

US Christmas Day Airstrikes

On 25 December 2025, and in what the Nigerian government later confirmed was a joint operation, the United States (US) bombed terrorist encampments in the forests of the Tangaza and Tambuwal Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Sokoto State in the northwest, following weeks of reported sightings of surveillance aircraft over northern Nigeria. While some debris from the missiles fell in some communities causing panic, there were no confirmed civilian deaths.

The US airstrikes targeted the terrorist group Lakurawa, which re-emerged in late 2024 (having been defeated in 2022) and is affiliated with the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), which operates primarily in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Republic of Niger. The US Africa Command (AFRICOM) reported that 'multiple ISIS terrorists' were killed, while the government of Niger tracked terrorists fleeing the area, and joined Nigeria and Chad in patrolling of borders to prevent them from retreating to safe havens abroad. The US president described the airstrikes as retaliation for an ongoing Christian genocide; however, while violence in northwestern states affects both Christians and Hausa Muslim communities, in central Nigeria Christian communities, clergy and individuals are the sole targets of mass killings and forced displacement.

Prior to this military action, concerns had been raised in some quarters that the redesignation by the US of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in November 2025 would worsen the situation for Christian communities, concerns based largely on a misunderstanding of what CPC designation is meant to entail. Moreover, these communities have been subjected to attacks since 2010 which have expanded relentlessly in scope and scale over time, and which were set to continue regardless of redesignation.

In reality, what has to an extent worsened the situation and led to misunderstanding and concern was not the redesignation itself, but the US president's 'guns-a-blazing' rhetoric, which was a departure from normal protocol, and which several terrorist factions openly mocked and vowed to challenge. This rhetoric had [galvanised terrorist attacks](#) on Christian communities in Benue, Plateau and Kaduna States in particular, prior to the aerial bombardment, and all indications are that terrorist factions were preparing to launch unprecedented violence over the festive season in multiple states.

While the temporary disarray caused by the airstrikes may account for a lower than anticipated number of attacks over the festive season, a rash of violent attacks that may have been scheduled for that time as defiance to the president's statement are being rolled out in late December 2025 and into the new year. However, there is also speculation that these attacks are occurring with such intensity and in diverse places to draw attention away from Sokoto State, because the key terrorist base is located there.

With attacks continuing, the US has warned of follow up bombings, with Israel also offering assistance to the

Nigerian government which, if taken up, could prove counterproductive by potentially enflaming sectarian sentiments.

The fact that this initial US military action was launched in agreement with the Nigerian authorities means it is part of a broader counterterrorism effort, thereby lending it international legal credibility. It therefore cannot be compared to the act of aggression launched against Venezuela, threats of military action against the governments of Cuba, Colombia and Mexico, or the continuing assertions of the need to take Greenland from a fellow member state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) by any means necessary.

The US airstrikes appear to have spurred the Nigerian government into taking more effective action to address terrorist attacks (see later paragraph). Thus while debate about the Christmas Day airstrikes increases in the wake of mounting terrorist attacks, mass killings and abductions, the sobering reality is that given the Nigerian government's failure to adequately protect its people, the country was already on an accelerating trajectory towards failed statehood, and to being divided into multiple fiefdoms controlled by diverse violent non-state actors that would pose a threat to traumatised citizens, the West African region, the African continent, and nations further afield.

Terrorism: December 2025 -January 2026

Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria

As December 2025 drew to a close, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacked three Christian villages in Adamawa State within a five-day period.

On 29 December ISWAP attacked Mondag village, killing 11 people, destroying a church, looting properties, setting over 100 homes ablaze, and subsequently referring to their victims as 'hostile Christians,' the terminology used by the Islamic State Central African Province (ISCAP) following attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mozambique.

On New Year's Eve ISWAP fighters invaded the Higa community, setting fire to around 50 homes. While no deaths were recorded, the terrorists subsequently released video and still images purportedly showing the village on fire alongside propaganda affirming Nigerian Christians as 'legitimate targets', whose lives could be spared only if they converted or agreed to pay Jizya (the historical tax levied on non-Muslims).

Then on 2 January ISWAP attacked Timoa village, killing four people, destroying around 50 houses and three motorcycles, and abducting five people.

Benue State, Central Nigeria

On 5 January, four farmers were killed as they were harvesting rice when 15 militia men who spoke the Fulani dialect, *Fulfude*, attacked the Ikyaghev community, in the

Saghev Precinct of Guma LGA in Benue State at around 10am. At time of writing, several people are still missing.

