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## AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

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He inspires little more confidence among his co-religionists, however. His fellow northerners seem unconvinced by his plans for agricultural and industrial development. The governors of northern states such as Bauchi and Borno have not noticeably improved things either. 'The only state governor to have made a difference is **Babatunde Fashola** in Lagos; there are no signs of development of jobs in the north,' a senior Nigerian diplomat told *Africa Confidential*.

Environmental degradation and rapid population growth drive people from the countryside into the towns, with no means of livelihood. The government has no effective response to short-term demands for jobs and services, and there is no sign of a credible long-term policy on desertification and the destruction of crop lands and grazing land.

Attempts by international Islamist groups to destabilise Nigeria through sponsorship of extremist sects are hard to discern. Nigerian intelligence sources insist that Yusuf's group and its members are home-grown (many have fled into **Chad** since his killing). Nigerian analysts say they see no evidence that groups such as **Al Qaida** in the Islamic Maghreb, which operates as far south as northern **Mali**, have teamed up with local fanatics. Islamist proselytisers from **Pakistan** are said to be at work along the Sahel belt but have not been linked to the uprising.

However, **Al Qaida**'s figurehead, **Usama bin Laden**, has identified Nigeria as a resource-rich country ripe for insurrection. The danger, say officials in Abuja, is that the internal crisis could open the doors to external groups. Jihadists do

not usually work in isolation and the doors may already have been quietly opened.

This latest crisis started after **Boko Haram**'s leaders were arrested and held in prison. There had been clashes in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, two months earlier, when police blocked a funeral procession of sect members carrying the body of a colleague, saying that the mourners on motorcycles were not wearing the regulation helmets. The resulting skirmish ended with 14 **Boko Haram** members shot dead and Yusuf vowing revenge. Following investigations, the police raided a sect compound in **Biu** village, 200 kilometres south of Maiduguri, where they found knives, machetes and home-made bombs, and arrested nine militants. Another raid on 25 July left a senior militant dead; the police said he killed himself and injured a colleague when a home-made bomb exploded; militants claimed police killed him.

### BAGS OF EXPLOSIVES AND WEAPONS

According to the Inspector General of Police, **Ogbonnaya Okechukwu Onovo**, a search 'recovered many bags of explosives and different types of dangerous weapons'. The militants counter-attacked in Bauchi on 26 July when, according to Onovo, up to 50 militants and 5 policemen were killed. Eyewitnesses reported a greater number of dead bodies. Further attacks spread the next day to Wudil in Kano, Maiduguri in Borno and Damaturu in Yobe.

In Maiduguri, small groups of militants launched synchronised attacks across the city, starting just after midnight. An ambush on the state police headquarters resulted in a shoot-out lasting over three hours, with up to 50 militants killed. They had killed a sergeant on guard at the Police Mobile College next door and murdered five policemen in their dormitories, including Superintendent **Usman Farouk**, second-in-command of the state's anti-riot squad.

In all, there were over 100 fatalities, most of them militants. On motorcycles in the heavy downpour, they set fire to police stations and attacked police officers' homes, prison guards and prisons. With

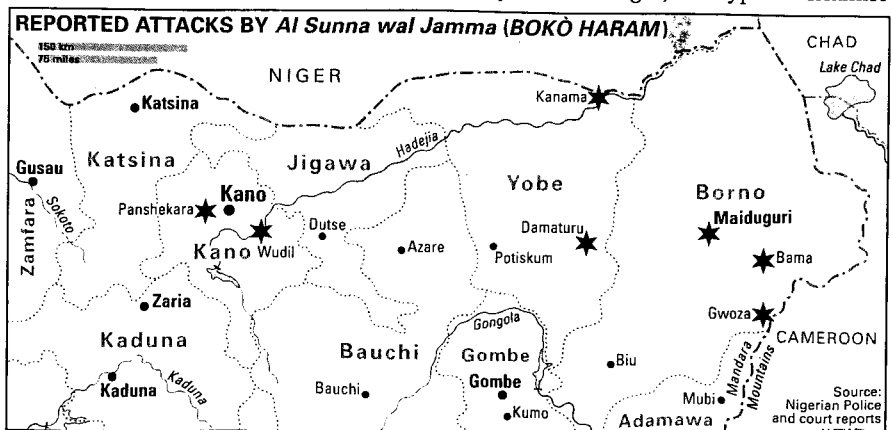
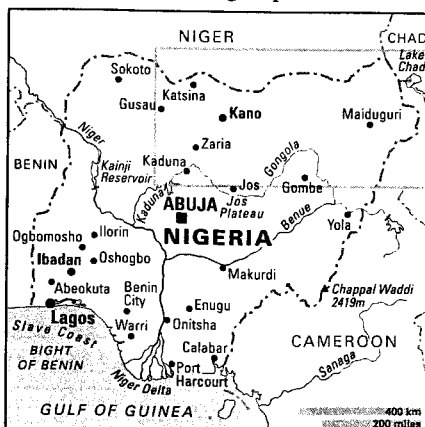
knives, machetes, bows and arrows and petrol bombs, they burned anything that seemed to represent government, shouting '**Allah Akbar**' ('God is Most Great'), stealing guns and ammunition, and emptying gaols. The security forces killed many, arrested some and cordoned off trouble spots. A dusk-to-dawn curfew the next day restored an uneasy peace, although thousands of people were displaced.

