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Ademola Adegbamigbe: "Osama's Nigerian Agents"

Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaeda head, is killed by an American strike force. But his affiliates are alive in Nigeria, representing danger

His image haunted Americans in their dreams and waking hours. Osama bin Laden, leader of the terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, was their bogeyman from the pit of hell. Apart from his past activities in other parts of the world, he unleashed cataclysm on the United States, a situation that gave rise to a 10-year manhunt for him.

That nightmare ended in the wee hours of Sunday 1 May, when he was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan, by elite US Navy SEALs. His death was announced last week by President Barack Obama, who said at the East Room of the White House that "Justice has been done." Osama bin Laden, who many like to call by his first name, was shot in the head and chest and was buried later at sea.

However, the death of Osama has not signified the end of terrorism worldwide, especially in Nigeria where his adherents and affiliates are causing death and destruction on a massive scale. According to analysts, terrorists with al-Qaeda connections are alive in Nigeria, maintaining training camps and indoctrinating those disposed to militant Islam. Their hands are seen in the sectarian killings witnessed in the country.

The Capture of Osama

Obama was just four months in power when he decided to smoke Osama out of wherever hole he was hiding. On 2 Jun 2009, he signed a memo to CIA Director Leon Panetta, stating: "In order to ensure that we have expanded every effort, I direct you to provide me within 30 days a detailed operation plan for locating and bringing to justice" Osama bin Laden."

Obama revealed that last August, after years of painstaking work by the US intelligence community, he was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden. Not sure of the veracity of the information, Obama said that it "took many months to run this thread to ground."

To be sure of their target, the US President met repeatedly with his national security team, working on more information that helped to ascertain that the terrorist's hideout had been located within a compound in Pakistan.

And finally, last week, he determined that he and his team had had enough intelligence to strike. Thus, Obama authorized an operation to get Osama. He was found in a big \$1 million-two-storey property about 800 yards from the Pakistan Military Academy near Abbottabad city, northwest of Pakistan. It is about 150 km from Islamabad, the capital of the country.

According to the Associated Press, an American news agency, when one of bin Laden's most trusted aides picked up the phone last year, he unknowingly led US pursuers to the doorstep of the wanted terrorist. That monitored phone call, as a US official was quoted as saying, "ended a year-long search for bin Laden's personal courier, the key break in a worldwide manhunt."

The courier, in turn, led US intelligence officials to a walled compound in North-East Pakistan, Navy SEAL members shot bin Laden to death" Not a man to trust others with information about his whereabouts, not even his lieutenants, bin Laden depended on his couriers who helped to bring his messages in and out.

Hope for his capture started showing when inmates of the CIA secret detention centre started singing about an important courier, code-named Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, a bin Laden chum. In fact, when Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the third man in the al-Qaeda pecking order was arrested by the CIA, he confirmed knowing al-Kuwaiti, but claimed the courier had no link with the terrorist organization.

But real confirmation came when, in 2004, the CIA nabbed Hassan Ghul, a top al-Qaeda operative in Iraq, who revealed that al-Kuwaiti was actually a courier who was close to Faraj al-Libi, who replaced Mohammed as al-Qaeda's operational commander.

A US official was also quoted as saying that "finally, in May 2005, al-Libi was captured. Under CIA interrogation, al-Libi admitted that when he was promoted to succeed Mohammed, he received the word through a courier."

But he made up a name for the courier and denied knowing al-Kuwaiti, a denial that was so unbelievable that the CIA took it as confirmation that he and Mohammed were protecting the courier. It only reinforced the idea that al-Kuwaiti was very important to al-Qaeda."

The US intelligence apparatus, therefore, reached a conclusion that if they could apprehend al-Kuwaiti, then the capture of bin Laden would be a matter of time. After many years, the CIA finally yanked off al-Kuwaiti's mask to identify the real man.

He is Sheikh Abu Ahmed, a Pakistani born in Kuwait who, for long, had eluded security officials. Since bin Laden was so careful not to use phones or the Internet in his hideout, sleuths were always running into dead ends.

