

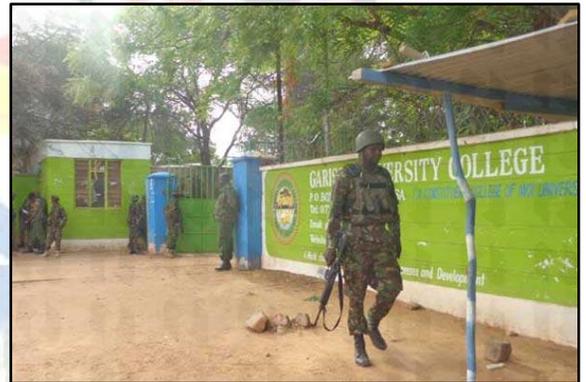


## Al-Shabaab Attacks Garissa University College in Kenya

Information Cutoff: 4:00 p.m. on April 2, 2015

### Key Points

- On April 2, a team of gunmen attacked Garissa University College in Kenya, targeting students, teachers, and staff in the area.
- At least 147 people have been killed and dozens were injured, several of them critically.
- A siege of the university by the attackers lasted for more than nine hours. Following a counterterrorism operation by the Kenyan security forces, it appears that the assault has ended.
- The attack reportedly involved the deliberate targeting of Christians, several of whom were held hostage in one of the university's residential buildings.
- At least four attackers were killed and one was arrested.
- The foreign terrorist organization al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.



Security forces at the front gate of Garissa University College

### Attack Details

On April 2, at approximately 5:30 a.m. (local time) a team of 4 to 10 gunmen attacked Garissa University College in eastern Kenya, roughly 90 miles from the Somali border, with assault weapons and explosives. The assailants opened fire, leaving at least 147 dead and dozens wounded, with most suffering from bullet and/or shrapnel injuries. Several of those victims are in critical condition and casualty reports continue to rise. The attack reportedly began when gunmen opened fire on security guards at the front gate of the university and forced their way onto campus. There are conflicting reports that a blast may have also occurred at the gate.

A siege of the university lasted for more than nine hours and after consistent reports that Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) were on scene and exchanging gunfire with the assailants, the counterterrorism operation appears to have ended. As many as 500 students have reportedly been rescued out of the 815 enrolled at the university. All staff have been accounted for. There were reports of masked gunmen holding an unknown number of Kenyan Christians hostage in one of the University's four residential buildings which were later cleared by Kenyan security forces. Al-Shabaab, a U.S.

designated foreign terrorist organization and the East African affiliate of al-Qa'ida, has claimed responsibility. In a statement released shortly after the attack began, Sheikh Abdiasis Abu Musab, al-Shabaab's military operations spokesman, claimed that the gunmen separated Muslims from Christians, releasing the former while taking the latter hostage or killing them. At least four attackers were killed and one was arrested. The United States International University—Africa, Kenyatta University in Nairobi, and the University of Nairobi have all issued security alerts to its students, in some cases referring to a specific terrorism threat against universities. In the aftermath of this attack, Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta has vowed to accelerate the recruitment of 10,000 new police officers.

### **Assessment & Analysis**

Given the targeting of Christians in this assault, it appears likely that the operation was timed to coincide with the upcoming Easter holiday, as students on campus were reportedly preparing to leave for break. There are numerous reports that the University was poorly protected, with only a handful of security guards and police officers assigned to its gates which likely made it vulnerable to an attack. Al-Shabaab maintains an affiliate in Kenya identified as "al-Muhajiroun—Emigrants of East Africa," which has threatened attacks in the region and recently released the first issue of an online English-language jihadist magazine entitled *AMKA*.

This attack follows numerous reports this month of concerns of al-Shabaab attacks throughout the Horn of Africa region, including in Kenya, Djibouti, and Uganda, and follows a high-profile mass casualty attack on a hotel in Mogadishu last week that left at least 17 dead. Both the United States and the United Kingdom have recently issued warnings about the threat of terrorism in the region.

Local media accounts claimed that authorities in early March were warning of an alleged al-Shabaab plot referred to as "3M" for Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Mandera County (Kenya). Despite a multi-national military campaign against al-Shabaab which has led to the group losing control of key areas in Somalia and an amnesty policy by the Somali government aimed at encouraging members of the terrorist organization to surrender, al-Shabaab maintains an enduring ability to carry out high-profile mass casualty attacks in its area of operation. In February 2015, al-Shabaab released a propaganda video via its Al-Kataib media front that in addition to threatening attacks throughout East Africa also included a broad call for extremist sympathizers in the West to conduct attacks against major commercial retail centers, specifically mentioning high-profile shopping malls in Canada, France, UK, and the United States.

In March 2015, the United States conducted an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operation in Somalia, which resulted in the death of Adan Garaar, a senior operational leader of al-Shabaab. Earlier, the U.S. Department of Defense confirmed that it conducted an airstrike on January 31, 2015, which killed Yusuf Dheeq, the external operations commander of al-Shabaab, responsible for planning and conducting strikes beyond Somalia. Additionally, on September 1, 2014, Ahmed Abdi Godane, the former leader of al-Shabaab, was killed in a U.S. UAV strike. His successor, Ahmed Omar Abu Ubaidah, has vowed to avenge Godane's death.

### **Implications for New York**

- Schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions have been attacked by terrorist organizations abroad as a way of increasing psychological impact by targeting children and young adults.
- Multi-phased coordinated active shooter attacks may ultimately conclude in hostage-taking situations.
- Coordinated attacks against educational institutions likely require extensive pre-operational surveillance and information gathering in order to exploit potential vulnerabilities in security. Security personnel should therefore be alert to suspicious behavior and activities, including loitering near potential target locations, extensive photography, testing of perimeter fences, and probing questions regarding safety procedures and personnel.
- High-profile arrests of terrorists and trials associated with these individuals may be met with calls for retaliation and potentially elevate the risk of solidarity attacks carried out by both foreign terrorist organizations and homegrown violent extremists.
- Public and private-sector security personnel are encouraged to remain informed on developments pertaining to foreign terrorist organizations, as key actions including propaganda statements by extremist leaders, attacks, and military operations may motivate sympathizers in the West to conduct violent attacks.
- Public vigilance and awareness campaigns such as the “If you see something, say something” initiative play an important role in identifying suspicious behavior, unattended packages, bags, and other items which could be used in terrorist attacks to conceal an IED or other weapons.
- Information sharing and prompt reporting of suspicious indicators between the public, private-sector security personnel, and law enforcement is vital to the deterrence, detection, and disruption of terrorist activity and the prevention of attacks.

#### Sources

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