

METRO

Shock, as terror attack on Army base claims 17 soldiers

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...40 injured, terrorists raze three armoured vehicles, seize arms

...Ansaru terrorists taxing, kidnapping people in Birnin-Gwari Emirate – BEPU

...Terrorists aiming to paralyse Nigeria, says COAS

...Adds, security architecture being reviewed to bridge gaps, bolster fighting will of troops

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Terrorists, suspected to be the Ansaru arm of the Boko Haram sect, on Monday attacked a military base at Polewire in Birnin-Gwari, Kaduna State, killing 17 soldiers and injuring 40 others, after a fierce gun battle between both parties.

The gunmen also killed three locals, razed four armoured vehicles and went away with military weapons after killing the soldiers.

The attack came as Birnin-Gwari Emirate People's Union, BEPU, raised alarm over the continued subjection of its people to terror attacks and imposition of taxes and other levies by Ansaru members, despite persistent complaints to the government.

This is even as the Senate yesterday urged President Muhammadu Buhari to urgently declare a full-scale war on terrorists engaged in massive killing and wanton destruction of property in Niger State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Meanwhile, Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Faruk Yahaya, yesterday reiterated the resolve of the Army to deal with adversaries terrorising the peace of the country by reviewing its security architecture to bridge gaps and bolster the morale of troops.

‘How attack occurred’

According to locals, the terrorists, in large numbers came to the area on motorbikes, wielding dangerous weapons including Rocket Propelled Grenades, and RPGs.

Vanguard gathered from a source that the terrorists were moving from Niger State to Zamfara State, through their usual route in the Birnin-Gwari area when they pounced on the military base along the route in Birni-Gwari.

“The attack took place at about 5 pm, Monday. The fierce gunbattle lasted several hours. The soldiers were overpowered by the terrorists who came in large numbers on motorbikes.

“The terrorists burnt down three armoured vehicles belonging to the military, took away arms and other properties belonging to the military,” a source said.

The source added: “17 soldiers were killed in the attack carried out by the suspected terrorists.

40 wounded soldiers were brought in to the 44 Army Reference Hospital in Kaduna where 17 of them were confirmed dead.”

Another source in Birnin Gwari said apart from the soldiers, three civilians, including two vigilantes and a traveller, were killed during the attack.

The source said the wounded soldiers were conveyed to Birnin Gwari General Hospital and 271 Nigerian Air Force Medical Centre, while the corpses were conveyed to the 44 Military hospitals in Kaduna.

Attempts to confirm the casualty figures from military authorities in Kaduna and the state police command was unsuccessful.

But the chairman of Birnin Gwari Emirate Progressive Union, Ishaq Usman Kasai, who confirmed the attack and death of the vigilantes, said: “The terrorists suspected to be

members of the Ansaru were believed to be coming from Niger State when they attacked the military base.

“We had to run and seek refuge elsewhere. Most of the residents slept outside Birnin Gwari town. Normalcy has since returned.

The Kaduna-Birnin Gwari road is the most dangerous road.”

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Ansaru terrorists taxing, kidnapping for ransom people in Birnin-Gwari Emirate – BEPU

‘Ansaru members freely terrorise, tax us’

Speaking further on the attack, the Birnin-Gwari Emirate People's Union, BEPU, expressed deep concern over the activities of the Ansaru terrorist organization, which members have freely continued to terrorise communities in the eastern part of Birnin-Gwari LGA.

Chairman of the group, Comrade Ishaq Usman Kasai, said the terrorists had concentrated on communities such as old Kuyello, Unguwan Makera, Kwasa-Kwasa, Damari, and Kuduru forest, Ingade Alha and Maidaro, imposing taxes and other levies on the people and kidnapping the locals for ransom.

He said people of the communities, having complained to the government without result, have now started deserting the areas.

He said: “There is an urgent need for the government and relevant stakeholders to arrest this situation before the area is completely taken over by criminals who have continued to challenge the national security and sovereignty of Nigeria.

“BEPU acknowledges efforts being made by the local government, especially under the leadership of the sole administrator, Hajiya Umma K. Ahmad, to tackle the insecurity and support the Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, with a little demonstration of commitment from the state and federal governments to arrest the situation.

“The security situation is becoming increasingly alarming, as a large swathe of Birnin-Gwari Local Government Area is now at the mercy of marauding bandits who usually roll into towns and villages in convoys of motorcycles, mostly riding three on each, brandishing AK-47 rifles, killing and abducting people, including women and children.