Then Ahmed, in the middle of last year, standing somewhere not far from bin Laden's hole, had a telephone conversation with someone who was under CIA surveillance. Things became clearer in August 2010 when he unwittingly led security operatives to bin Laden's compound.

The U.S kept this matter close to its chest, not even trusting close allies like Britain and France with it. In mid-February, the government was quite sure that a "high-value target" was hiding in the compound.

Where bin Laden lived is a three-storey building that has few windows facing the outside of the compound. There is a terrace on the third floor and the building has a seven-foot privacy wall and 12 to 18-foot walls topped with barbed wire.

Moreover, internal partitioning of different sections of the compound provides extra privacy. To make sure that the landlord remained elusive, access to the compound is restricted by two security gates, and those living there burn their waste within, unlike other house owners who pack theirs outside for collection by waste management authorities.

In spite of these precautions, the Navy SEAL men that held rehearsals of the raid on 7 and 13 Apr on a one-acre compound at Camp Alpha, a segregated section of the heavily fortified Bagram Air Base in the Parvan Province of Afghanistan, decided to drop in through the sky, while top US officials were monitoring the action from Washington.

Four modified MH-60 SEAL helicopters flew in from Ghazi Air Base in Pakistan and, like dragonflies, made their way to the garrison suburb of Abbottabad. The SEALs had earlier come across the border from Afghanistan, along with what an expert described as "tactical signals, intelligence collectors, and navigators, using highly classified hyper spectral imagers".

There was, however, a snag when one of the four choppers developed fault as it wanted to land in bin Laden's compound, a development that made Obama, his top generals and war planners watching the process in the situation room of the White House to sit on the edge of their seats.

The pilot, however, managed to land the craft inside the walls. Notwithstanding this small setback, the SEALs disembarked and raided the compound. The 54-year-old al-Qaeda chief was killed in the operation that lasted 40 minutes. Before leaving, the assault men blew up the faulty helicopter and flew back with reinforcement craft.

US government officials said that the raid was a dramatic denouement of years of intelligence gathering that included the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency [NGA] that deals with imagery and maps and the National Security Agency [NSA] described as the "code-makers and code-breakers."

In other words, they can, with subterranean tactic, watch and listen to conversations anywhere in the world, ranging from those engaged in by enemy soldiers, drug barons, hijackers, and pirates, to terrorists, and desperados of different hues and husbands with a penchant for taking a tumble in the hay away from the home.

Bin Laden's Sins

Bin Laden's problem started when he called for attacks against American forces in the Saudi peninsula and in the Horn of Africa. On 29 Dec 1992, his organization exploded a bomb in a hotel in Aden, Yemen, where American troops had been staying while on their way to Somalia. Although the real targets had left, the bomb killed two Austrian tourists.

On 26 Feb 1993, the organization exploded a truck driven into the underground garage at the World Trade Centre, killing six people. Bin Laden was to eulogize Ramzi Youser, the mastermind, who was convicted of the bombing. Eight months later, in Somalia, 18 American peacekeepers were killed and their bodies dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, the capital city. Bin Laden cheered the killers.

After establishing a terrorist camp in Sudan in 1994, the Saudi government froze his assets and revoked his citizenship.

In November 1995, his organization detonated a truck bomb at a Saudi National Guard training centre operated by the United States in Riyadh, killing seven people. And in June 1996, another truck bomb destroyed Khobar Towers, an American military residence in Dhahran, killing 19 soldiers.

After fleeing to Afghanistan when Sudan expelled him, bin Laden started working in concert with Mullah Muhammad Omar, leader of the Taliban. Thus in August 1996, from the Afghan mountain

stronghold of Tora Bora, bin Laden issued his "Declaration of War Against the Americans Who Occupy the Land of Two Holy Mosques."

He repeated this mission in an edict in February 1998, calling for attacks on Americans anywhere in the world, declaring it an "individual duty" for all Muslims.

