

Special Incident Bulletin – Bomb Blast in Wuse II, Abuja, Nigeria

Since the Nyanya bombings, and subsequent bombings in Kano and Jos, SAR Consultancy has highlighted the growing risk of an insurgent led incident in Abuja, and unlike the Nyanya attacks, highlighted the rising probability of an attack inside the FCT. Furthermore, given recent threats by Shekau, the likelihood of such an incident increased significantly. Only last week SAR Consultancy noted that it was most likely that insurgents would conduct an incident without warning, rather than use petrol tankers as conduits for their attacks, as had been suggested.

Preliminary Incidents Details

On 24 June 2014, at approximately 1600hrs, near Banex Plaza, Wuse II, Abuja, Nigeria, an explosion was reported outside Emab Plaza. The area is known for the hustle and bustle of people, as it is a shopping district within the city. Unlike previous bombings in Nyanya earlier in the year, this explosion occurred within the centre of the city, an area that many had perceived to be secure from such attacks. However, this incident has illustrated what many analysts have been repeating time and time again, that the FCT was becoming an increased target for Boko Haram.

At the time of writing, SAR Consultancy has been informed that the explosion was most likely the result of a VBIED. This is highly probable given the similar Modus Operandi of the last four explosions in Nigeria this year. An eye witness reported that a vehicle was driven through the gate of the Plaza prior to detonation, but this remains to be confirmed.

The initial death toll is estimated to be over twenty, with many others injured. As noted by SAR before, official death tolls are often contested by independent observers present at the scene of such incidents; as a result, these early tallies may be a lot lower than the real figures. As of yet, there has been no claims of responsibility, but the majority of analysts are laying the blame at the feet of Boko Haram. This is quite justifiable given their recent role in similar incidents in Nyanya, Kano and Jos.

Initial Assessment

Reports are still emerging about the incident, given the location, time and scale of incidents, it is likely to have shocked many who were going about their everyday business. That being said, the incident is not a huge surprise to analysts monitoring the security situation in Nigeria; events of the last three months have presented many of the indicators to suggest such an incident was becoming increasingly likely. In fact, in the assessment after the first Nyanya bombing, SAR wrote that ‘since the declaration of the State of Emergency, the natural assessment would have been that insurgents would attack Abuja in the short to medium term. Albeit that this took longer than many had expected, recent developments had provided indicators of possible conditions conducive to an attack in Abuja or a place of prominence’. Such an attack did take longer than expected, but a number of key indicators were becoming increasingly apparent.

Recent high scale VBIED attacks in Nyanya, Kano and Jos, amongst others less successful, illustrated that Boko Haram were mastering the method. Given this growing level of experience and subsequent successes it was somewhat inevitable that their members would attempt an attack in the centre of Abuja. The fact this one was a success, clearly negates statements from the Government that they could protect the FCT from such insurgents attack. While many wanted to believe this mantra, the level of security in and around the FCT, if critically assessed, indicated that the possibility of such an attack was likely and could potentially be successful. Furthermore, given Shekau's recent threats against Abuja, and the success of his other threats, the risk of such an attack had significantly increased.

What this shows?

Contrary to what many believed or wanted to believe, this incident illustrates that the insurgents have a capacity to attack the FCT. It also illustrates that if there was a political agreement between certain politicians and insurgents, as many thought, to restrict attacks in the city, this is no longer in effect. After a nearly two years of limited insurgent attacks within the centre of Abuja, this incident illustrates it is still as vulnerable as before.

What's next?

Based on similar incidents in Nyanya, Kano and Jos, it is most likely that this incident is the work of Boko Haram. Given previous responses, it is likely that Shekau will wait a while before making a statement. Based on the fact that there were secondary attacks in Nyanya, and Jos, and allegedly in Kano, it is highly likely that a second incident could occur within Abuja in the next few days or weeks. Although security is likely to be heightened within the city, these insurgents have illustrated their ability to conduct secondary attacks within minutes or within weeks. This risk should not be underestimated.

Why a shopping complex in the FCT?

Planning would have been required but not difficult in this location as it is an area known for a high density footfall of traders and customers.

Government admitted to presence of insurgent cells in the city.

Shekau's threats recently have clearly identified Abuja, FCT as a target.

Limited reinforced security presence in effect in target location.

Chance of success was high given the number of suitable targets

Requirement for large attack team was greatly reduced by using a VBIED.

Choice of timing and location ensured the impact was large scale.

Growing experience of conducting such incidents in Nyanya, Kano and Jos, has provided valuable knowledge of how to conduct such attacks successfully.

Targeting the FCT will negatively impact politicians, wealthy Nigerians and internationals, resulting in a probable impact on the economy, and commercial and diplomatic activities.

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