



## ***The Lakurawa Threat and Strategic Imperatives to Decimate Banditry in NorthWest Nigeria***

### **Introduction**

Ardent observers of Nigeria's security landscape have blamed the return of the Lakurawa group on the failure of the country's military, intelligence and security agencies to nip the internal security threat at the bud. Although, the Nigerian military recently confirmed the emergence of a new armed group, *Lukarawa* in the Northwestern states of Sokoto and Kebbi is not actually new.<sup>1</sup>



The group which was once dislodged in 2020 by combined security agencies in the country later regrouped in December 2023. Sources revealed that the *Lakurawa* group was invited by local leaders in Gudu and Tangaza LGAs of Sokoto State in 2017 to address the growing threats of bandits in Zamfara State.<sup>2</sup> However, news broke out in 2018 that the

group was a terror group cloaked as herdsmen. Since their regrouping in 2024, their activities have expanded. They had set up camps in 10 local government areas of Sokoto and Bauchi states before their operations became exposed to the public.<sup>3</sup> The north-west is currently Nigeria's most terrorised region with four states in the region among the top 5 states with the highest number of kidnapping incidents between July 2023 and June 2024.<sup>4</sup> Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna emerged the top 3, with Sokoto coming 5th.

Insurgency and terrorism in the region have undermined the critical achievements of the government in developing the geopolitical zone of the country. Since the uncovering of the group's activities, at least 15 people have been killed in Mera Village in Augie Local Government Area of Kebbi State. The attack in Mera village occurred around 2pm by the group's members who were fully armed with sophisticated weapons. The manner of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ma, M. 2024. Are the Lakurawa a New Wine in An Old Wineskin? Opinion Nigeria. Available at: <https://www.opinionnigeria.com/are-the-lakurawa-a-new-wine-in-an-old-wineskin-by-matthew-ma/>

<sup>2</sup> This Day Newspaper. 2024. Lakurawa Terror Group Must Not Come to Stay. Available at: [https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2024/11/17/lakurawa-terror-group-must-not-come-to-stay/#google\\_vignette](https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2024/11/17/lakurawa-terror-group-must-not-come-to-stay/#google_vignette)

<sup>3</sup> Salman, A. Uthman, I. & Odeniyi, S. 2024. How Lukarawa terrorists operate in 10 Sokoto, Bauchi council areas. The punch Newspaper. Available at: <https://punchng.com/how-lukarawa-terrorists-operate-in-10-sokoto-bauchi-council-areas/>

<sup>4</sup> Achi, L. 2024. Lukarawa Threat: Sokoto Braces, Maintains Development Strides. This Day Newspaper. Available at: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2024/11/12/lukarawa-threat-sokoto-braces-maintains-development-strides/>

attack created fear in the minds of the people about the group's ruthlessness and audacity.<sup>5</sup> Security operatives in the state believe that the armed group operates in five local government areas in Sokoto state. The group's geostrategic location and proximity to Niger Republic gives it the advantage of conducting attacks in Nigeria and disappearing into Niger and vice versa. This situation is dire considering the current not so friendly relations between Nigeria and Niger. The Lukarawas are believed to be affiliated to other terrorist groups in the Sahel, particularly in Mali and Niger. Intelligence reports show that the group exploited the breakdown in cooperation between Nigeria and Niger to penetrate Nigeria. The Defence Headquarters (DHQ) has identified some of their members and has issued an arrest warrant for them. Some alleged leaders of the group include Abu Khadijah, Abdulrahman (Idi), Dadi Gumba, Muhammed Abu, Usman Shehu, Abu Yusuf, Musa Walia, Ibrahim Suyaka, Ba Sulhu, and Idris Taklakse.<sup>6</sup>



Communicating in Hausa, Fulfulde, and Arabic, the group's members are believed to be aged between 18 and 50 years. They have been terrorizing villages by imposing and collecting taxes on cattle. Victims recounted that they come to count the number of cattle in households and calculate taxes to be paid based on percentage taken from the cattle. The itinerant group which experts believe are interested

in establishing their own caliphate move from community to community on motorcycles, making it difficult for security operatives to identify their exact location. It was disclosed that the group has between 1,500 and 1,800 followers, but this number has been debunked by other observers that believe their membership is still below 500. Reports show that the group has been luring locals with money, farm inputs, and pumping machines, and like Boko Haram terrorist recruitment strategy, several people have joined Lukarawa because of poverty and hunger. Residents of the affected communities are afraid to report members of the Lukarawa because of threats against them, as the group's current recruitment drive aims at increasing their numbers.

### **Actionable Solutions**

Lakurawa is capitalising on the high incidence of poverty in the affected states to lure innocent youths into their fold. It is reported that they offer about N1 million for people to join the group, and give as low as N10,000 to people to become informants for the group. Poverty alleviation projects and employment are desperately needed in the region. Members of Lakurawa were at some point accommodated by inhabitants who thought the group meant

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<sup>5</sup> Achi, L. 2024. Lukarawa Threat: Sokoto Braces, Maintains Development Strides. This Day Newspaper. Available at: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2024/11/12/lukarawa-threat-sokoto-braces-maintains-development-strides/>

<sup>6</sup> Salman, A. Uthman, I. & Odeniyi, S. 2024. How Lukarawa terrorists operate in 10 Sokoto, Bauchi council areas. The punch Newspaper. Available at: <https://punchng.com/how-lukarawa-terrorists-operate-in-10-sokoto-bauchi-council-areas/>

well for them. There is a need for more intelligence and security agencies must deploy agents on clandestine missions to live among, identify and route out elements of the organization before their activities become more prevalent. At the same time, community leaders and political leaders must work to alleviate poverty and deny the terror group the opportunity to recruit more locals. The government should take quick action to uproot them before they take root in Sokoto, Kebbi and Bauchi states. Security agencies must also



take decisive steps to prevent them from establishing partnerships with other bandits and terrorists in the northern region of Nigeria. Nigeria's security architecture must take decisive steps to cut Lukarawa off from partnering with other terrorist organisations like Boko Haram, ISWAP, JNIM, AQIM, Ansaru who are active in West Africa and the Sahel. This is to ensure that they do not become a greater security threat for the country and sub-region. Nigeria's porous borders remains a major problem, and the federal government must ensure that are well policed and that technology is deployed to monitor the border activities. The porosity of Nigeria's borders poses serious threats to the country's national security by enhancing the infiltration of criminals and small arms into the country through the border communities. Securing the nation's borders will enhance security operative's goal in flushing out terrorist and criminal organisations and decimating their transportation and supply routes.

Before the 2023 military coup d'état in Niger, there were joint border operations of Nigerian and Nigerien security forces under the aegis of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). This security alliance kept the terrorists at bay, however, the coup in Niger against President Mohammed Bazoum depreciated the relationship between both states. The Nigerian government must engage the Nigerien junta in further cooperation to restore the military alliance that has been mutually rewarding. The MNJTF alliance which benefits both countries in their fight against terrorism and national security threats must be maintained. Many residents of the state refer to a cold war between the state governor and Sultan of Sokoto which is hampering the fight against insecurity. The federal government might need to assess relationships between traditional leaders and state governments in the northwest to ensure that both institutions of the government are committed to the agenda of national peace and progress.