On 28 July, Yar'Adua ordered the security agencies to 'take all necessary action' against the attackers. The army shelled Yusuf's strongly defended bastion in Maiduguri and eventually tracked him down nearby. His deputy, **Mallam Shikau**, was said to have been captured alive.

Yusuf had declared his followers ready to die to ensure the institution of a strict Islamic society. 'This is a fanatical organisation that is anti-government, anti-people. We don't know what their aims are yet; we are out to identify and arrest their leaders and also destroy their enclaves, wherever they are' responded police chief Onovo. By analogy with **Afghanistan**, he called the militants '**Taliban**'. Formed in late 2003, **Boko Haram** mounted its first attack on New Year's Eve that year from a base in Kanama village, on the border of Yobe State and **Niger**. It stormed police outposts and killed several officers.

One professor at a Bauchi university thinks the militants are not so much opposed to Western education as to what they regard as its use to undermine Islam. They object that the curriculum is neither delivered by Muslims nor designed to further Islam and argue that Western ideas of democracy have failed in Nigeria.

Residents describe most sect members as poor youths with few job prospects, although some came from wealthy families or were university graduates who had torn up their degrees. This is a classic mix of Islamist activists. Others were recruited through the sect's network of **Ibn Taimiyah** schools, which were allowed to flourish and offered free education to the children of poor parents. A local official said that children often became alienated from their parents because of the ideology they were taught, a typical Islamist



*madrasa* model. Some ran away to Yusuf's compound, he said, while others appeared to have been tricked by being told they were being taken for further studies.

Some children just vanished, he said, and parents received a call saying, 'Your child has been taken for a holy war. He will not be coming home. Thank you for producing him.' The group's schools in the four states that suffered from violence have already been destroyed.

*Jama'atu Nasril Islam*, a traditional Islamic body, condemned the attacks. 'As the umbrella Islamic organisation in the country, the JNi cannot and will not fold its arms and watch the carnage and madness going on in the country in the name of Islam,' said its acting Secretary General, **Abdulkarim Mu'azu Palladan**. In Abuja, federal lawmakers called for an enquiry. From New York, United Nations Secretary General **Ban Ki-moon**, deplored 'yet another round of sectarian violence in parts of northern Nigeria'.

There is more trouble in the south, too, as the amnesty and the ceasefire that brought some respite before the *Boko Haram* riots threaten to unravel. Governors from the 'South-South', which includes the Niger Delta, have threatened to pull out of the federal government's amnesty for militants in their region. Their criticism increasingly speaks of the 'Northern establishment', just as the North's Islamist groups accuse Yar'Adua's government of kow-towing to the Christian South. The Chairman of the South-South governors, **Liyel Imoke** of Cross River State, doubts that a comprehensive, well thought-out plan exists which the region could try to implement. He was sure 'Yar'Adua could bag a Nobel Prize over amnesty', though.

One big upset, echoed by Governor **Emmanuel Uduaghan** of Delta State, was the report that a 'petroleum university' in the Niger Delta town of Warri was being relocated to Kaduna in the north, as part of Energy Minister **Rilwanu Lukman's** reforms of the industry. An official of the Petroleum Technology Development Fund, **Rabe Darma**, said the university controversy was due to 'misconceptions, misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the facts by misguided politicians who want to heat up the polity'.

Further, some southern politicians claim that top officials in the Ministry of Petroleum Resources and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation have a northernisation agenda for the oil and gas industry. A Delta State Elders' Forum, led by Chief **Edwin Clark**, a former federal Minister of Information, rejected the amnesty initiative, accusing the federal government of colluding with the northern oligarchy. The Forum, many of whose members are retired army officers, promised to 'join the freedom fighters in the creeks' if Abuja did not review its

policies and actions on the South-South.

