

Security Advisory: Nigeria



Local and military sources reported on Wednesday 19 August that jihadist militants linked to the Islamic State (IS) group have taken hundreds of hostages in a town in north-eastern Nigeria. Late on Tuesday, militants from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which is an offshoot of Boko Haram, overran the town of Kukawa in the Lake Chad region, seizing people who had just returned to their homes after spending nearly two years in displacement camps.

According to Babakura Kolo, head of a local militia, “the terrorists attacked the town in 22 trucks around 4:00 pm (1600 GMT) yesterday and engaged soldiers guarding the town in a fierce battle.” Residents of Kukawa, escorted by the military, had returned to the town on 2 August on orders of the Borno state authorities. They had been living in camps in the regional capital Maiduguri where they fled following an attack in November 2018. A local chief, who accompanied the residents to the town, disclosed that the people had returned with the hope of “cultivating their farmlands.”

Tuesday’s attack in Kukawa is likely to undermine the credibility of the Nigerian government’s claims that they are winning the battle against terrorist groups in the region and it is likely to further create a major setback in the government’s efforts to resettle refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). There have been growing concerns that communities within the state of Borno don’t have

adequate protection to ensure locals' security and the safe return of refugees. Tuesday's incident highlights these concerns.

Since 2009, Boko Haram has been carrying out attacks in Nigeria and neighbouring countries in the Lake Chad region, and while numerous counter-attacks by a joint multinational forces have been carried out across borders, the group shows no apparent signs of slowing down. Over the last decade, Boko Haram has been responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people and the abduction of thousands of others, including the 2014 kidnapping of schoolgirls from Chibok, which shocked the international community. In 2015, Boko Haram split, giving way to the formation of ISWAP, which has pledged allegiance to IS. Since its formation, ISWAP has carried out violent attacks, targeting government forces and local communities. Nigeria's decade-long jihadist conflict has also forced around 2 million people out of their homes, most of them from the northern part of Borno state. Many have lived in displacement camps in Maiduguri, the state capital. However, in the last two years local authorities have increasingly been encouraging the displaced to return home, despite concerns voiced by international charities who warn that this is not safe. Since 2018, residents have been returned to five major towns, where they are confined under military protection, with trenches dug around the towns in a bid to fend off jihadist raids. However despite the fortifications, the insurgents have continued to launch deadly attacks, while residents who venture out to work on their farms or collect firewood have been killed or abducted.

MS RISK ADVISORY: The security environment in Borno state remains complex and the security situation could deteriorate quickly. Security operations, including airstrikes, are likely to occur in the Kukawa district and in other areas around Lake Chad in the coming days and weeks. Those in Borno state are advised to monitor developments, remain vigilant for militant activity, and adhere to all instructions issued by the local authorities and their home governments.

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24 HR CONTACT INFORMATION:

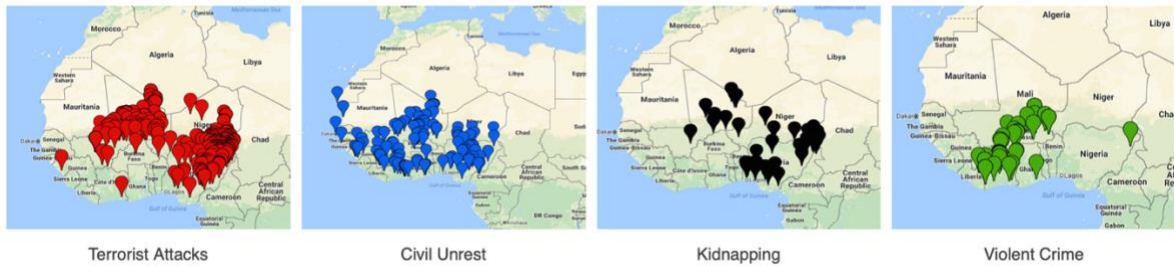
Email: operations@msrisk.com

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

For more information about D-Risk as well as monthly subscription packages

Contact: sales@d-riskalert.com

Website: <https://www.d-riskalert.com>



South Suite, Ragnall House, 18 Peel Road
Douglas, Isle of Man, IM1 4LZ

24 hr Global Contact: +44 207 754 3555
www.msrisk.com

Directors

S.J. Bingham, P.A. Crompton, P.O.J. Tracy
Registered in the Isle of Man No. 007435V