



By: TA | AP Brief

US struck Islamic State targets in Nigeria after group targeted Christians



President Donald Trump said that the U.S. launched a “powerful and deadly” strike against Islamic State forces in Nigeria, after spending weeks **accusing** the West African country's government of failing to rein in the **persecution of Christians**.

In a Christmas evening post on his social media site, Trump did not provide details or mention the extent of the damage caused by the strikes in Sokoto state.

A Defense Department official, who insisted on anonymity to discuss details not made public, said the U.S. worked with Nigeria to carry out the strikes, and that they'd been approved by that country's government.

Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the cooperation included exchange of intelligence and strategic coordination in ways “consistent with international law, mutual respect for sovereignty and shared commitments to regional and global security.”

Trump said the airstrikes were launched against Islamic State militants “who have been targeting and viciously killing, primarily, innocent Christians.”

Residents and security analysts have said Nigeria's **security crisis** affects both Christians, predominant in the south, and Muslims, who are the majority in the north.

“Terrorist violence in any form, whether directed at Christians, Muslims or other communities, remains an affront to Nigeria's values and to international peace and security,” Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

Nigeria is battling multiple armed groups, including at least two affiliated with the Islamic State — an offshoot of the Boko Haram extremist group known as the Islamic State West Africa Province in the northeast, and the less-known Lakurawa group prominent in the northwestern states like Sokoto where the gangs use large swathes of forests connecting states as hideouts.

A “country of particular concern”

Security analysts said the target of the U.S. strikes could be the Lakurawa group, which in the last year has increasingly become lethal in the region, often targeting remote communities and security forces.

“Lakurawa is a group that is actually controlling territories in Nigeria, in Sokoto state and in other states like Kebbi,” said Malik Samuel, a Nigerian security researcher at Good Governance Africa. “In the northwest, there has been the incursion of violent extremist groups that are ideologically driven,” he said, blaming the incursion on the near absence of the state and security forces in hot spots.

Nigeria's government has previously said in response to Trump's criticisms that people of many faiths, not just Christians, have suffered attacks at the hands of extremists groups.

Trump ordered the Pentagon last month to begin planning for potential military action in Nigeria to try and curb the so-called Christian persecution.

The State Department recently announced it would restrict visas for Nigerians and their family members involved in killing Christians there.

And the U.S. recently **designated Nigeria** a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act.

Trump said the U.S. defense officials had “executed numerous perfect strikes, as only the United States is capable of doing” and added that “our Country will not allow Radical Islamic Terrorism to prosper.”

Nigeria's population of 220 million is split almost equally between Christians and Muslims. The country has long faced insecurity from various fronts including the Boko Haram extremist group, which seeks to establish its radical interpretation of Islamic law and has also targeted Muslims it deems

not Muslim enough.

But attacks in Nigeria often have varying motives. There are **religiously motivated** ones targeting both Christians and Muslims, clashes between farmers and herders over dwindling resources, communal rivalries, secessionist groups and ethnic clashes.

The **U.S. security footprint** has diminished in Africa, where military partnerships have either been scaled down or canceled. U.S. forces likely would have to be drawn from other parts of the world for any larger-scale military intervention in Nigeria.

Trump has nonetheless kept up the pressure as Nigeria faced a series of attacks on schools and churches in violence that experts and residents say targets both Christians and Muslims.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted Thursday night on X: “The President was clear last month: the killing of innocent Christians in Nigeria (and elsewhere) must end.”

Hegseth said that U.S. military forces are “always ready, so ISIS found out tonight — on Christmas” and added, “More to come...Grateful for Nigerian government support & cooperation” before signing off, “Merry Christmas!”