Then on 6 January around 10 militiamen [ambushed](#) and killed four farmers in their fields in the Udeku Maav-Ya community of Mbakyol Truran Ward, in Kwande LGA.

As in other central states, the killings, abductions and instability have occasioned mass displacement, and forcibly vacated ancestral lands are subsequently occupied. In the words of [one displaced villager](#): *'More than 500 Fulani ethnic militia are occupying our villages and farms. We have relocated to Jato-Aka town because we can no longer go home or farm without risking our lives. How can anyone claim to be a herder while carrying sophisticated weapons, attacking farmers, and occupying their land?'*

Kaduna State, Central Nigeria

Two people were killed and 20 were abducted when Fulani militia, who were recently [designated terrorists](#) under Nigeria's new counterterrorism doctrine, attacked Congo village in Kachia LGA in the predominantly Christian southern part of Kaduna State on 29 December. According to survivors the militia wore military camouflage and sported AK-47s. The villagers called to alert the police and army of the attack, which lasted for around 45 minutes, but no help came. The assailants are demanding 200 million Naira (around GBP 104,000) in ransom.

Further abductions occurred on 2 January following an attack on Ungwan Danladi village in Kajuru LGA in which four villagers, including Rev Philip Adamu of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), were seized. The kidnappers, who reportedly spoke in *Fulfude*, called the community on 3 January demanding ransoms of 20 million Naira (around GBP 10,400) for Rev Adamu, and 10 million Naira (around GBP 5,200) for the other hostages.

Kidnapping victims from across southern Kaduna are all believed to be held in an area in the Rijana Forest, where around 30 subcamps are guarded by militia men.

Katsina State, Northwest Nigeria

On 5 January heavily armed terrorists [reportedly attacked](#) the Unguwar Barau Gidan, Dan Mai-gizo and Gidan Hazo communities in the Na'alma Ward of Malumfashi LGA, killing and abducting an as yet unspecified number of individuals.

Malumfashi LGA has witnessed an increase in terrorist attacks despite the fact that peace agreements had recently been concluded between the local authorities and armed non-state actors operating in the area. For example, in August 2025 terrorists stormed the local mosque and killed at least 32 worshippers in the Unguwar Mantau community.

Kebbi State, Northwest Nigeria

On 31 December terrorists belonging to Lakurawa conducted coordinated attacks on Kaiwa, Gelawu and Gebbe villages in the Shanga LGA of Kebbi State. While a police spokesperson

put the death toll in these attacks at seven, local sources asserted that at least 21 residents had been killed.

Kogi State, Central Nigeria

A short [video](#) circulating on social media in the first week of January depicts around three elderly women and two young children in poor condition who are among seven people [abducted](#) from the First ECWA Church in Aiyetoro Kiri on 14 December, and who were released by their captors, reportedly following the payment of 15 Million Naira (approx. GBP 7,800) in ransom. News reports indicate that two [decomposing bodies](#) were also recovered. Thirty-one church members remain missing.

Niger State, Central Nigeria

On 3 January at least 60 people were killed in an attack on the Kasuwan Daji Market in Borgu LGA, in Niger State. According to local sources, ISWAP fighters emerged from the Kainji National Park and attacked the market at around 4pm, surrounding it and killing traders and their clients. The terrorists also looted foodstuff and valuables, set the market ablaze, then continued their killing spree until the early hours of 4 January, setting fire to homes, and abducting an unknown number of people, mostly women and children.

The community lies a short distance from Papiri in Agwara LGA, where over 200 pupils and 12 teachers were [abducted](#) from St. Mary's Catholic Primary and Secondary School on 21 November 2025, and several recently released students were among the fresh abductees. Local people had complained of a continued lack of security despite previous terrorist attacks in the area.

Ondo State, Southwest Nigeria

The Divisional Police Station in Ipele in Owo LGA was attacked on New Year's Eve by around 20 heavily armed terrorists as residents fled to the bush. The intensity of the attack forced the police officers to flee, and the assailants burned the station to the ground. The attack occurred shortly after news had emerged of arrests of [39 terrorists](#) who had reportedly fled to Ondo State following the Christmas Day bombings of terrorist camps in Sokoto State by the US.

Plateau State, Central Nigeria

On New Year's Eve in Plateau State, members of the Fulani militia attacked the Bum community in Chugwi, Vwang District, Jos South LGA, at around 11pm, leaving at least nine people dead, several others injured and homes burnt. The attacks occurred despite warnings that the majority Christian state, a regular flashpoint for mass killings during the festive season, had been threatened specifically prior to the Christmas Day bombings. In a [comment](#) to Nigerian media Solomon Dalyop, National President of the Berom Youth Moulders Association, lamented that community leaders had raised security alerts days earlier, but had received no response. An eyewitness also said she had recognised one of the attackers as a herder who occasionally moved cows through her village.

