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# Boko Haram: How it all began

By Isa Umar Gusau, Maiduguri | Publish Date: Aug 2 2009 12:00AM | Updated Date: Aug 2 2009 12:00AM

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Yusuf then moved to Anguwan Doki to set up his own preaching and teaching structure. The structure, which was destroyed a few days ago by the military, is said to be owned by his father-in-law, Alhaji Bapur. In 2002, Yusuf became an Islamic teacher with his pupils increasing in number.

Some time in October, 2003, part of the team which formed the backbone of his following, led by Aminu Tashen Ilimi and one other person nicknamed Mullah Umar, accused Yusuf of being too liberal with the ideology and, considering him to be compromised, moved out of his enclave.

The breakaway faction led by the two set up a base outside Kanamma, a village in Yobe state, located on the border of Nigeria and Niger Republic. The group was said to have named their base Afghanistan. They wanted it as an independent state with its own government, territorial boundaries and people who identify with their ideologies. Though it was not clear whether they were provoked, in January 2004, they attacked a police station close to Kananma and another in Damaturu, carting away police arms and ammunitions. The federal government responded by sending military troops to confront them.

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After two days of fierce battle, dozens of them were said to have been killed and 50 were arrested, while the rest fled and went underground. Some soldiers might have been killed also, but the military did not disclose the number of casualties. In September of the same year, another group, suspected to be linked to the sect, attacked the divisional police headquarters in Bama local government area of Borno state, killed some policemen including an assistant commissioner, and destroyed the station. The group also laid similar ambush on the divisional police headquarters in Gwoza local government, destroyed some properties and, carting away arms, moved to the Mandara hills in the local government.

The federal government responded by deploying soldiers. After two days of battle on the hills, 28 members of the group were killed while others fled. Later, security men in Cameroon arrested five members of the sect and handed over to the Nigerian government.

For three years, the sect went underground until, in May 2007, they reappeared in Kano state shortly after the April elections, and attacked the Sharada office of the Federal Roads Safety Commission (FRSC), killing two officers on night duty. Within the same week, they were said to have attacked Panshekara police station, killing 11 policemen, including a DPO, and carted away arms. They were said to have later camped at an abandoned water works where they were again engaged by the military after another two days fight. Some were killed while others crossed River Kano and fled.

In between these attacks, Malam Muhammad Yusuf was severally arrested and questioned, mostly by the State Security Service (SSS), on charges of linkage to the group. Repeatedly, he said they were his breakaway disciples who were responsible for their own actions. Not long ago, he was acquitted by the courts for lack of evidence.

The group again went under ground. Muhammad Yusuf continued his teaching and preaching. Yusuf, according to some accounts, was not quite militant but somewhat liberal. He, it was believed, was a man who assembled a group that he could not control and, to remain in charge, he had to dance to the tunes of some key subordinates.

### The Ideology

Members of the Boko Haram sect simply believe that western education, brought by people who were not Muslims, was not part of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). They believe western education has a corrupting influence on Muslims and that it is the single

title



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major factor militating against the implementation of a complete Islamic system. They also believe that being employed and paid wages is associated with western education, so earning from such work is haram. They only encourage trading and are opposed to luxury on the basis that a luxurious person is after the world and not the hereafter. They believe that when one is working, one rarely devotes time to worship, which they say contradicts the Qur'anic verse that says Allah did not create humans and jinn (spirits) except for them to worship Him.

Although they want the establishment of a system similar to that implemented by the Taliban in Afghanistan, they insist they are not Taliban but followers of the sunnah (practices) of the Prophet (may peace be upon him). They are opposed to the use of Televisions, videos players, and other gadgets which, they say, are distractions from the worship of Allah.


At different times, their position was chastised by popular Islamic scholars during debates. For instance, the late Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam had, in a well circulated audio interview, said he had met with Yusuf and that he had convinced him that the Boko Haram ideology was misguided, citing the roles of medical doctors, nurses, science laboratory experts and pharmacists to provide health cares services, water engineers to provide water supply, builders, road workers; vehicles, ships and even aircrafts manufacturers and pilots all of which Muslims require to travel to Saudi Arabia from various parts of the world to perform Hajj, which is one of the pillars of Islam. Ja'afar said Yusuf had agreed with the position in private but changed position in public, amongst his followers. Yusuf however denied shifting his position and his followers kept increasing, with many relocating to Yusuf's enclave in Maiduguri from different parts of the country.

In 2008, the Borno state government established a special joint police and military anti-robbery team, called Operation Flush.

Somewhere along the line, there was growing bad blood between the group and security men over the former's doctrine which did not recognise government and all its agencies. In 2009, a law on the use of crash helmets by motor cyclists came into force but members of the group, many of whom ride on motorcycles, ignored it. Security men, Operation Flush (which seriously enforced the use of helmets and often seized motor cycles from users who failed to comply) in particular, believed that the group refused to wear helmets because they did not recognise the government.

On Thursday, June 11, 2009, 17 members of the sect were shot by men

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of Operation Flush after disagreements over their alleged refusal to use crash helmets. The shooting took place while the sect members were in a funeral procession to bury some of their members who died in a car accident. The sect members were hospitalised at the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital (UMTH), but none died. Government neither sympathised with the victims nor paid for their medication while there was no apology from police or any investigation.

In an interview a few days later, Yusuf threatened a reprisal attack. There were feelers that the sect members were getting prepared and residents were scared. On Tuesday, July 21, nine of them were arrested and paraded on Friday, July 24, by the police. They were found to be in possession of 74 empty bomb shells and other explosive materials. The items were recovered in the residence of one of the military commanders of the group, Inusa Ibrahim Sabo, in Biu local government area of the state.

The suspects said they were preparing in to defend themselves because they presumed the shooting of their brothers was intentional and they were no longer safe. That Friday at night, a locally made bomb exploded in the residence of another follower, blasting him to death while his friend sustained severe injuries. The follower's name was given as Hassan Sani Badami from Biu whose death Yusuf later described as a ticket for him into paradise.

On Saturday, July 25, some members of the sect struck in Bauchi, killing some policemen while a number of them were also killed. The following day, Sunday Trust published an interview in which Yusuf reviewed the whole situation including what happened in Bauchi and threatened that there was going to be revenge but refused to disclose details of the operation. incidentally, the strike was being planned for that same day. All GSM lines were said to have been disabled by the sect as no network had service throughout the night. The following morning, only MTN fluctuated while Starcomms was working but there were no recharge cards to buy. It was said that the aim was to make the simultaneous strike successful so that there could be no contact among the victims i.e. the police. At about 10 pm or so, members of the sect grouped in batches and, simultaneously, struck different police stations and residences of police officers and killed policemen. They were repelled at the police headquarters in Maiduguri after three hours of fire exchange which was said to have begun at 12:30 am. The attacks were extended to Potiskum in Yobe state and Wudil in Kano state. A counterinsurgency operation was launched by the federal government and soldiers were deployed to Maiduguri, targeting Yusuf's enclave which is the sect's

headquarters.

After about four days of fight, the government forces killed Yusuf and many of his men after bombing his enclave.

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