His organization, on 7 Aug 1998, exploded two bombs simultaneously at the American Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dares Salaam, Tanzania. While the former killed 213 people and wounded 4,500, the latter killed 11 and wounded 85.

The mother of all his sins came on 11 Sep 2001, when al-Qaeda launched a series of coordinated suicide attacks on the United States. That day, 19 al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners, crashing two into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City, killing everyone on board and others working in the buildings.

The terrorists crashed the third into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington D.C. And the fourth crashed into a field near Shanks Ville in rural Pennsylvania. That was after some of its passengers and flight crew attempted to retake control of the plane, which the hijackers had targeted at the Capitol Building or the White House in Washington D.C. Over 3,000 victims and the 19 hijackers died in the attacks.

The Man, Bin Laden

The seventh son and 17th child among about 50 of his father's children, Osama bin Muhammad bin Awad bin Laden was born on 10 Mar 1957 to Muhammad bin Awad bin Laden. The father, in 1931, emigrated from Southern Yemen and hit it big in construction in Saudi Arabia before he died in a plane crash on 3 Sep 1967.

Young Osama's mother, the last of his father's four wives, was from Syria, a state of affairs that made him to become the butt of snide remarks by family members who called him "the slave child."

According to Mary Anne of the New Yorker, "It must have been difficult for him as Osama was almost a double outsider. His paternal roots are in Yemen and within the family, his mother was a double outsider as well - she was neither Saudi nor Yemeni but Syrian."

Bin Laden attended the elite Al Thagher Model School in Jeddah, where he was indoctrinated after school by a Syrian physical education teacher. This made the young man become a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious movement founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al Banna, a school teacher opposed to British rule.

His Islamic fundamentalism deepened when he studied at King Abdul Aziz University, where, apart from the Brotherhood in his blood and on campus, he was influenced by adherents of Wahhabism, an anti-Western strain of Islam. Here, two Islamic scholars, Muhammad Quttub and Abdullah Azzam, influenced him greatly.

Their ideas helped to shape the al-Qaeda philosophy. When in 1980 Soviet troops occupied Afghanistan, bin Laden moved to Pakistan, on the border of the occupied country.

But in 1982, he actually moved in, bringing with him construction machinery and recruits. Apart from setting up training camps for them, he was paying roughly \$25,000 a month to subsidize their upkeep.

According to a report, "the flood of young men following him to Afghanistan prompted the founding of al-Qaeda. The genesis was essentially bureaucratic because bin Laden wanted a way to track the men so that he could tell their families what had happened to them.

The documentation al-Qaeda provided became a primitive database of young jihadists." It was here that he met leaders of other militant Islamic groups, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of the Egyptian Jihad.

Osama's Kinsmen in Nigeria

A proof that Al-Qaeda is alive and well in Nigeria was when Kano, which Karl Meir, author of This House Has Fallen, describes as a city notorious for "pious mayhem" was once again plunged into confusion when Osama's death was announced by Obama.

Non-indigenes started to flee their homes located in potentially combustible areas and seeking sanctuary in military and police barracks, and safe areas like Sabon Gari, largely inhabited by non-indigenes.

It was for this reason that Dan Azumi Doma, the Commissioner of Police on election duty in the state, assured the people that there was "no cause for alarm, as the police have made adequate security arrangement to handle any possible threat to life and property".

That statement, to many Nigerians, was hardly reassuring. This is because people were aware of the presence of al-Qaeda in Nigeria.

In fact, when the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, in 2009 held a town hall meeting in Abuja, she warned that Nigeria could be a target for al-Qaeda. She argued: "Al-Qaeda has a presence in Northern Africa.

There is no doubt in our mind that al-Qaeda and like organizations that are part of the syndicate of terror would seek a foothold anywhere they could find one, and whether that is the case here or whether this is a home-grown example of fundamentalist extremism, that's up to the Nigerians to determine." In fact, since then, other proofs abound.

