Summary

This Trend Analysis highlights the unintended implication of the ongoing military operations - Operation Deep Punch - on communities in fringes of Madagali local government area (LGA) of Adamawa State. It examines the current dimension of insurgents’ attack on civilians in Borno State especially firewood sellers and farmers, which raises concerns of forceful conscription of young people into insurgent groups, and efforts to rehabilitate ex-insurgents and persons associated with insurgents in Borno State. The analysis presents recommendations to address these identified risks.

Introduction

Attacks by insurgent groups on communities in Borno State and in border communities in Adamawa State remain the biggest peace and security challenge in the states in January. The drawn-out battle against insurgents that pitched the Nigeria government against the violent extremist group, Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad (Boko Haram) and more recently its splinter group, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), entered its ninth year with negative impacts on security and protection of residents of the states. In January, security and protection issues subsists in Borno State and continued to impede access to villages in many communities, undermining the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to their communities. The improved security and protection recorded in Adamawa State in previous months was significantly reversed by the sharp increase in
number of insurgents’ attacks on communities in Madagali LGA. Adamawa State recorded the highest number of attack on communities, eight out of the 12 attacks recorded in the early warning system occurred in Madagali. Borno State accounted for about 89% of all suicide bomb attacks recorded in the system, with about 80% of the bomb carriers reported as females, thereby reinforcing the trend of feminization of suicide bombing. The month recorded other significant attacks including on firewood loggers, military posts, markets, IDP camps, police stations, etc. Of the 18 incidents recorded in Borno State, 15 occurred in Borno Central Zone, three in Marte and Munguno LGAs in the Northern Zone, and none were reported in the Southern Zone. In Adamawa State, 13 of the 17 incidents recorded occurred in Madagali LGA. In comparison with December 2017, January recorded more insurgents’ attacks on communities in Adamawa State. Four attacks on communities were reported in December, while at least eight were reported in January. In Borno State, there was no significant difference in the type or frequency of attacks from December to January.

Risk Factor I: Unintended outcome of Operation Deep Punch on Madagali

In July 2017, the Nigerian Army launched 'Operation Deep Punch' to clear remnants of Boko Haram from Sambisa Forest and the general Lake Chad area. The operation is a part of the ongoing Operation Lafiya Dole in the Northeast region. The intensified military offensive in and around Sambisa Forest and the axis of Damboa, Bama, Gwoza, Ngala, Marte, and Kala/Balge LGAs of Borno State triggered the influx of dislodged insurgents into many border communities in Madagali LGA of Adamawa State. Madagali LGA shares borders with Gwoza, Damboa, and Askira/Uba LGAs in Borno State and an international border with Cameroon. Madagali was occupied by Boko Haram in 2014 after the declaration of Gwoza as headquarter of their Islamic caliphate, but it was liberated by the military in 2015. Gwoza is about 25km away from Madagali and Camp Zeiro, the strong hold of Boko Haram inside Sambisa Forest, is 41km away. Madagali also connects to another major hideout of Boko Haram - the Mandara hills situated along the Nigeria-Cameroun border. The Mandara hills region includes Gwoza hills in Borno State, hills across villages in Madagali, and those through to Cameroon.

In the month reviewed reports showed that Palam, Gulak, Mayo Wandu, Shiwari, Yimirsa, Bitiku, Hybulam, Kafin Hausa, Mildu and Kaya communities in Madagali were attacked with reported raiding of food stores and dispensary, rustling of animals, burning of houses, and killing at least 18 people. The attack on Hybulam community on January 26 killed three people, while three others were kidnapped and a bomb blast during the burial of the victims killed an additional six people. The frequency of the attacks is also significant; at least ten communities were raided between Jan 11 and 26 and two bomb explosions were reported in this period.

These attacks occurred despite ongoing military operations and activities of local hunters deployed to provide security to villages in the LGA. The presence of the 143 Ranger Battalion in Madagali, whose previous efforts led to the
liberation of Magadali in 2015, seemed inadequate to prevent the attacks. This has reportedly breached the confidence of communities in the capacity of the military to protect them. Community actors in Gulak and Palam and others accused security forces of laxity in responding to early warning information shared with them, especially reports of insurgents’ movements around the communities that subsequently culminated in attacks on said communities.

