

Breaking News; France Tells Nationals to Leave Northern Nigeria - Naija Pundit

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France has asked its citizens to leave northern Nigeria and areas around the capital Abuja after threats due to its military intervention in Mali, a diplomatic source said on Monday.

Islamist militants have vowed to target French interests following its two-week-old military offensive in Mali against militants allied to al Qaeda.

The diplomatic source said the threat of kidnappings coupled with Nigeria's support for France's action in Mali had raised the risks for French nationals.

France has about 2,000 citizens living in Nigeria, of which 335 live in or around Abuja.

French oil major Total has moved its staff from Abuja following the kidnapping of a French national in a remote northern town close to the Niger border last month, Chief Executive Christophe de Margerie said on Friday.

It was the first time in recent history that a company has said it had evacuated foreigners from Nigeria's capital due to security concerns. The diplomatic source said Total had asked 40 employees to leave Abuja.

Nigerian Islamist group Ansaru said it kidnapped the French national and threatened to continue to target the French because of the country's military action in Mali and its ban on the Islamic veil. Ansaru also claimed responsibility for an attack on a military convoy taking troops from Nigeria to Mali last week in Kogi state, south of the capital Abuja.

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The group's full name is Jama'atu Ansarul Musilimina Fi Biladis Sudan, which roughly translates as "Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa".

Ansaru is thought to have loose ties to Islamist sect Boko Haram, which killed hundreds last year in an insurgency focused mostly on Nigerian security forces, religious targets and politicians, rather than foreigners.

Explaining the French advice to leave northern Nigeria, the diplomatic source said: "It's down to a culmination of factors that this decision was taken: the threat of kidnappings on certain people, the French hostages, the commitment of Nigeria on Mali as well as the threats from Boko Haram."