Boko Haram

Although the United States has eventually seen the end of bin Laden, ripples of the influence and impact of the fundamentalist cult persist. The bomb attacks witnessed during the last elections in Borno State have been linked to the Boko Haram Muslim fundamentalist group, which thrives on the full backing of the al-Qaeda.

The Boko Haram, which is against Western education, wants the imposition of Islamic law all over Nigeria. This, however, is just one of its demands. Others include that about 200 of its members still clamped in detention, should be set free.

In addition, those exiled should be allowed to return, seized Boko Haram mosques released and the sect given the liberty to carry on its religious activities as it deems fit.

After the bombings in the Maiduguri metropolis during the elections, which are the latest in a spate of terrorist attacks, the Boko Haram left a three-page statement outside a newspaper office in the city, warning that more attacks are to be expected from the fundamentalist sect.

Borno State, which has always prided itself as the home of peace, has had the slogan shattered over the last three years by the daredevilry of the Boko Haram sect. Although many of its members have paid the supreme price, with the police wiping them out in large numbers at every insurrection, the sect remains a threat to peace in Borno State.

Bomb attacks almost marred the conduct of the recent elections in the state. The first bomb blast occurred on 9 Apr, at Ungwar Doki, Maiduguri, near the Monday Market, close to the state High Court. Five people were seriously wounded in the incident, with one of the INEC officials losing both eyes and the intestines of another ripped out.

The bomb that caused the damage had been dropped in the polling unit surreptitiously, some minutes before the explosion.

At about 7 pm on the same day, six hours after the first blast occurred, there was another detonation in Abbaganaram, also in the Maiduguri metropolis, adding six more victims to the casualty list. This incident took place after the elections had already been concluded.

The indiscriminate bomb attacks continued during the presidential election on 16 Apr. An explosion occurred in the densely populated Mobungaranam area in the morning of the election, killing three people, including a policeman, and injuring 14 others.

A day before, a bomb was thrown into a police van at Kasuwan Shanu junction, a popular cattle market in the Maiduguri metropolis.

Three more blasts occurred on the day of the presidential election at Bama Road, Gwangwe and Baga Road.

At Baga Road, the targets were passers-by. Between 9 and 16 Apr, nine bomb explosions were recorded in Maiduguri. At 10 pm on 8 Apr, the eve of the National Assembly elections, Senator Ali Modu Sheriff, the outgoing governor of Borno made a 10-minute television broadcast to people of the state.

After the English version of his speech, he had to break it down into a Kanuri translation for all and sundry to understand. And his speech was on the conduct of the next day's election, with particular emphasis on the Boko Haram dread.

Sheriff urged all prospective voters to go out the next day to cast their votes, promising absolute security. He also attempted to dispel the palpable fear that the Boko Haram was poised to disrupt the exercise.

In the broadcast, Sheriff, who has been governor for eight years, after a four - year term at the Senate, said that all security agents, including the police and the army, were on standby to ensure safety for all. But in spite of the guarantees, the elections turned out to be bloody.

Considering their antecedents, the Boko Haram does not issue empty threats. And the sect has never hidden the fact that it is always able and willing to unleash terror if the Borno State government does not grant its wishes.

After the killing of Alhaji Modu Funami Gubio, then ANPP Borno State's gubernatorial candidate, together with Sheriff's younger brother and six others on the same spot earlier in the year, the outgoing governor came out with claims that political rivals were responsible.

But the Boko Haram group countered the governor's claim. According to them, the bullets that fell Gubio and seven others with him, came from the guns of Boko Haram adherents.

Sheriff's claim that the Boko Haram could not have carried out the hit was based on his reasoning that the killings were too clinical and professional with the bullets hitting their targets on the head. The Boko Haram pattern, which he claims to be abreast of, was to "usually rush in and rush out, shoot in the air and run into hiding."

But the patterns of past attacks and even the very recent ones credited to the sect are a clear departure from that. Boko Haram's recent attacks have always been daring and bold and they usually go for the kill. They cannot be so easily pinned down because their tactics vary. They have been known to employ guerrilla tactics when confronting security agents.

