



Preliminary Report

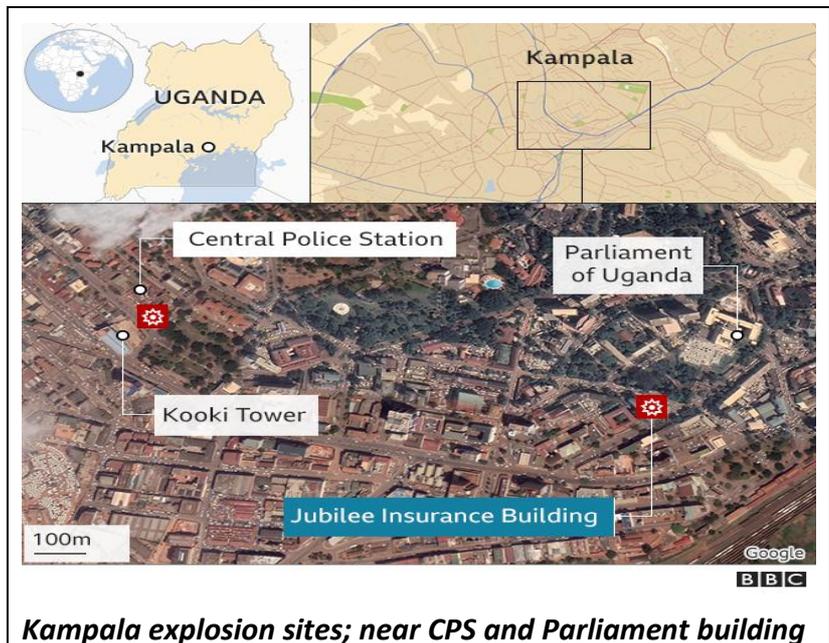
UGANDA: Twin Explosions in Kampala

16 November 2021

Incident

On 16 November 2021, two-separate but seemingly coordinated attacks were carried out by three suicide bombers in Kampala. One attack took place outside the central police station by the first suicide bomber who was on foot while the other two attackers, riding a motorbike blew themselves up near the parliamentary building. All the three attackers were Ugandan nationals.

The two blasts left six people dead, including two police officers and the three suicide bombers. 35 people were also wounded. It was also reported that the police arrested a fourth potential suicide bomber and his vest was disassembled. Although Ugandan officials have put the blame on Allied Democratic Force (ADF) group, which is based in the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but has active cells operating in the country, Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for



Kampala explosion sites; near CPS and Parliament building

the two attacks in a statement posted on its affiliated Telegraph channel.

Background

The Tuesday twin attacks were not the first terrorist attacks in Uganda. In July 2010, two bombings in Kampala resulted in 74 deaths. The attacks were carried out by al-Shabaab terrorist group based in Somalia. The motive for the attacks was said to be a retaliation for Uganda's military deployment in Somalia as part of the African

Union Mission (AMISOM). Although there has been a number of attacks in the country, Uganda has not experienced major terrorist attacks from al-Shabaab nor any other group since the 2010 incident. Meanwhile, ADF that has its roots in Uganda, emerged in 1995 as a coalition of three rebel organizations, namely the Allied Democratic Movement, the National Army of Liberation of Uganda and Uganda Muslim Liberation Army, that opposed the government of President Yoweri Museveni. It was committed in carrying out attacks in the capital Kampala, provoking increased military intervention from Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) to quell the attacks.

The group could not withstand the pressure and needed to relocate to a remote area to recuperate and remobilize, hence it moved to the remote areas of neighboring DRC where it is currently based and operating mainly around Ituri and North-Kivu provinces. It has killed thousands of civilians over the years in these provinces. The group has also engaged in illegal mining, timber trading and other illicit transborder economy to fund its operations. It is also suspected that the group is being involved in massive money laundering activities through various licit economic methods. Although it has been regarded an obscure organization for some time, it received international attention when it pledged allegiance to IS in 2019 and became known as Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). It is purported to have links with Ahlu Sunna Wa Jamma'a (ASWJ) insurgency group in northern Mozambique.