When members of the armed forces pulled out from the communities in Madagali LGA, this was reportedly seen as a break in confidence. Thereafter, attacks on communities increased. This resulted in a sense of fear among the locals, who are increasingly becoming suspicious of their military protectors. The military personnel are supposed to ensure the safety of the communities. However, the local populace claimed they were seen withdrawing from the area in the early morning of December 29.

The successes recorded by military interventions like Operation Deep Punch are critical to the successful management of the insurgency. The January 30 report of the destruction of Camp Zeiro in Sambisa Forest and environs. This pushed insurgents into border communities in Madagali LGA, often with the aim of looting and raiding communities rather than killing villagers.

The attack on December 30 killed four loggers while insurgents abducted six others and stole five vehicles meant for loading firewood. On January 3, 31 firewood loggers were reportedly abducted in the bushes in Gamboru, Ngala LGA. The victims were all male and reportedly in their twenties.

**Recommendations:**
An assessment of the capacity of the military battalion in Madagali should be considered with a view to strengthen communication with the control and command based in Chibok to improve response, and prevent and mitigate attacks. The capacity of the stationed battalion and other security forces should be assessed to understand existing resource limitations or other issues impeding their capacity to provide security for communities in the fringes of the LGA, those most vulnerable to insurgents’ attacks.

Civil-military relations should be strengthened for effective communication of early warning information between communities and security, moving responses away from countering to preventing attacks in communities in Madagali. The role of the hunters and vigilantes currently supporting the military to counter violent extremism in the LGA should be strengthened with appropriate trainings on community-based early warning to bridge the communication gap and increase their support to communities with minimal security presence.

Risk Factor II: Suspected forceful conscription of firewood loggers

In Borno State, attacks targeting firewood loggers, farmers, and civilian populations continued in the month and it is indicative of the precarious situation of villages and surrounding bushes in the LGA outside the capital town of Maiduguri.

The earlier clearance for farming was however withdrawn by the military in January due to rising attacks on farmland. This has implication for food security and livelihood of communities and IDPs in host communities.
On January 8, suspected insurgents attacked firewood loggers in the bushes of Kaje village in Marte LGA, killed about 20 firewood loggers, and abducted about 20 others. Community members reportedly believe these attacks on loggers are due to the suspected relationship between them and insurgents. They are believed to be secretly supplying insurgents with food and basic needs while fetching firewood, or to be spying on insurgents for the military and civilian militias. However, the trend of attacks and abductions on the loggers, who are young males, could allso be to forcefully conscript them.

Recommendations:
There is the need for the government to investigate the alleged collaboration between firewood loggers and insurgents to remove all access to support for insurgents attacking civilians from their hideouts in bushes around communities. The investigation should be sensitive and understanding of the loggers’ circumstances which provides them with limited opportunities to make a living. Similar attention giving to the control of farming activities should also be extended to firewood logging to ensure that the lives of civilians are not further jeopardized.

Peace Factor I: Borno State Government’s effort to rehabilitate ex-insurgents and persons associated with Boko Haram

The Borno State government’s current efforts to provide rehabilitation and reintegration programs for ex-insurgents and persons associated with the insurgency through the Borno State Rehabilitation Centre in Bulunkutu, Maiduguri is a key program aiming to address some of the emerging concerns following the protracted war on insurgency in the state.

Special programs are necessary in the demobilization and rehabilitation process. However, experience from other countries with similar contexts showed that family reunification and community-based strategies are the most effective to prevent reversal and return of the beneficiaries to the insurgency. The reluctance of their families and communities to accept them back could reverse the gains of the rehabilitation program if unaddressed.

Recommendations:
Prioritizing community-level healing and acceptance is critical in Borno State where early warning system reports have shown emerging conflicts arising from discrimination against ex-insurgents and people associated with them, including women and girls that were abducted and had children fathered by Boko Haram members. Simmering tension between groups including returnees and ‘remainees’ (people that remained in the community when others fled during invasions by insurgents) over looted properties and other issues have been identified. Rehabilitation programs in this context should therefore be two-pronged: rehabilitate ex-insurgents and persons associated with the insurgency, and prepare communities to live harmoniously with the rehabilitated persons.

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