

# TERRORIST GROUPS IN AFRICA

Matthew Henman considers some of the biggest threats to African stability

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## Boko Haram



A poster in Maiduguri showing Boko Haram suspects wanted by the Nigerian army

Jamaat Ahl al-Sunna li Dawa wal-Jihad, better known as Boko Haram, is a militant Islamist group fighting for the implementation of sharia (Islamic law) in Nigeria, and is primarily active in the Northern states of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Kano, Bauchi, and Kaduna. The group's origins lie in the Yusufiyya Islamist movement established in Borno in the early 2000s by Mohammed Yusuf, a radical young cleric. Following mounting harassment by the security forces, the mainstream Yusufiyya movement led by Yusuf launched an uprising along with the Nigerian Taliban in July 2009. While this was crushed, the group re-emerged as a series of local factions under the nominal leadership of Imam Abubakar bin Mohammed (alias Abubakar Shekau) and launched a guerrilla campaign in late 2010. In the subsequent

years, the group's capabilities developed significantly. Although initially focused on security force and Government targets, the group's targeting has since broadened, and from 2013 it has mounted an increasingly brutal campaign against the civilian population in its areas of operation, which it claims is in reprisal for the population's support of the Government's counter-insurgency campaign. A series of mass-casualty attacks on Nigerian schools in late 2013 and early 2014, most notably the abduction of 276 female students in the town of Chibok in Borno State in April 2014, gained the group international notoriety, and it became the subject of increasing regional and international attention.

By early 2015, violence in the Northern states of Nigeria - which was mirrored by attacks in

Cameroon, Chad, and Niger - prompted the rescheduling of Nigeria's 14 February general election and the launching of a regional multinational offensive against the group. While the group ceded control of all territory seized to the multinational regional forces, it did not seemingly suffer substantial losses and retains a significant insurgent capability. Separately, in an audio statement released on social media on 7 March, the largest faction of Boko Haram, led by Shekau, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, with the pledge formally accepted by the Islamic State on 12 March. The group subsequently rebranded itself as the Islamic State's Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya and maintained a steady tempo of attacks in both North-East Nigeria and neighbouring countries over the remainder of 2015.



## Al-Shabaab

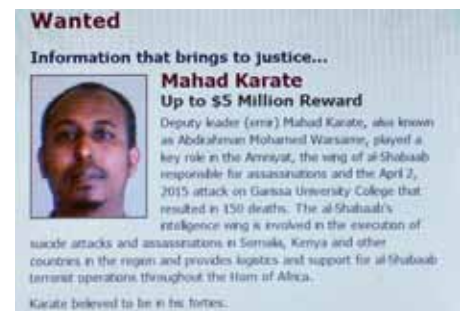
Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen is a militant Islamist group based in Southern and central Somalia. It is committed to expelling all foreign forces from Somalia, overthrowing the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), and establishing an Islamic state governed in accordance with its radical interpretation of sharia (Islamic law).

Founded in 2002 by a small group of Somali veterans of the jihadist training camps in Afghanistan, it became active in Mogadishu in 2003, and between 2004 and 2006 it operated as a militia affiliated with the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). Following the Ethiopian intervention and the defeat of the UIC in December 2006, Al-Shabaab evolved into an ideologically and organisationally distinct group, and quickly established itself as the leading insurgent outfit operating in the country. After the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces in January 2009, Al-Shabaab consolidated its position as the dominant actor in Somalia, controlling vast swathes of territory, including the majority of the capital, Mogadishu. However, the presence of African Union peacekeepers prevented Al-Shabaab from establishing complete control, and since the

intervention of Kenyan and Ethiopian forces in 2011, it has lost control of Mogadishu as well as extensive areas of Southern and central Somalia. During 2012 and 2013 the group successfully transitioned to guerrilla operations and it continues to carry out a high-intensity campaign targeting domestic and foreign security forces, and the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). In July 2010 Al-Shabaab demonstrated that it had the capability and intent to strike targets outside Somalia, when it carried out a mass casualty co-ordinated suicide bomb attack in the Ugandan capital Kampala, and Al-Shabaab's 21-24 September 2013 assault on the Westgate mall in the Kenyan capital Nairobi demonstrated that the group remains capable of carrying out high-profile mass casualty attacks beyond Somalia's borders.

