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Preliminary Report

Boko Haram kills 98 Chadian soldiers

23 March 2020

Incident

In the morning of Monday 23rd March, 2020 in Boma, Lac province, in the Lake Chad area, where the borders of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria converge, Boko Haram carried out a seven-hour attack on an island army base, in the terrorist group's deadliest assault on Chadian armed forces since their insurgency begun in north-eastern Nigeria in 2009.

The militants have killed 92 Chadian soldiers and six out of 47 soldiers who were wounded in the attack have since died, bringing the number of deceased to 98. The victims were both commissioned and non-commissioned officers. Twenty-four army vehicles including armored trucks were destroyed while arms and ammunitions were carried off in speedboats by Boko Haram. According to reports, army reinforcements dispatched to help the forces at the base were also attacked by the terrorist elements.



Chadian President, Idriss Deby who visited the scene of the attack on Tuesday 24th March, to pay respect to the dead soldiers and examine the extent of damage, noted that the Monday attack was the single deadliest incident suffered by Chadian forces in its history.

Analysis

The attack against the Chadian forces by Boko Haram fits into a pattern of offensives by the jihadi group and its splinter faction Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP) in Chad, Niger and Cameroon and Nigeria that begun in the last quarter of 2018 and continued throughout 2019 and early 2020 in which the jihadists target military bases in order to cause mass casualties among forces, demoralize them and seize territories.

Considered among the most respected armed forces in the region, a reputation earned during decades of war and rebellions, had honed in a 2013 campaign against al Qaeda-linked Islamists in the deserts of northern Mali, the attack and the subsequent murder of the Chadian soldiers has dealt a serious blow to President Derby and his revered armed forces.

Meanwhile on the same day of the attack in Boma, Boko Haram also inflicted heavy casualties against Nigerian soldiers when they attacked a military vehicle transporting explosives and ammunition near Goneri in Borno state. Although the Nigerian Defence Ministry spokesman, *John Enoch*, acknowledged the attack and loss of lives without providing numbers, local witness estimated the dead being to be between 50 and 75 soldiers.

The persistent attacks and killing of members of the armed forces of countries in the region will embolden the terrorists and make them feel invincible while adversely affecting the morale of the national troops.

The Boko Haram insurgency, which erupted in northeast Nigeria in 2009, has killed more than 30,000 people and forced about two million to flee their homes. Further afield in the Sahel particularly Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen-Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM-GSIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) are expanding their presence and have killed hundreds of troops since mid-2019.

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), that intensified its operations in the Lake Chad Basin in early 2015 had chalked considerable successes, appears to be struggling to cope with the new vigour of the insurgents. In Cameroon, violence increased in 2019 and early 2020. As many as 275 people were killed by attacks in 2019, most of them civilians in the Country's Far North region. In Niger, 174 soldiers were killed in three attacks in January 2020 alone (not all attributed to Boko Haram) and as many as 30 people were killed after a bomb ripped through a crowded market on a bridge connecting the Nigerian town of Gamboru and Cameroon's Fotokol also in January.

Conclusion

The leaders of the Lake Chad Basin region urgently need to take steps to reinvigorate the MNJTF in order to boost the morale of the forces and bring hope to the people in the area. While it appears the cooperation among the Member States that brought impressive successes in 2015 has weakened, the militant's networks have become more efficient. Without the revamping and full commitment to the MNJTF, the mayhem of Boko Haram and ISWAP will further destabilize the already volatile Lake Chad Basin.