places to settle on our ancestral land. We can't farm because the Fulanis are not allowing us. They claimed our land were sold to them by the local chiefs and the Emir of Gassol himself.

“The attack would not have happened if the Emir Alhaji Idi Ciroma responded to security threats in the area when we reported the problem to him. The little crops we have planted have already been taken over by the herdsmen who have turned our farms into grazing field,” they stated.

“The Emir, himself a Fulani, has not shown any concern even when cows eat our crops and we report to him. His inaction led to the attack on our community yesterday in which no fewer than six people were killed,” one of the victims, Terver Akporogh, told Sunday Tribune.

Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Joseph, confirmed the attack but said details were still sketchy.

But the Special Adviser to the governor on Security Matters, Wonukem Agyo, told journalists that the Army Commanding Officers of 20 Battalion, Serti and 93 Battalion, Takum had been contacted to deploy their men to clamp down on the attackers.

The attack came days after President Muhammadu Buhari ordered the Inspector General of Police and Chief of Army Staff to clamp down on armed Fulani herdsmen terrorising communities across the country.