Nevertheless, it has been asserted that ADF could be having a close working relation with al-Shabaab despite the al-Shabaab affiliation to al-Qaeda while ADF is inclined to IS. It has been reported that al-Shabaab has been providing logistic and training to ADF with the latter sending fighters to Somalia and al-Shabaab trainers travelling to DRC. The two groups allegedly engage in illegal mining and smuggling of precious stones and other natural resources.

Evolving Threat

Uganda has experienced a number of attacks since the second half of this year which have been attributed to ADF cells operating in the country. On 01 June 2021, armed men on motorcycles linked to ADF shot at the vehicle of Uganda's Works and Transport Minister and a former Military and Police Chief, Katumba Wamala, near his home in Kampala. Mr. Wamala's daughter and the driver were killed while he was injured. On 23 October, a bomb explosion at a restaurant in a busy suburb in Kampala killed a 20-year-old waitress and injured three people. IS claimed responsibility for that attack through Telegram channel. Two days later, a suicide bomber who was already known to the police and on the list of ADF wanted persons, detonated his vest inside a bus travelling from Kampala to western Uganda killing only himself and injuring several other passengers. Police accused the commander of ADF Muhammed Nkalubo, Ugandan national based in DRC, of

coordinating the two bombings. On 29 October in Nakaseke district located 60 kilometers north of Kampala, unknown assailants gave a fruit-shaped bomb to children while they were playing and two of them were killed. These attacks are purportedly the first series of attacks in Uganda since ADF established relations with IS.

Analysis

The incidents suggest a growing terrorist attacks in Uganda, mainly in Kampala. The attackers of 16 November explosions infiltrated and successfully executed two simultaneous attacks at government enclave, hosting several ministries and parliament. The ability by terrorists to penetrate such high security area demonstrate not only its effective operational strategies but also its ability to gather sound intelligence.

Al-Shabaab already has its own 'legitimate cause' to launch attacks in Uganda due to Uganda's deployment in Somalia. Although the group has kept a low profile since the 2010 bombings, the recent attacks could serve to motivate and revitalize al-Shabaab operations in Uganda. The purported cooperation between al-Shabaab and ADF could make it easy for the two groups to coordinate their activities in the country to facilitate the planning and execution of attacks in Uganda. The Uganda Government will now have to deal with two terrorist organizations; al-Shabaab and ADF.

By launching attacks on Uganda, ADF has widened its area of operations. As a result, the group would also be stretching, mainly, its logistics and financial resources in order to sustain its cross-border operations, as well as enhancing intra-group cooperation and coordination. In order to respond to all these needs, the group might vigorously engage further into illegal criminal activities.

Until recently, the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) has been a very rare modus operandi within ADF group. This indicates that the group had recently acquired the skills to manufacture and use explosives. This may seek to affirm that indeed, there is collaboration between either ADF and al-Shabaab, especially as the latter is known to be specialized in the manufacture and use of IEDs. This modus operandi could be expanded to include the use of Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) as they have become a significant feature of al-Shabaab.

Meanwhile within the DRC, ADF has since beginning of the year has intensified its attacks targeting civilians and government forces. The attacks in Uganda do not only indicate the intensification of the group's activities across borders but also IS expansion to eastern Africa.

Conclusion

The recent attacks in Kampala evidence the growing terrorism threat in Uganda and bears directly on the prospects for peace and stability in the country. The increasing presence of foreign-terrorist-fighters (FTFs) within ADF in Eastern DRC could now also spill over to Uganda. Uganda, already surrounded by countries battling terrorism could present a gateway for IS foothold to the rest of east Africa. The national security forces should act swiftly to contain the threat; neighboring countries, East African Community (EAC) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) should also be on high alert to assist before the threat worsens to attract more fighters and engulf the region. The resurgence of ADF activities indicates that the security/military approach alone without simultaneously addressing the underlying factors that contribute to the emergence and evolution of violence, cannot end the threat and would as a result resurface periodically.