



ACSRT/PRE-REP/06/2020

21 December 2020

Preliminary Report

Students Abducted in Kankara, Katsina State in Nigeria Released

17 December 2020

Incident

On Thursday, 17th December, 2020, Katsina state Governor, Aminu Bello Masari, in a televised interview with state channel NTA announced that 344 students who were abducted on 11th December at the Boys School in Kankara had been freed. According to the Governor, the students were held in the Rugu Forest in neighbouring Zamfara state before their rescue.



He revealed that the Nigeria security forces had cordoned off the area where the boys were held and had been ordered not to fire their weapons, adding that the state authorities had established indirect contact with the kidnappers in an effort to make sure that the students were released unharmed. He expressed optimism that the 344 students represented all those who were captured.

Analysis

It will be recalled that on 11th December, 2020, gunmen on motorcycles estimated to be over 100 stormed an all-male Government Science School in Kankara, Katsina State and abducted more than 300 students, [[ref our ACSRT/PRE-REP/05/2020 dated 15 December 2020](#)]. Although the attack was initially blamed on armed bandits who are active in the Northwest region, Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, later claimed responsibility for the incident in an audio released on 14th December. This raised serious anxiety about the possibility of the

expansion of the activities of the terrorist group from its stronghold in Northeast to the Northwest region where communal attacks, cattle rustling and kidnappings for ransom are already common.

The swift response of the state authorities and security services particularly the Army and the Air Force in cordoning off the area and pinning the kidnappers down in the woods in neighbouring Zamfara state is highly commendable.

The release of the students will provide a reprieve for the Buhari government that has been accused of failing to reign in on both terrorist in the Northeast and bandits in the Northwest. What is not clear is the exact circumstances that led to the release of the students. While the Governor of Katsina state had indicated that there had been an indirect contact with the kidnappers, the Coordinator of Defence Media Operations, Maj. Gen. John Enenche, noted that there were no negotiations or ransom paid to the kidnappers. He averred that the operation was a rescue one but added that if there were negotiations, they were done outside the remit of the military.

While the release of the students is a laudable achievement for the state and national authorities, the claim of responsibility for the attack by Boko Haram should not be ignored. As indicated in our report under reference, there must be a thorough investigation to establish the level of Boko Haram's direct involvement in the attack and to take all measures to ensure that the group does not establish a foothold in the region.

The Nigerian authorities should also consider the possibility of Boko Haram outsourcing its activities to the bandits in the Northwest.

Conclusion

The expansion of terrorist attacks by Boko Haram into the Northwest will put a further strain on the already overstretched security services that are battling the insurgency in the Northeast and banditry in the Northwest. This mixture of the two criminal activities – terrorism and banditry – prefigures an emergence of a more complex threat in the area, and will make it even more difficult for the security services to distinguish who is involved in what activity. Everything must, therefore, be done to ensure that this does not happen.