No one has, it seems, yet produced evidence that Yusuf's group has links to *Al Qaida*, whose affiliates move easily through the porous borders of the Maghreb to the north. The cash washing around Nigeria's corrupt oil economy makes it more resilient to foreign funding, officials say, although the government will be keen for a promise of anti-terrorism money from the **United States** during Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton's** visit next week.

At the local Lake Chad Club, questions over possible foreign influence beyond

the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger – where Yusuf allegedly told the military he bought his weapons – are met with dismissive laughter. There is no money in suicide bombing, the patrons say. However, national intelligence sources accept that the growing political and economic pressures in the north have created new opportunities for militants to exploit in their campaign to destabilise the government – and the chance for foreign-backed and organised groups to move into the region's biggest economy and most populous country. ●

## INSIDE BOKO HARAM

The late *Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf's Boko Haram* group had about 2,000 members, some of whom had first attacked police stations in 2003. The group's rhetoric grew increasingly violent, said **Ibrahim Ahmed Abdullahi**, leader of the rival *Izala* sect, which Yusuf had denounced. The two men had been friends.

**Abdullahi** and local army commander Colonel **Ben Ahanotu** say they and many others warned the authorities about *Boko Haram's* activities, but the government did nothing. Borno State Governor **Ali Modu Sheriff** said there was not enough evidence to convict, but **Abdullahi** and others believe the membership of children from influential families and the group's alleged financier, Borno's former Commissioner for Religious Affairs **Alhaji Buji Foi**, helped deflect attention. Foi was also killed in the crackdown although the details are still unclear.

Yusuf's second-in-command, **Amir Abubakar Shakou**, was also killed. Like many recruits, he came from neighbouring **Niger**. The group also recruited from **Cameroon** and **Chad** and Yusuf reportedly told Ahanotu after he was captured that *Boko Haram* bought most of its weapons from those three countries, particularly Chad. Police attribute these cross-border links to kinship ties rather than Islamist networks, but they may be underestimating the jihadists.

Another official said the group was very hierarchical, with senior members wearing red armbands, lower ranking ones wearing yellow and new members or children wearing white. It appeared well-trained militarily, he said, since it managed to cut three of Maiduguri city's four main telephone lines an hour before the attack and then simultaneously attacked all the police stations in the city centre. They had training camps in the nearby Mandara Mountains, he said, not far from a police training centre.

Some police officers are out for revenge. At least 17 policemen were killed in the first two attacks. Local sources say the killers of the second-in-command of the Mobile Police in Borno were guided to his front door by his brother-in-law, a sect member. *Boko Haram* had taken out the mobile phone network by sabotaging the masts, but police listened over the radio as militants attacked. The memory of his colleagues begging for reinforcements and screaming as they died reduced one policeman to tears.

Previous attacks on police occurred in Kanama and Damaturu in January 2004, when weapons were stolen; in September 2004 in Bama, 70 kilometres from Maiduguri, when several officers were killed; and another in Gwoza, when more police weapons were stolen. *Boko Haram* was not directly responsible, but Yusuf had previously taught **Aminu Tashen-Ilimi** and **Mola Umar**, whose groups carried out the attacks. In 2002, they split from Yusuf, who enjoyed a chauffeur-driven Mercedes-Benz car and demanded money and property from his followers. The pair set up a base in Kanama on the Niger border and called it 'Afghanistan'. An affiliated group killed two road safety officers in Kano State in May 2007 and eleven officers at Panshekara police stations.

Borno Police Commissioner **Christopher Dega** said police were aware of *Boko Haram's* relationship to the attackers but charges linking Yusuf to them had failed to stand. Nine men were arrested on bomb-making charges in Biu on 21 July, he said. Three days later, the prisoners told journalists the sect's leader had told them to make bombs to protect themselves; on the same day, two more men died in Biu when a home-made bomb detonated prematurely.

*Boko Haram* members were in thrall to the charismatic Yusuf. Police are investigating local businessmen to see whether he had other sources of funding. His fortified compound boasted a clinic, a crude bomb-making laboratory and a weapons stockpile – all within a stone's throw of Maiduguri's main railway station. Local officials say a joint anti-crime task force planned to raid the compound but the militants pre-empted them: accusations are flying between the police and military over the source of the leak. ●

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