

THE KILLING OF BORNO FISHERMEN

The shocking attack on Mukdolo in Borno State holds lessons for Nigeria

While the actual number of fishermen killed last week in Ngala Local Government, Borno State remains a matter of conjecture, what is not in doubt is that the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) fighters inflicted serious damage on our country. According to reports, the insurgents had warned fishermen to stay away from the Lake Chad basin area before Thursday's attack on innocent citizens who were on fishing expedition, killing no fewer than 37 persons with dozens of others wounded.

We sympathise with the families of the victims and urge the authorities not to abandon the injured at this most difficult period as it is often the case. "This deeply shocking attack is another horrific reminder of the real threats of violence and insecurity that IDPs and other people affected by more than 13 years of the non-international armed conflict in the region continue to face daily in their struggle to survive," the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Matthias Schmale said in a statement that underscores the gravity of the tragedy. "The village of Mukdolo had been abandoned prior to the attack due to the activities of non-state armed groups."

If there is any lesson from the killing, it is that the federal government cannot continue to hawk the claim that the insurgency war is "technically over". It is not. Even if we admit that Boko Haram, ISWAP, and associates may have banished the idea of carving for themselves the caliphates they covet, they still constitute mortal danger to several rural communities, especially in Borno State. Besides, when gunmen invade areas and kill people on an industrial scale as ISWAP fighters just did, the challenge of insecurity becomes more perplexing. To worsen matters, the response of the federal government has become quite predictable.

That the insurgency has lasted this long is a critical national security challenge that deserves seriousness, and we hope that the next administration will tackle it with more vigour. Under the current leadership,



veritable clues to unearth the sponsors of the terror group have not been followed. For instance, the 2020 conviction in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of some Nigerians offered the federal government a window of opportunity to uncover the enablers of Boko Haram in the country. Unfortunately, that lead was never pursued, even though the insurgency has claimed more than 200,000 lives, displaced millions and laid many areas waste.

Of course, the propaganda arm of the current administration continues with its usual hollow comparison with the past. But the reality remains that the insurgents are still making vast territories within our country practically ungovernable. The implications are scary. With helpless and hopeless rural dwellers submitting to payment of taxes and levies just for their lives to be spared by non-state actors, the line between governance and anarchy becomes blurry. And as sundry criminal cartels mastermind destruction of lives and properties in the

rural parts of the country, the hope of victims in the government wanes.

While decorating the then newly appointed service chiefs three months after assuming office, President Buhari gave a December 2015 deadline to the military and security helmsmen to crush the Boko Haram insurgency. That ultimatum upped the tempo of operations against the insurgents with several of them killed, their supply source (of food and fuel) cut and scores of their members arrested. But eight years later and as he clears his desk, can President Buhari say he has defeated the insurgency? Certainly not!

To defeat the insurgency, the federal government must continue to provide necessary support to the military through prompt acquisition of battle changing platforms, weapons, and equipment. Massive recruitment is required in addition to deployment of technology to dominate the vast ungoverned space in the Northeast. We must also continue to deploy diplomacy to cut all financial support to ISWAP and Boko Haram fighters using the relevant financial intelligence, while sustaining the cooperation and collaboration with the countries around the Lake Chad basin.

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