Al-Shabaab suffered a series of significant blows to its leadership following several US counter-terrorism operations against the group in 2014 and early 2015, including the killing of Al-Shabaab leader Ahmad Abdi Aw Muhammad Godane (alias Sheikh Mukhtar Abu Zubayr) in a US airstrike on 1 September 2014. Yet, after a small drop in

operational tempo as Sheikh Ahmed Umar (alias Abu Ubaida) came to power, attacks by the group continued as normal, with a continuation of deadly suicide attacks in Mogadishu as well as cross-border assaults in Kenya, notably the group's attack on Garissa University on 2 April 2015 that killed at least 148 people. While Al-Shabaab continued to operate at a high-level across 2015, internal divisions have emerged with dissident factions pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.



**An image posted on the US department of state website, shows Al-Shabaab's spy chief Mahad Karate**

## Lord's Resistance Army

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is a loose-knit militant organisation led by Joseph Kony that operates in Northern Uganda, Southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR). The LRA was founded by Kony in 1991 following the renaming of the United Democratic Christian Movement/Army (UDCM/A), a religious group that splintered from the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), itself a group that emerged in opposition to the Government of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni.

The LRA was founded with the millenarian objective of overthrowing the Government of Museveni and replacing it with a Christian theocracy. The group began attacking civilian targets throughout Northern Uganda in the late nineties and the LRA was soon carrying out similar such operations in the DRC, CAR, and Southern Sudan. In response to the LRA's continued attacks against civilians, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Kony and four senior LRA commanders in 2005 on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Following the ICC indictments, the LRA engaged in negotiations with the Ugandan Government, leading to the

signing of a permanent ceasefire in early 2008 ahead of the signing of a peace agreement. However, the agreement was scuppered by Kony at the last minute and LRA violence increased notably across the group's area of operations. This violence led to a series of co-ordinated regional counter-terrorism offensives against the group, severely depleting its strength. As such, the LRA's primary

objective is that of survival, with only small groups of militants scattered throughout the cross-border region between Uganda, the DRC, Sudan, and the CAR. Nevertheless, it retains some low-level capability and the intent to continue attacking civilian targets, as it demonstrated by the continuation of sporadic attacks in the DRC, CAR, and South Sudan since 2012.



**Members of a self-defence group stand guard against attacks from the Lord's Resistance Army**

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## Sudan Revolutionary Front



*Sudanese forces and civilians celebrate after regaining control of a town controlled by the Sudan Revolutionary Front*

The Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) is a militant coalition comprised of three Darfur-based groups, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army - Abdel Wahid (SLM/A-Abdel Wahid) and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army - Minni Minnawi (SLM/A-Minnawi), in addition to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army - North (SPLM/A-North), which is based in the South of the country. The coalition primarily operates across Darfur, and the Southern states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, which border South Sudan. The SRF was formed on 12 November 2011, with the objective of overthrowing President Omar al-Bashir and his National Congress Party (NCP) Government through "popular and military means", and establishing a secular democratic state.

For most of 2013, the SRF engaged in a series of ongoing clashes with army forces across South Kordofan as the army attempted to force the coalition to withdraw from strategic positions in the state, culminating in a two-month long counter-insurgency offensive against the SPLM/A-North – which forms the majority of SRF fighters in the South near to the border with South Sudan, which is governed by the SPLM/A – in November. Attacks against security forces continued in other SRF areas of operation, most notably the killing of nine soldiers in Central Darfur on 13 December 2013. Khartoum also claimed that JEM and the SPLM/A-North were re-grouping in South Sudan, which borders South Kordofan, during this time, accusing Juba of providing a safe passage for fighters. In March 2014, a total of 171

people - including at least 10 civilians and 78 security force members - were killed in two separate attacks by the SLM/A-Minnawi, SLM/A-Abdel Wahid, and a splinter faction of the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) - itself a JEM splinter group - in North Darfur State, demonstrating that SRF components remained capable of conducting large-scale attacks against Government forces, despite a general decrease in verifiable attacks since late 2013. Indeed, on 12 March 2015, the SFR killed 24 people in an attack on security forces and pro-Government militiamen in South Kordofan, successfully besieging several Government buildings before being repelled. However, this was only one of three confirmed attacks conducted by SRF groups between 1 January and the end of May, amid the re-election of Bashir as president in mid-April.