

Boko Haram ambushes soldiers in Kogi



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About 850 soldiers shortlisted for a counter-terrorism course at the Nigerian Army Training Centre in Kontagora, Niger State narrowly escaped death when they were ambushed by suspected members of the outlawed

Boko Haram islamist sect.

Four of them were however seriously injured in the incident which took place at a location between Okene and Lokoja, Kogi State on Sunday night.

A security source said on Monday that the soldiers were men of the 322 Artillery Battalion, and the Fourth Brigade Garrison, Ekeunwa, Benin in Edo State.

The PUNCH learnt that the 850 soldiers were expected to give fillip to the ongoing counter-terrorism operation in Borno and Adamawa states on completion of the counter-insurgency course.

Our source said there were suspicions that the attackers were insurgents because of the intensity of the gunfire directed at the vans conveying the soldiers from both sides of the road.

He added that the soldiers, who shot their way through the ambush, passed the night at the Nigeria Army formation in Lokoja.

The four injured soldiers, according to him, were taken to a military facility in Lokoja while the commanders of the troops addressed the others on Monday morning.

The source said, "There was an attack on soldiers along the Okene-Lokoja Road on Sunday night. Four of the soldiers were seriously wounded in the attack though all of them are still alive and are receiving treatment at Lokoja.

"The soldiers were on their way for a course at Kontagora, where they are expected to be deployed in the North-East for the war against the insurgents.

"The soldiers were pulled out from two military formations in Benin—the 322 Artillery Battalion and the Fourth Brigade Garrison in Ekeunwan, Benin.

"It was not long that the soldiers returned from a peacekeeping operation in Sudan; they were members of the NIBBATT 41 that returned to the country about two months ago.

"The soldiers were taken unawares as the attackers operated from both sides of the road

and got four of the soldiers seriously wounded.

“However, they returned the fire and passed through to Lokoja where they were addressed the following morning. I believe as I talk to you that they must have left for Kotangora to participate in the planned course.”

The source said that there were feelings that somebody might have given out information on the movement of the troops from Benin to Kontagora.

Efforts to get the comment of the Director of Defence Information, Maj. Gen. Chris Olukolade, on the latest ambush were futile as the calls to his mobile telephone indicated that it was switched off.

It will be recalled that about 190 Nigerian troops were ambushed by militants a few kilometres from Okene on January 19, 2013.

The militants were said to have cut through the convoy of Mali-bound Nigerian Army peacekeepers travelling in three luxury buses via Kaduna to Bamako, Mali.

They first hit the convoy with Improvised Explosive Devices planted on the highway before firing on the troops afterwards. Two soldiers were killed and several others injured during the attack.

A few days after the incident, a group, Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis-Sudan, claimed that it carried out the attack. The group is a break-away faction of Boko Haram.

CAS rules out sabotage in case of missing jet

Meanwhile, the Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Adesola Amosu, on Monday dismissed insinuations linking the missing Air Force Alpha jet to sabotage.

Amosu, who spoke with State House correspondents after a meeting with President Goodluck Jonathan and Vice-President Namadi Sambo, over the incident, also expressed hope that the two crew members might still be alive.

The Alpha jet marked NAF 466 went missing while on an operation against insurgents in Adamawa State on Friday.

While noting that the search operation had been challenging, the CAS said he would provide credible information about the jet before the end of this week.

He said, “One of our Alpha Jets went on routine operation in the North-East. On its return, the pilots lost contact with the control towers and that made us to immediately initiate a search.

“But I am hopeful that before the end of the day or week we should be able to provide credible information as to the location of the aircraft and then the pilots.

“But one thing is clear whatever problem they had, an ejection was contemplated. It is therefore my hope that the pilots are still alive.”

Amosu said the possibility of sabotage was zero given the fact that the Air Force was in full control of the nation's air space.

He said, “Sabotage? No, because it is a distance of just from Maiduguri to Yola. We are in full control of the air space. But don't forget that when you lose radio signal, it becomes very challenging. There are so many possibilities but we are working on them.”

Amosu, who explained that weather had hampered the search operation, also applauded the cooperation that had been offered by citizens in attempts to find the jet.

He said with the information gathered so far, the authorities had got “an idea” of the area the aircraft could be.

The CAS added, “The weather has not been helpful as we have deployed all our surveillance capability, the citizens have been very, very helpful and we have got good information from them.

“But you know, in the aviation sector, we have some specific information that we ought to have to make the search easy.

“But the information we are getting from the citizens is good but not sufficient enough for us to define the area of search. But we have an idea of where the aircraft could be.

“Do not forget that it is the open Sahel. Some people may think it is easy but in the open Sahel, sometimes it is even very challenging.

“Human beings standing may look like trees and again the area we are talking about we have operations going on there and we have limitations as to how low we come to conduct the search.”

Farmers in the Gombi Local Government Area of Adamawa State reportedly claimed on Sunday that they saw a low-flying aircraft that might have crashed near Gabun, a village in the area.

Senate to consider Jonathan's \$1bn loan request

Barring any last minute change, the Senate will on resumption on Tuesday (today) consider President Goodluck Jonathan's request for a \$1bn loan to fight terrorism.

The Chairman of the Senate Committee on Rules and Business, Ita Enang, confirmed this while briefing journalists in Abuja, on Monday.

“Then there was the request from Mr. President for \$1bn loan. The request will be laid on the order paper for consideration by the Senate,” he said.

Jonathan, had in a letter to the National Assembly which was read during plenary a day before legislators went on vacation, said he needed the loan to upgrade equipment, training and logistics of armed forces and other security agencies.

In Ilorin, Kwara State, the Minister of National Planning, Dr. Sulaiman Abubakar, said on Monday that Nigeria could not win its terrorism war with divisions among its citizens.

He stated that it was imperative for all stakeholders to collaborate with the government in its efforts to tackle insurgency.

The minister, who spoke with journalists, reminded Nigerians that terrorism did not start with the Jonathan administration.

He stated that there had been former threats to national peace and stability that were not handled well.

He said that Nigerians, instead of the Jonathan government, should be blamed for the country's inability to address the security challenges.

Abubakar said, “The challenges we are facing today in the area of insecurity are not a new phenomenon. It is a build-up. It started some years back. We got to where we are now not on the account of Mr. President, but on the account of our inability as a people to identify what constitutes threat to our lives.

“You cannot win the war on terrorism as you cannot win any war at all in any country if that territory remains divided. What I see in Nigeria is that the government is doing its own but our people in the North-East and some of our people, who I would not want to mention, are not united. There are divisions and dissenting voices. With that you cannot win such a war.

“For any strategy to work, it must go along the line of ground strategy. Every party must be on the same page to really prosecute that war.

“In Nigeria today, we are not on the same page. The government is making effort by equipping the military, restructuring the military and seeking the assistance of international donor agencies, but Nigerians, perhaps on account of our political differences, are not on the same page.”

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