Taraba State, Northeast Nigeria

Several communities in the predominantly Catholic Chanchanji Ward of Takum LGA witnessed a series of attacks both before and during Christmas and into the New Year that have caused more than 8,000 people to flee.

According [local clergy](#), at least 14 people from Adu, Abeda, Abom, Demevar, Gaza, Fanga, Mchar, Tse Gyuse, and Ugosor villages were confirmed to have been killed between 19 and 25 December.

Local clergy confirmed that 20 out of 37 churches in the area have been attacked and looted including the Catholic Parish Headquarters which was vandalised on Christmas Eve. During the attack the windows of the newly constructed church building were shattered, while the parish office, the priest's residence and the old church building, where many parishioners stored personal belongings for safekeeping, were looted and damaged.

On 6 January, five farmers were killed, raising the death toll to 19. The attackers have reportedly changed their tactics from mass killings in largescale attacks, to killing isolated individuals in their farms or on roads.

Undermining Structures of Traditional Authority

As well as attacking Christian targets, terrorist factions have focused increasingly on abducting traditional rulers, generally from their homes, underlining that no-one is safe, undermining the guardians of tribal tradition who symbolise stability and continuity in their respective ancestral areas, and thereby creating a void that they exploit to assume primacy.

On 26 December around seven armed men invaded the Adanla community in Igbaja Ward 2 in Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State to abduct the traditional ruler, Oba (King) David Oyerinola. However, the monarch and his wife were away and the assailants proceeded to abduct nine members of his extended family, including a five-year-old girl, forcing the Oba and his wife to relocate to an undisclosed area to ensure their safety. The attackers demanded N300 million in ransom (approx. GBP 156,000).

Oba Olaonipekun, the Oniwo of Aafi, was abducted from his palace in the Ile-Ire district of Kwara State on the evening of 31 December, along with his son Olaolu, who is a member of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The traditional ruler's wife was reportedly shot in the arm as the assailants forced their way into the palace. The abductors later demanded a ransom of 150 million Naira (approx. GBP 78,000).

Improving Military Response

As stated earlier, the US bombing of terrorist bases in Sokoto appears to have galvanised the Nigerian authorities into action, although responses to terrorist violence remain sporadic.

For example, on 31 December, and following intelligence-led cordon and search operations in the Kalmari area of the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK, the Joint Task Force North East) identified and arrested Sharif Umar, also known as Yusuf, the ring leader, recruiter, equipper and coordinator of bombings in the northeast, including suicide bombings. Significantly, Sharif had coordinated and provided explosives for the 24 December suicide bombing of a mosque in central Maiduguri, in which at least five people were killed and 35 were injured. It was the first suicide bombing in the city in five years. He was also pivotal to a failed suicide bombing attempt in the Yobe State capital, Damaturu.

Nigeria has witnessed a rise in IED attacks, with terrorist factions in the northeast increasingly using compressed animal dung in the manufacturing process. On 28 December the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) reportedly destroyed an improvised explosive device (IED) factory in Tsafe LGA, Zamfara State and eliminated several terrorists. The first strike targeted Turba Hill, a confirmed terrorist hideout. The second hit the camp of Kachalla Dogo Sule, a notorious terrorist leader who has carried out numerous attacks, including the downing of a NAF Alpha Jet in 2021, and whose location had been identified as a key hub for the production of IEDs.

While the production of IEDs was previously linked to terrorist factions operating in the northeast, it is notable that, as was the case in the Christmas airstrikes, the areas targeted by these airstrikes were in the northwest, with NAF stating they were conducted based on credible intelligence reports that linked the targets to recent IED attacks along the Dan Sadau–Magami axis. A day earlier, on 27 December, a roadside IED in Maru, Zamfara State, had killed at least seven to nine people.

On 1 January air and ground troops destroyed identified terrorist camps in Mallam Fatori and Shuwaram areas of Borno State, wiping out logistic hubs storing weapons and food. The armed forces took advantage of ongoing and bitter infighting between Boko Haram and ISWAP near Lake Chad that has reportedly claimed the lives of some 200 terrorists.

