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Bloodbath in Maiduguri, Yobe

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By Ndahi Marama & Umar Yusuf with agency report

MAIDUGURI—THERE was fierce fighting, yesterday, between the Nigerian troops and Boko Haram insurgents in Maiduguri, the Borno State capital. About 80 insurgents were killed, while several others escaped with bullet wounds.

The latest attack came barely a week after the insurgents tried to take over the state capital from the Damaturu-Jimtilo axis but were repelled by soldiers who deployed massive artillery and fighter jets to dislodge them.



(<http://dvsl3w2q45hb8.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Maiduguri.jpg>)

SUICIDE ATTACK—Aid workers evacuate injured persons in the suicide blast in Potiskum, Yobe State, yesterday. A witness said the bomber emerged from a bus that pulled up in front of the home of Sabo Garbu who is running for a seat in the House of Representatives. Photos: AFP.

The insurgents were stopped from taking over the city by youths otherwise known as the Civilian JTF, and other residents who risked their lives by coming out in large numbers to assist troops in repelling the invaders.

Meantime, a suicide bomber blew himself up outside the house of a legislator in Potiskum, Yobe State, yesterday, killing 10 people, security sources said.

The bomber walked up to the house of a member of the House of Representatives and PDP candidate for the same position in the forthcoming elections, Sabo Garbu, before detonating the explosives. A bus stopped outside Garbu's home and dropped off the attacker before speeding off, the sources further said.

Also, suspected suicide bombers who disguised as women were arrested in Yola, Adamawa State, last night. The incident happened barely few hours ahead of the presidential campaign visit to Yola by the APC flag bearer Major General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) scheduled for today.

The suspects were nabbed by the military at the ever busy Mubi roundabout in the state capital.

This came as three soldiers and 123 Boko Haram terrorists were killed when the Islamist group attacked a Chadian army contingent in northern Cameroon, the Chadian military said.

Massive insurgent's casualties

The heavily-armed gunmen attacked the southern edge of Maiduguri at about 3 am, yesterday, setting off explosives as they tried to enter the city, several residents said.

They were, however, repelled by troops backed by vigilantes but they regrouped and tried to take the city from the Eastern end, where they again met stiff resistance.

As the gun battles raged, "the whole city (was) in fear," said resident Adam Krenuwa.

Defence Spokesman, Chris Olukolade said the assault on the town, where the extremist group was founded more than a decade ago, was "contained" and that "the terrorists incurred massive casualties.

"The situation is calm as mop up operation in the affected area is ongoing," agency reports quoted him as writing in a text message.

Despite waves of attacks in the city in recent months, Maiduguri has become a place of refuge for people forced to flee other areas in Borno that have been taken over by the terrorists.

The affected areas

The areas affected during yesterday's attack were Molai village which is 10 kilometres south of Maiduguri; Ngom village and Mafa Local Government Area, about 30 kilometres north east of the city along the College of Agriculture and the Chad Basin Development Authority road in the metropolis.

The Molai attack started at about 7am when some insurgents armed with AK47 rifles, Rocket Propelled Launchers and Anti-Aircraft machine guns in a convoy of 15 Hilux vehicles and many motorcycles attempted to enter the city from Dalwa-Molai axis, a suburb of Maiduguri. Troops stationed along the Maiduguri-Damboia Road engaged them in heavy gun duel, and with quick reinforcement of troops and civilian JTF, most of the terrorists were killed while others escaped with gunshot wounds.

Most churches were hurriedly closed down during morning service while others could not even open as a result of the sounds of explosions and gunshots. A female member of the Deeper Life Church in Molai (names withheld) was hit by a stray bullet while trying to escape from the scene of the attack.

The Information Officer of National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, Mr. Abdulkadir Ibrahim confirmed the multiple attacks on the city which has so far displaced many people from their homes, but insisted that he was yet to get details on number of casualties, promising to get back before press time.

Sources said during the first attack on Dalwa-Molai axis which is not far from the Giwa Military Barracks, more than 60 insurgents were killed. The terrorists were, however, quick in picking the dead bodies of their fallen members. Only 46 bodies of the terrorists were recovered. Troops and thousands of civilian JTF members pursued the fleeing and injured terrorists who ran back towards the Sambisa forest.

According to the sources, when the four-hour battle around Molai axis was about to subside, another group of insurgents attacked troops along the Mafa-Ngom-Maiduguri Road, but military and civilian JTF members succeeded in repelling the second attack, killing more than 30 of the insurgents.

The second attack around Mafa-Ngom area started at about 11am and lasted for two hours before airforce fighter jets with assistance from ground troops repelled the insurgents.

“Most residents of Molai, NNPC depot and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Quarters along the troubled Maiduguri-Damboa Road, which was closed down for motorists since July last year, had to flee into the city for safety”, said Molai resident, Mallam Jubrila Usman.

PDP, Gov Shettima commend troops, Civilian JTF

Meanwhile, the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP and Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno State have praised the gallantry of officers and men of the Nigerian Armed Forces for repelling insurgents in Borno and other troubled states in the North.

PDP reacts

PDP National Publicity Secretary, Olisa Metuh in a statement, yesterday, said “the members of the armed forces have shown exceptional patriotism while risking their lives to protect those of other citizens and intensifying efforts to ensure that the nation is rid of terrorist activities.”

Metuh said the party recognized the sacrifices being made by the military adding that “what is needed at this point is for all Nigerians to close ranks and support them with words of encouragement, prayers and helpful information where necessary.

“This is no longer the time to dwell on politics or engage in unnecessary blame-games. We cannot continue to seek political capital while terrorists slaughter and maim our people. To win this battle therefore, all citizens must come together, stand with our government and the military and present a common front against terrorism irrespective of our religious, political and ethnic differences.”

The PDP condoled with the families of the victims of the attacks, comforted the displaced and the wounded and prayed God to restore enduring peace in the country.

Shettima lauds youths

Also, Governor Shettima of Borno State commended youths in the state who volunteered and came out in very large numbers to defend Maiduguri from being taken over by insurgents.

The insurgents laid siege to Dalwa from Damboa axis as well as the Mafa entry point with the determination to seize Maiduguri

and its massive population of residents and internally displaced persons, taking refuge in the state capital.

Shettima spoke, yesterday, after the insurgents had been repelled by members of the armed forces, and the Civilian JTF who mobilized to the two battle fronts in defence of their fatherland.

Isa Gusau, media aide to Shettima, quoted the governor as saying: “I received with gratitude, information on how youths from different parts of Borno State, comprising those under the Borno Youths Empowerment Scheme otherwise called “Civilian JTF,” and other residents of Maiduguri.

“They came out of their homes, abandoned their families and with very uncommon courage, sacrificed their lives and moved to front lines to support our gallant armed forces.

“This was a patriotic battle to defend the soul of Borno State and its people from being seized by determined insurgents who in the early hours of Sunday, February 1, 2015, (yesterday) laid siege to two entry points into Maiduguri: Dalwa community from Damboa axis and from the Mafa-Dikwa axis.

“These terrorists had a murderous intention of killing a massive population of residents and internally displaced persons, taking refuge in the state capital and destroying homes and businesses in what would have become an unimaginable calamity. ‘I have never been as proud of our youths in Borno State as much as I am today. The youths have since 2013 risen in firm defence of the good people of Borno State, and today, they have once again proved to all of us, that they have by playing complementary roles, taken our collective destiny in their hands and we are full of gratitude to them.”

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