

Special Incident Bulletin – Bomb Blast at Central Mosque, Kano, Nigeria

Of late, incidents displaying the hallmarks of Boko Haram are occurring at an increased rate outside of the three states more commonly known for such attacks. A number of factors are evident in many of these incidents with a growing consistency across attacks. Universities appear to be becoming a significant target; the use of VBIEDs is increasing in popularity again, however there is a debate as to whether they are suicide VBIEDs or not; some of the recent attacks had a two phase approach – first detonation and then once emergency services arrive, detonate a second explosion; an emerging pattern of attacking significant towns outside the SOE, such as Niger, Gombe, Bauchi, etc. Earlier this year, SAR Consultancy highlighted the growing risk of insurgent led incidents in significant locations outside of the SOE, and the momentum behind such attacks appears to be growing. Whether this is strategic, politically linked, or a growing level of support for Boko Haram in the North, it is difficult to categorically confirm at this time, but it does require further investigation. Future attacks are likely especially given the lack of an apparent strategy to tackle this group, its supporters and its allies.

Preliminary Incidents Details

On 28 November 2014, at approximately 14:00/14:30 at the Central mosque in Kano State, Nigeria, three explosions were reportedly detonated. The exact facts are still unclear at this time; it has been said that two explosions occurred at the mosque, while a third IED exploded in the vicinity, shortly after the first two. Others suggest three simultaneous explosions. Furthermore, it has been said that at least ten gunmen opened fire on the mosque after the explosion. The death toll is also unconfirmed at this time, with many suggesting as many as 126 are dead and over 400 injured, while others suggest figures somewhere near 64 dead and 126 injured. These discrepancies are not new, exact details are always difficult to confirm in the Nigeria. The impact was so high because the attack took place during Friday Jumat prayers, just before the Iman began the service. It was reported that the first two explosion were VBIEDs, detonated by suicide bombers when they could not access the mosque, the use of suicide bombers still remain unconfirmed at this time, but given recent incidents, this may be credible. There has been no claim of responsibility of yet, but this is nothing out of the ordinary. It has many of the hallmarks of a Boko Haram attack and Boko Haram rarely claim incidents immediately, ordinarily waiting a number of days before they issue a statement.

Initial Assessment*

Given the perceived improvements in the security infrastructure and the noted positive policing approach on behalf of the security forces in Kano State over the last year or so, incidents such as yesterday are particularly worrying, as well as disappointing, although not totally unanticipated at

An unconfirmed yet interesting assertion

It has been purported, yet remains to be confirmed, that around the same time as the explosion in Kano, an IED was defused in Maiduguri, Borno, also near a mosque. If this is true, it may illustrate a growing level of organisation and logistical planning within the group. In addition, it helps raise the question, are the individuals and groups who are conducting attacks outside of the three SOE, working as individual cells in support of Boko Haram, or is this a demonstration of a strategic and increasingly structured and focused group at play?

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the same time. Over the last number of months, significant incidents have been recorded in Kano, a known target of Boko Haram, irrespective of the improved security situation. Yesterday's incident and recent incidents raise a number of questions, albeit that the police and military have significantly improved their commitment and response capabilities in respect to targeting Boko Haram activities. Has this commitment waned? Have insurgents come in spite of this increase presence, as a method of showing their force and capabilities? Or, what factors have changed within the city to allow for an apparent increase in attacks in Kano, of late?

Given the symbolic significance of Kano State as the Northern Capital, its economic prowess, its symbol as a prominent Islamic city of Northern Nigeria and its history as a target for Boko Haram attacks, the selection of Kano for this attack, as said above, is not surprising. Albeit a traditional target, a number of factors may have changed recently which have made it an increased desirable target.

Only very recently the newly appointed Emir of Kano made a speech saying that he had doubts that the military could tackle the growing insecurity and that the people needed to take a stance against Boko Haram; this caused a lot of controversy with many seeing his words as a call for Nigerians to take up arms against insurgents. In addition, Kano's symbol as an economic centre in the North, and the Emir's recent position as the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, may have been perceived as anti-Islamic by Boko Haram. Although Boko Haram are often portrayed in a simplistic form as a group opposed to Western ideals, Boko Haram have more clearly demonstrated their disapproval of all activities which do not conform to their ideologies. Kano as a location, the mosque as a target, and the relationship of this mosque to the Emir clearly illustrate that the group are prepared to challenge Muslims just as easily as Christians, if they do not conform to their ideologies. The economic activities in Kano, the recent statements of the Emir, and his previous position do not conform to these ideologies and therefore may be perceived as a direct challenge and as a result, a suitable, if not desirable targets.

Note: *The targeting of Muslims by extremist Islamist groups has been referred to as Takfiri, a belief by such extremists that Muslims are not true Muslims if they do not confirm to the extremist ideologies.*

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Why Kano, and why a Mosque?

Successful attacks increasing in Kano of late, Sept and Nov 2014

Kano is a symbolic capital both economically and as a centre of Islam in the North and in Nigeria

Kano and the Emir possibly perceived to be anti-Islamic by Boko Haram or at least anti Boko Haram ideologies

Demonstration of Takfiri elements

Recent statements by the Emir of Kano

Centre of Economic prowess and likely significance in forthcoming elections

Chance of success was high with three IEDs and armed men

Planning would have been required but not difficult as there are known cells in the city

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

What this shows?

This incident confirms the recent geographical spread of activities outside of the three SOE, showing a capability and a continued focus to do so. This incident is slightly different from recent incidents in Kano; the majority of recent incidents with IEDs and/or VBIED would have required good logistics and planning, but in comparison with town and village attacks in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, the required numbers of insurgents would have been low. If reports of armed insurgents shooting after the explosions are correct, this may be a step towards tactics used in the SOE states. This increases risks of detection but could be a show of growing confidence in the group's activities outside of the SOEs.

What's next?

Given the apparent increase in frequency of attacks outside of the SOE, the gradual change in location experienced over recent weeks and months, and the recent choice of targets, it is forecasted that such attacks will continue with increasing profile, were possible. The likely increase in political game playing in advance of the 2015 elections may provide further provocation for future attacks. Furthermore, given the reported response by many citizens rioting and attacking the police after the incident, for a perceived lethargy in tackling Boko Haram, there may be an increase in vigilant groups visible throughout the city, similar to the early days in Maiduguri after the declaration of the SOE in May 2013. Already there are reports from Kano that three gunmen were beaten to death after yesterday's incidents by citizens and that there were a small number of citizens killed by police in the rioting. Similar outbreaks of violence may be reported between such vigilantes, the military and police in Kano, and between groups suspected of being members or supporters of Boko Haram. As a result, further direct and indirectly linked violence is likely to occur in the forthcoming weeks and months in Kano. Albeit there has been no claim of responsibility yet, In light of recent attacks in Maiduguri and now Kano, at the same time as the President calls for an extension of the SOE, Boko Haram are likely to release a video proclaiming their role in both incidents in the next few days or weeks. Whether this is faced by Shekau, a person impersonating him, or by another is somewhat irrelevant, given recent incidents it is clear to see that this group are not going away for some time.

What does SAR Consultancy Offer?

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What will this means for working and traveling within the North of Nigeria?

While travel to the North of Nigeria still remains feasible if proper security preparations are conducted prior to travel, SAR Consultancy advises all those considering travelling to the North East and North Central to examine the necessity for such trips at these times and advises to only travel where absolutely necessary for at least the next few weeks.

Outstanding Question? *If the Emir's recent comments did contribute to yesterday's attack, could Sokoto be the next target given recent comments of the Sultan?*

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