Statistics at the end of 2010 show that the sect was responsible for the death of about 40 people in Borno State even as it has killed more policemen than civilians.

On the first Saturday of December 2010 for instance, all hell was let loose when some suspected Boko Haram gunmen attacked some members of Operation Flush - the elite joint military and police state security task force-at the Kasuwan Shanu area of Maiduguri.

For more than two hours, a gun battle raged. Two members of the Boko Haram group and three civilians were killed. Four days later, they launched another attack on security operatives at a check point at Zannari area, also in Maiduguri. They burnt down a joint task force patrol vehicle after laying an ambush for them while they were on patrol at Zannari.

Al-Qaeda is synonymous with bomb attacks. And since Boko Haram enjoys its backing, the recent bomb blasts underline the ties between the two fundamentalist groups. The al-Qaeda group has continued to spread its tentacles of terror around the world.

The Jos Blasts

Those who exploded bombs that killed people in Jos, Plateau State on Christmas Eve of 2010, were linked to the al-Qaeda. There were four simultaneous explosions at Kabong in Gada Biu area of Jos North, while another one was detonated in front of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Kabong.

The Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad [JALJ], a Muslim sect which claimed responsibility, posted its claims on its web site, http://mansoorah.net/sb_attacks.php. Security officials said that the group had links with the al-Qaeda.

According to experts, the manner of the Jos bombings bore the hallmark of the al-Qaeda which has the inclination of claiming responsibility for multiple and simultaneous bombings with heavy casualties, as well as video postings in Arabic language.

JALJ claimed that it was working under the leadership of Abu Muhammad and Abubakar bin Muhammad Shekau and reminded Muslims that "Allah enjoined them to make provisions for fighting disbelievers, since they (disbelievers) are fighting Islam and its faithful."

The group also claimed responsibility for the bombing in a church in Borno State that claimed four lives.

Security checks revealed that the website was created on 21 Sep 2010 and hosted on a server in Columbus, Ohio, United States with the registered domain name help centre given as <http://tucowsdomains.com/>.

Further investigation revealed that "the characters behind the group's website showed that it was registered by one Aliyu Dahiru of 12 Dankura Street, Gandun Albasa, off Zoo Road, Kano, with the domain name of mansoorah.net." Aliyu also has a telephone number +1.2348028539. He claimed to have a degree from the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University in Bauchi and also has a Face-book account.

However, Mr. Olusola Amore, the police force public relations officer, said that the police have arrested seven suspects over the crisis, adding: "We cannot rule out the fact that the group may be

working with al-Qaeda or others, but the police have arrested seven persons and investigations will unearth others involved in the crisis."

Eyewitnesses said that no fewer than 30 people were killed in the blasts. Moreover, the United States said that al-Qaeda was the financier, the planner, and the executor of the Abuja bomb blasts.

Al-Qaeda House Demolished

When the Kano State government received security reports on the activities of Boko Haram members in the state in 2009, it invited and warned the sect leader, Malam Salisu Yusuf Aljasawy. Equally, the State Security Service also invited and warned him of the implications of his utterances that were "inimical to the peace" of the state.

According to Sule Yau Sule, government spokesman, when the state government realized the ideology of the religious sect after the Wudil incident, "it quickly directed that the man's house and adjoining mosque in Wudil be demolished."

Detroit Terror Attack: Profile of Umar Farouk AbdulMutallab

Another proof of the al-Qaeda presence in Nigeria was how Umar Farouk AbdulMutallab, son of Alhaji Umaru Mutallab, a native of Funtua and former chairman of First Bank, wanted to take the lives of 278 passengers aboard an America-bound airliner on Christmas Eve in 2009.

To his classmates and teachers at the British School of Lome, in Togo, West Africa, Umar Farouk AbdulMutallab was the cheerful, if sometimes serious, student whose pious views earned him the nickname, the Pope.