“BEPU notes that the bandits usually spend hours operating with impunity and unleashing terror, especially in rural communities. The bandits also placed taxes on various communities and keep coming back repeatedly to attack them because of the absence of law enforcement agents.

“BEPU observes this situation as not only tragic but also shameful that these bunch of ragtag bandits on motorcycles, wielding AK-47 rifles, can roam most communities in the area with impunity killing and abducting peaceful, helpless innocent citizens in a nation that seems to have standing Armed Forces and the Police.

“For instance, as it stands today, the eastern part of Birnin-Gwari is fast becoming headquarters of terrorists where bandits operate and seem to govern. The bandits have carried out about five attacks in Tabanni Ward alone within just this week, whereby many people were killed and dozens abducted.

‘Towns coming under governance of bandits’

“It is frightening that many communities in Birnin-Gwari LGA are falling under the governance of bandits.

“The first attack on Tabanni took place on March 15, 2022, where two people were abducted and one was killed on Dogon Dawa-Zaria road. Similarly, on March 27, 2022, Old Tabanni was attacked, one man was killed and seven women were abducted. On the same date, one man was killed in Kamfanin Mamman Yarwa of the same Tabbanni ward.

“Most of the people of Old and New Tabanni are now in Old Kuyello as Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs. Similarly, on March 24, 2022, one man was attacked and killed along with Sabon Layi-Kakangi Ward. It is of great concern that despite the recent series of attacks in these areas, there was no official reaction from the government in terms of at least reactive security mobilization, words of sympathy or humanitarian assistance to the affected communities.

‘Terrorists recruiting people by force’

“BEPU is also concerned with the activities of Ansaru terrorist organization whose members have freely continued to operate, preach and recruit people by force in various communities in the eastern part of Birnin-Gwari LGA, such as Old Kuyello, Unguwan Makera, Kwasa-Kwasa, Damari, Kuduru forest, Ingade Alha and Maidaro.

“There is, therefore, an urgent need for the government and relevant stakeholders to arrest this situation before the area is completely taken by criminals who have continued to challenge the national security and sovereignty of Nigeria.”

“The above-mentioned cases are just a few examples but killings and kidnappings in Birnin-Gwari LGA have become daily affairs, especially along major roads (particular the Birnin-Gwari to Kaduna and Birnin-Gwari to Funtua roads). Moreover, the road from Dogon Dawa to Rigachikun was completely taken over by bandits.

“Currently, Birnin-Gwari to Kaduna road is a no-transit area unless with security escort. Even with the escort, travellers are usually ambushed, kidnapped and killed on many occasions. This usually happens because the security escorts are mostly very few which

makes them prone to be overpowered by the bandits who are usually stationed at various common flashpoints to attack travellers along the roads.

“There are many notorious flashpoints, especially along Birnin-Gwari to Kaduna roads where permanent security checkpoints need to be mounted in order to minimize the level of kidnappings and killings of travellers.

“These notorious flashpoints include Kwanar Bola, Kwanar Ruwa, Unguwar Yako, Polewire, Zonkoro, Zirin Gaza, Gonar Mangoro, Hawan Kwantena, Kwanar Mahaukaciya, Kwanar Giginya, Rafin Kaura, around Labi, Kwanan Dutse/around Manini, Tashar Tsuntsaye, Pollwaya, and Yadin Boroni among others.

“The major den of the kidnappers that operate along Birnin-Gwari to Kaduna road is around Falale (Demba) of Buruku forest. For the past four months, most of the ransoms that have been paid are at that particular place.

‘Terrorists levy a tax for access to farmlands, permission to live’

“Millions of Naira are being paid to the bandits as a ransom for the freedom of kidnapped persons and taxes for access to farmlands and for freedom to live in various communities within the LGA. There are hundreds of captives, including women and children, who have been in the den of the bandits for months and are yet to be released because their families could not afford to pay for their freedom.

“One of the most disturbing incidents is that of the kidnapped three young ladies, namely; Nusaiba, Rabi’atu and Firdausi Lawal Ado.

“These teenagers are students of a College of Health who were abducted on their way from Kaduna to Birnin-Gwari for Christmas break since December 2021 and are still in the den of kidnappers/bandits, despite many efforts by the family and some well-meaning members of the community to secure their freedom.

“No one knows the state of health of those teenagers at present, except the kidnappers. There is a need for the government to come to the aid of this traumatized family for these

girls to regain their freedom. With the series of attacks on most communities in Birnin-Gwari LGA, thousands of people are rendered internally displaced persons, IDPs, without proper organization and other necessary care from the government.