On 7 January the Nasarawa State Police Command arrested six kidnappers who had invaded Angara village, abducted two women leaving behind an infant, and later kidnapped a male member of the community. All three abductees were rescued when the police and local vigilantes stormed the assailants' hideouts in Angara and Fadaman forests.

Even as the army appears to have become more proactive, differing approaches within the Tinubu administration towards addressing terrorist violence remain evident, in particular the contrast between the views of the National Security Adviser (NSA), Nuhu Ribadu, who reportedly favours a non-kinetic approach that includes peace agreements with armed groups which do not provide for disarmament or accountability, and that of Defence Secretary General Christopher Musa who has [warned](#) against such deals stating: 'If they genuinely want to stop, they should lay down

their weapons and surrender. ... we will take them into custody, screen and investigate them thoroughly; that's the proper approach.'

These contrasting approaches were recently laid bare in a [leaked](#) official document that was issued by the Katsina State Ministry of Justice, dated 2 January, and addressed to the Chief Judge of the state containing a list of 48 individuals detained for banditry-related offences, and requesting the intervention of the Administration of the Criminal Justice Monitoring Committee (ACJMC) to '[facilitate] their release from detention, as one of the conditions precedent for the continuance of the peace accord deal signed between the frontline Local Governments and the bandits.' The letter also contains a list of around 22 prisoners currently on trial before the state's High Courts, and requests their release under the same provisions.

This request for these releases comes after Nigeria's president had [designated](#) groups previously referred to as bandits as terrorists, vowing to show them no mercy. It has been criticised widely for depriving victims of justice, for granting a 'get out of jail free' card to perpetrators, and for facilitating impunity that promotes repeat offending.

Criminalisation of Victim Communities and Inequality Before the Law

The requests made in the Katsina letter highlight an abiding disregard at official level for the safety of and redress for victims, as well as a tendency of those in authority to respond more harshly to them when they air their plight, than to their assailants.

For example, in late December, unarmed women peacefully protesting the incessant kidnappings in Kwara State outside the state's Government House and requesting protection, many of whom were from communities severely affected by militia attacks, were [whipped](#) and harassed by suspected hired thugs in front of security operatives, who did not intervene to protect them.

Members of victim communities who, in the absence of effective official protection, resort to self-defence – which is guaranteed under Section 33(2)(a) of Nigeria's Constitution – also receive harsher treatment than their assailants.

On 23 December, Sunday Jackson, a farmer from Adamawa State who had been on death row for 11 years for disarming and killing a Fulani man with his own weapon who had ambushed and stabbed him while he was farming, and whose death sentence had been upheld by Nigeria's Supreme Court in 2024, was finally pardoned and released by the state governor, Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri. However, he

has had to relocate with his family to an undisclosed location to ensure his safety.

More recently, on 8 January Victor Solomon, also known as Zidane, who was arrested in 2019 for his alleged role in the Kasuwan Magani crisis in Kaduna State in which over 66 villagers were killed, was sentenced to death by a High Court, despite having been acquitted earlier. His community in Kajuru has endured relentless attacks from Fulani terrorists, in which at least a thousand members of the Adara ethnic group, to which Zidane belongs, have been killed, including the [Adara Paramount Chief](#) whose murderers were never prosecuted. Thousands more Adara people have been abducted, with unknown numbers of women and girls subjected to sexual violence, and millions of Naira extorted from the community in ransom payments.

Zidane, along with other youth organised themselves to defend their people due to inaction by the regime of former governor Nasir El Rufai, whose tenure was characterised by intense and sustained mass killings in predominantly Christian southern Kaduna that effectively went unaddressed, and following which no perpetrator was arrested, prosecuted or convicted. He was arrested following a military manhunt ordered by El Rufai, detained in an army guardroom, tortured for over a year, and was then handed over to the police who tortured him for three months before arraigning him before two separate courts, the first of which acquitted and discharged him in 2024.

By contrast, in November 2025 a Federal High Court in Abuja found Boko Haram leader [Hussaini Isma'il](#), who is also known as Maitangaran, guilty on four counts of terrorism. Although the total sentence amounted to 75 years – 15 years on count one and 20 years each on counts two, three and four – the presiding judge ruled that his sentences should run concurrently, beginning from the date of his arrest on 31 August 2017, and leaving the decision on where Isma'il should serve his sentence in the hands of the Comptroller General of Nigeria's Correctional Service.

Meanwhile, and also in November 2025, the court which found Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the separatist Indigenous People Of Biafra (IPOB) movement, guilty on seven charges, including terrorism and involvement with an outlawed movement, and gave him four life sentences – to be served concurrently in a prison in Sokoto State.

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