

ISIS's Alliance with Congolese Militants Fueled by Ugandan Members

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 28 June, Quebec's French-language *lapresse.ca*, which covers national and international affairs from multiple ideological perspectives, reported in the excerpted article on bombings in Beni, Congo. The article noted on 27 June there was a bombing at a Catholic church and another suicide bombing at a bar near a mosque, both attributed to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)'s local affiliate. As a result, according to the article, people in Beni were psychologically affected and feared venturing into the streets, with children staying home from school and markets closing early. Meanwhile, Congolese security forces erected checkpoints to prevent any other potential attackers from entering Beni.

According to the article, the suicide bomber's identification documents, and prisoners who knew him, revealed he was Ugandan. Aware of the difficulty in intercepting potential future suicide bombers, the security forces asked citizens to report on any suspicious activities. This reflects the ongoing challenges Congo is having in quashing the rising insurgency around Beni.

The ISIS affiliate has also been analyzed elsewhere in African media,

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including on 8 May by the Senegalese French-language website *dakaractu.com*, which covers Senegalese and Francophone African affairs from a neutral perspective. It showed that Ugandans have long been part of the affiliate, including former leader Jamiil Mukulu. He is a Uganda-born Christian who converted to Islam, opposed the Ugandan government, and established the Allied Defense Forces (ADF)'s international links in exile in Congo, while recruiting along the Congo-Uganda border.

The ADF evolved into the Beni-based ISIS affiliate now called Islamic State in Central Africa Province in 2019, which was three years after Mukulu's arrest in Tanzania and the succession of Musa Baluku. After Baluka took power, according to the article, a Kenyan named Waleed Zbu Zein, who had lived in Uganda, formalized the ADF's pledge of loyalty to ISIS.

Source: “Les ADF : la très méconnue branche de l'État Islamique en RDC (The ADF: the little-known branch of the Islamic State in the DRC.),” *dakaractu.com* (Senegalese French language news source), 8 May 2021. https://www.dakaractu.com/Les-ADF-la-tres-meconnue-branche-de-l-Etat-Islamique-en-RDC_a203170.html

Far from renouncing his religious convictions against the backdrop of the establishment of an Islamic State in Uganda, Jamil Mukulu, Hussein Mohammed as his Islamic name, set up the Salaf Foundation with an armed wing called the Movement of Ugandan Freedom Fighters (UMFF).

At the same time, a local recruitment strategy was activated through marriages. This was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that two communities belong to the same ethnic group. The majority in the region of Beni, the Nandé ethnic group, is also present in Uganda under the name of Kondjo.

Mukulu's arrest did not put an end to the activities of the ADF. Musa Baluku took control of the Ugandan Islamist militia. Under his leadership, the group set more ambitious goals. For Musa Baluku, the ADF must belong to a larger global movement. Also mentioned has been financial support mobilized by ISIS for the ADF through a Kenyan citizen named Waleed Ahmed Zein. To the ADF, the amounts sent by the Kenyan financier would be between \$500 and \$7,000. Still, the ADF were not recognized as an integral part of ISIS until 2019. Obviously, ISIS tried to benefit from these external branches. Its leader, Musa Baluku, said “there is no more ADF...we are a province, the Central African Province, which is one province among the many provinces that make up ISIS.”

Source: “Beni sous le choc au lendemain des attaques à la bombe (Beni in shock in aftermath of bomb attacks),” *lapresse.ca* (Quebec based French language news outlet), 28 June 2021. <https://www.lapresse.ca/international/afrique/2021-06-28/attaque-islamiste-dans-une-eglise/beni-sous-le-choc-au-lendemain-des-attaques-a-la-bombe.php>

In the morning, motorcycle taxis and several private cars circulated timidly on the streets of Beni while the doors of shops, boutiques, markets, and restaurants remained closed until early afternoon. Schoolchildren in blue and white uniforms who are usually ubiquitous did not come out all day, per orders by the authorities. The authorities have increased the number of checkpoints on access to the city of Beni, demanding to verify identity documents.

On Sunday evening, a bomb-carrier was killed when his device exploded near a bar and not far from a mosque. Earlier in the day, a bomb explosion in a Catholic church injured two women. A similar device exploded on Saturday night, near a gas station on the outskirts of town, without causing damage.

The army indicated that “the suicide bomber who blew himself up is a subject of Ugandan origin. ADF prisoners corroborated information about his identity.