“BEPU is, therefore, so concerned about the continuous killings and kidnappings of the people in the area, and observes that the entire Birnin-Gwari LGA is under serious threat unless the needful is done urgently to arrest the situation.

“BEPU argues that there must be a community before politics and other businesses can take place. Hence, without peace, there can never be political, social and economic development in any society. It is a known fact that if government abdicates its primary responsibility of protecting lives and properties, anarchy must surely take over as witnessed today.

“There is an urgent need for government to come to the aid of the people of Birnin-Gwari LGA before the community is completely annihilated.

“BEPU calls on the government to widen its cycle of consultations to consider involving local stakeholders as partners in identifying measures for addressing the insecurity situation. Government should, therefore, reach out to traditional rulers, clerics, local community leaders and elders in Birnin-Gwari towards addressing the insecurity in the area.

“BEPU is, therefore, appealing to government to fulfil one of its major responsibilities, which is protecting lives and properties in order to allow innocent and peace-loving people of Birnin-Gwari LGA to go about their normal businesses.”

Declare full-fledged war on terrorists, Senate to Buhari

Also considering the high-level insecurity in the country yesterday, the Senate asked President Muhammadu Buhari to urgently declare a full-scale war on bandits/terrorists killing and destroying property in Niger State in particular and Nigeria in general.

The Upper Chamber at plenary observed a minute silence in honour of those killed in a recent bandit attack at Guni in Munyan Local Government Area of Niger State, which resulted in a boat mishap.

It also directed the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, to provide relief materials and medical team to the surviving victims immediately.

Resolutions of the Senate were sequel to a motion sponsored by Senator Musa, All Progressives Congress, APC, Niger East.

In his presentation, Senator Musa, who came under Order 42 of the Senate Standing Orders as amended, said: “The Senate notes that a boat conveying residents of Guni town capsized in Guni-Zumba ‘River killing about 20 persons escaping attacks by bandits in Niger State; notes also that the victims, including women and children from Guni in Munyan Local Government Area, were said to have lost their lives on Wednesday morning.

“Observes that the incident comes amid attacks by gunmen across communities in Niger State, which has resulted in killings, abductions, and displacement of scores of residents.; “Observes also that the incident occurred when bandits simultaneously invaded the two communities, forcing the locals to flee;

“Worried that these attacks by armed groups have continued in the North-west and North-Central state of Niger, despite repeated government assurance to address the escalating atrocities.”

We’re reviewing security architecture to bolster fighting will – COAS

Meanwhile, the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen Faruk Yahaya, has reiterated the resolve of the Army to deal with all adversaries terrorizing the peace of the country.

Consequently, he said the Army was reviewing the security architecture of the country, with a view to bridging observed gaps and building the right fighting will of troops to deal with the threats from terrorists/bandits.

The COAS, who spoke through the Chief Of Policy and Plans, COPP, Major General Anthony Omozogie at a seminar in Abuja, noted that acts of insurgency, terrorism, kidnapping and banditry from Boko Haram terrorists, Islamic States of West Africa, ISWAP, the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, ECN and other terrorist organisations had continued to pose substantial threats to the nation.

While insisting that the Nigerian Army had continued to respond assiduously to contain and decimate all adversaries, in line with his vision to defeat all adversaries of Nigeria, the Army chief said: “The volatile and complex security emergencies facing the nation have necessitated the continuous review of the national security architecture to contain the threats.

“Varied acts of insurgency, terrorism, kidnapping and banditry from BHT, ISWAP to IPOB, ECN and other terrorist organisations have continued to pose substantial threats to the nation.

“Our troops have, however, continued to respond assiduously to contain and decimate all adversaries in line with my maiden message on the assumption of office, that all adversaries of Nigeria must be defeated decisively. Thus, sustaining and insisting on a winning mentality must be inculcated into all troops.”

While noting that the seminar put together by the Department of Transformation and Innovation was aimed at boosting the fighting spirit of the personnel deployed in the North East and other operational theatres across Nigeria, he said: “This seminar is coming at a time the adversaries have changed their tactics and are focused on kidnapping for ransom, attacking the nation’s critical infrastructure such as rail lines, power lines, communication networks, airports etc which is intended to cause paralysis in the country.

“To address these threats, it has become expedient to review the current security architecture and re-strategise to bridge observed gaps, as well as build the right fighting will for the threats.”

In his address, the Chief of Transformation and Innovation Major General Charles Ofoche said the seminar was organised to brainstorm and proffer practicable ways of imbibing the warrior ethos in troops, which encompassed the will, zeal and spirit to fight to the end.