

Special Incident Bulletin – Bomb Blast in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

Due to recent re-emergence and continued increase in the strategic use of VBIEDs by Boko Haram in the North East and more recently outside of the SOE to Nyanya, Abuja, and Kano State, SAR Consultancy re-affirms its assessment that there is a continued high risk of an insurgent led incident, of this nature, in significant locations outside of the SOE. While locations in the North are most susceptible, targets such as Abuja (Centre), Lagos, Port Harcourt, etc., may become more attractive targets. Given the success of recent attacks in Nyanya, Kano and now Jos, it is likely that confidence will grow within Boko Haram, which may in turn motivate more adventurous attacks. SAR Consultancy considers Kano and Jos to be very significant targets, both for Nigeria, and in respect to previous attacks and underlying tensions in these areas. Other locations, include Kaduna and Sokoto share these traits. SAR Consultancy would assess that all state capitals are vulnerable of attack, both as desirable targets, but also due to their security infrastructure. As a result, this heightened risk is likely to remain in effect for quite a while.

Preliminary Incidents Details

On 20 May 2014, Jos, Plateau State, shortly after 15:00, a bomb exploded at the New Abuja Market in Jos. This location is also called the Terminus Market, given its close proximity to the main Bus Terminus. The location is a busy market, frequented by many, in the commercial centre of Jos. About 30 minutes after the first explosion, reports emerged of a second detonation, outside of a nearby hospital. This is interesting given the police report after the explosion in Kano on Monday that a second device was defused within relative proximity to the first, shortly after the explosion. If this was a true, this could indicate an elaborated MO by the group. The estimated death toll is currently at about 120 people, but it is said that this could be higher. It was reported that some of those killed in the second incident were rescue workers who had responded to the first. Based on other incidents, the official death toll is likely to be lower. Once again, a group has yet to claim responsibility for the attacks, but given the recent incidents in Nyanya, it is highly likely Boko Haram are responsible. Furthermore, a suspected Boko Haram member was reportedly arrested in Jos for spying only last week. If this is linked, it may provide evidence of pre-planning and preparation by the group.

Initial Assessment*

Jos, like Kano, is a significant target selection, given security dynamics in the city. Although it has been quiet for a long while, religious tensions continue to run high at the best of times, and an incidents such as this is likely to reignite these tensions, similar to what happened in response to the church bombs on Christmas Day in 2011. As a result, clashes between the Muslim and Christian communities are highly likely. Indicators of growing tensions amongst the youth have already been reported.

Similar to claims from Nyanya and Kano, the first bomb would appear to have been a VBIED. Initial reports would suggest that a number of similarities between this attack and the Nyanya attacks are present.

The President of Nigeria came out very quickly with a condemnation of the attack and reiterated his commitment to win the fight against Boko Haram. Given the recent abduction of the girls in Chibok, the recent attack on the border with Cameroon in which approximately 200 people were reportedly killed, the Nyanya attacks, the recent attack in Kano, and now with this incidents, it is difficult to share this view. Even with the presence of international personnel in Nigeria, assisting the Nigerian authorities, it would appear it has done nothing in reducing Boko Haram's commitment or resolve. Furthermore, these incidents demonstrate that the security infrastructure in these locations are not equipped with the necessary abilities and assets to preempt such attacks, which is highly likely to be the case in many other locations.

Another thing that comes to mind given the attacks of recent days, is that even a SOE covering three states may not be of much significance, given the more widespread locations of incidents. Bauchi, Jigawa, Kano and now Plateau have all been targeted in recent weeks. This must at least influence the debate. **A more detailed assessment will be provide in this week's weekly situational assessment.*

What this shows? This incident, along with the others have late, demonstrate that Boko Haram not only have the capacity to conduct such attacks, but also have motivation. Furthermore, the ability to attack outside of the SOE is now unquestionable, to anyone who still questioned their ability. In respect to strategy, this incidents further illustrates strategic dimension to such attacks. If the arrest was linked to Boko Haram and this incident, it demonstrates pre-planning. Furthermore, the successful second bomb in Jos, and the potential of a second bomb in Kano, shows that Boko Haram wants to maximise the impact of their attacks. The use of a second bomb within close proximity has commonly been used in other countries to target those going to assist the initial attack.

What's next?

Given the events in Nyanya, Kano, and now Jos, it is highly likely another incident will take place in the short term. If it does, this likely to share many of the same elements of the Nyanya and Kano attacks. Furthermore, given the ongoing religious tensions within the city, this incident could ignite further strains, which may result in further loss of life.

Why the New Abuja Market, Jos?

Jos is a city that has witnessed a large number of incidents in the past, similar to the Kano

Desire to reignite religious tensions; Jos is significant in this respect given its prolonged tensions between the Muslim and Christian Communities

A commercial market, high football at the time of attack, similar to the Nyanya attack

Easy to be anonymous given its commercial nature.

City has been relatively quiet for the last year or longer, security infrastructure may have relaxed

Location shares many of the characteristics of the recent locations bombe; may have assisted in selection

Chance of success was high, given recent success

Requirement for large attack team was greatly reduce by using a VBIED

Suspected member arrested, may have related to a recognisance missions.

Choice of timing and location ensured the impact was large scale, similar timing to July 2013 incident.

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