According to a Daily Telegraph report, his former history teacher at the school, Mike Rimmer, remembered him as a model pupil but admitted that he had some radical views in his teenage years.

Mr Rimmer told the medium: "In 2001 we discussed the Taliban in class. All the other Muslim kids thought they were a bunch of nuts with beards, and could not understand why they did such things as banning kite flying, but Umar seemed to think that was reasonable." And because of his pious and high-minded attitude, his mates called him 'The Pope' or 'Alfa'.

Mutallab later attended the University College London to study mechanical engineering, where, in his leisure times, he wore a skullcap. He thereafter moved to Egypt, and then Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, where he studied for an MBA before dropping out to take some Arabic and Islamic courses.

After the failed bombing, FBI agents said that Mutallab confessed making contact via the internet with a radical imam in Yemen "who then connected him with al-Qaeda leaders in a village north of the country's capital, Sanaa."

Concerned about his son, his father reported his activities to the United States' Embassy in Abuja as well as to Nigerian security agencies.

The Kaduna Bomb Factory

On 23 Apr, security agents discovered a bomb-making factory, which was disguised as a residential building in Kaduna. The factory is located at the Rafin Guza area of Kaduna North Local Government, a few kilometers to the main city.

Mr. Haruna John, the police commissioner in charge of election duties in Kaduna State, said that was the place where a bomb exploded the previous day, killing one and injuring eight others.

Haruna said that the inspector general of police, Hafiz Ringim, "has constituted a high-powered investigation team which will soon arrive in Kaduna to investigate the various bomb explosions in the state and other parts of the country with a view to bringing the culprits and their sponsors to book."

Men of the state security service, the military, and the police have begun intense investigations into the sources of the bombs, while the team set up by the police boss, led by an assistant inspector general, will soon arrive in Kaduna to join in the investigations, the commissioner added.

In 2006, a caricature of Prophet Mohammed by a Danish newspaper, reproduced by some media in Europe, sparked off violence in major cities in northern Nigeria, leaving over 127 people dead.

What the Nigerian Government Can Do

Since it has been established that al-Qaeda is present in Nigeria, security analysts have said that one of the steps the government needs to adopt is community policing. In other words, if cops are made to work in their own communities, they will be able to fish out all dangerous elements.

"When there is a crisis in Lagos, for example, when you see policemen in Lagos speaking Igbo, Hausa or Fulfulde, that does not make for effective policing," an analyst told The NEWS in Lagos.

The United States' Federal Bureau of Investigations, probing the post-election explosions in Nigeria, said in its preliminary report that local affiliated terrorist cells provided support on the ground.

The Bureau said that it "conclusively found that the signature of the bomb matched other blasts by the terror network", and that some bombs "are made to serve as warning with little damage while others are made to achieve as much collateral damage and deaths as possible, which is the hallmark of al-Qaeda."

As a result, Obama has approved a request by Nigeria for a permanent FBI counter-terrorism unit in the country.

"These agents normally do investigations after a blast but their job in Abuja may now include preventing these blasts through better security coordination and surveillance," a US official told the media, adding that they would also train Nigerians on how to detect and deal with local terror groups.

Thus, President Goodluck Jonathan, apart from awarding a contract for the installation of close-circuit security cameras at sensitive locations nationwide, including airports, bridges, roads, hotels, and other places, has vowed to also keep an eye on Islamic scholars visiting Nigeria from the Middle East whose teachings are deemed inflammatory.

"Groups like the Boko Haram are being influenced and financed by extremist foreign religious leaders and groups with the intention of overthrowing the Nigerian Government. It is the responsibility of the government to cut such ties and funding in the interest of national security," the US Homeland Department officials warned.

In pursuance of achieving the measure, the Central Bank of Nigeria has directed that all banks should tell their customers to update their data because, according to the US government, "it was discovered that thousands of fictitious accounts are being used by suspected terror groups to move vast amounts of money to finance their training and operation. Hopefully the policy will close that window and cut off the funds."