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Railway Alert Network (RAN) Situational Awareness Message: UPDATE 1 – Al-Shabaab Terrorists Assault University in Kenya

April 3, 2015

Executive Summary:

- **At least 147 people are confirmed killed** in yesterday's assault by Al-Shabaab terrorists at Garissa University College in eastern Kenya.
- Al-Shabaab is an Al Qaeda affiliated terrorist organization based in Somalia, where Kenyan military forces have been engaged in counterterrorism operations since October 2011.
- More than 500 students reportedly escaped the campus.
- Accounts by eyewitnesses confirm that Christians were specifically targeted for execution.
- BBC News reports that more than 20 security officers are among the dead – killed during the attack by an Al-Shabaab sniper on the campus.
- Kenyan authorities assert that security forces killed four of the attackers; a fifth is reportedly under arrest.
- Police in neighboring Uganda report that country is on high alert – based on information gathered that indicates Al-Shabaab is planning a similar attack there.
- **Neither this incident, nor any accompanying threats, have prompted any change in the terrorism alert level in the United States or Canada.**

Detailed Discussion:

Casualties: Authorities in Kenya have confirmed that **at least 147 people have been killed**, many of them students and Christians, in the assault by Al-Shabaab terrorists at Garissa University College in the eastern part of the country.



The continuing media coverage cites governmental sources in Kenya as stating the number of dead is likely to rise considerably.

Escape: Reports indicate that **more than 500 students managed to escape** the campus during the attack or in its aftermath.

Attackers: Kenyan government officials assert that security forces cornered the attackers in one of the dormitories during counterterrorism and rescue operations yesterday.

- **Four of the attackers are reported dead.** Accounts vary on whether they were killed by security forces or committed suicide by detonating vests laden with explosive devices.
- **A fifth attacker has reportedly been arrested.**
- Witness statements have produced varying figures on the number of attackers involved in the operation, with some citing as many as 13 and others not more than 5 or 6.
- The attackers reportedly used automatic weapons and hand grenades throughout the assault and wore either some form of body armor or suicide bomb vests.

Witnesses: The witness accounts confirm reporting yesterday that:

- The attackers identified themselves as Al-Shabaab, shouting “We are Al-Shabaab” and “We came to kill or finally be killed”;
- The assault opened with indiscriminate firing upon students – both those out of doors and gathering for morning prayers and those who were either asleep or preparing for the day in their dormitories.
- As the attack proceeded, Christians were singled out and executed, with gunmen reportedly shouting questions and using other means to determine religious affiliation.
- Some reports indicate that some Christians were beheaded, though these accounts are not confirmed by Kenyan authorities.

Further, the reported statements of witnesses indicate that the attackers had prepared well, demonstrating familiarity with campus facilities and schedules.

- As noted in the BBC News article extracted below, surviving student Helen Titus, age 21, recounted to the Associated Press that as the terrorists began their assault they moved quickly to the main lecture hall, at which Christian students regularly gather at that early hour for morning prayer.
- She added, “They investigated our area. They knew everything.”

Security Concerns: Another surviving witness, who reportedly hid in bushes on the campus for more than five hours during the assault, stated that students had raised concerns over campus security in late 2014. In response, reporting indicates that only two armed guards had been provided.

Kenyan authorities state that 20 security officers were killed by an Al-Shabaab sniper during the attack – without specifying whether these officers were armed.

As noted in the initial RAN message on this incident, news media have reported that an “Internal Memo” issued by the “University of Nairobi Security Department” on March 25, 2015, warned, “Intelligence reports indicate that the al shabaab terror group is planning retaliatory attacks on vital installations in Nairobi including a major university.”

Analysis:

Preparation: As the investigation of this incident proceeds, focus should be placed on indicators of preparatory actions that were either missed outright or observed but their significance went unrecognized.

- As the account by surviving student Helen Titus indicates, the attackers knew the campus facility and schedule very well.
- This attack did not simply target sleeping or rising students in the very early morning in their dormitories.
- The attackers knew that students would be gathered in large numbers in other areas as well during the 5:00 to 5:30 am period – near the mosque, in the lecture hall where Christians assembled for morning prayer, in classrooms studying in advance of scheduled exams.

Motivation: Al-Shabaab asserts that its principal motivation for attacking civilians in Kenya is the deployment of Kenyan military forces in counterterrorism operations in Somalia.

- The Kenyan military has been fighting against Al-Shabaab in Somalia since the initial deployment in October 2011.
- At the same time, religion is clearly a driving factor as well. Al-Shabaab specifically strives to discriminate in its killings, targeting Christians for execution while sparing and releasing Muslims.
- The terrorist group employed the same tactical approach in two other recent deadly attacks in Kenya:
 - Deploying a team with automatic weapons and explosives at the Westgate Mall in the capital Nairobi in a siege that endured over a 4-day period in September 2013 (more than 60 killed and 175 wounded or injured); and
 - Hijacking by a group of as many as 20 terrorists of a bus bound for Nairobi from northern Kenya in November 2014 (28 people killed out of 60 on board).
 - In both of these attacks, gunmen singled out Christians for execution and freed Muslims without further harm beyond that which had resulted in the initial assault.

Terror Alert Level:

Now high throughout Kenya, with a dusk to dawn curfew in effect throughout the eastern and northeastern parts of the country.

The attack has united political parties across the spectrum of ideologies, as reflected in the #OneKenya campaign instituted on social media.



Ugandan authorities have reportedly raised the terrorism alert level in light of threats by Al-Shabaab of a similar attack there.

As noted in yesterday's RAN Message on this incident, American military and intelligence operations have targeted Al-Shabaab in Somalia, in particular leaders believed involved in the planning and execution of the Westgate Mall attack.

However, there has been **no indication from governmental authorities in the United States or Canada of a specific or credible threat of attack in North America or of an increase in the countries' respective terrorism alert levels.**

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You may also share this information with colleagues in local and State law enforcement, State fusion centers, and Federal security and law enforcement agencies.

Association of American Railroads

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Kenya al-Shabab attack: Victims' bodies sent to Nairobi

BBC News – April 3, 2015 (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32173001>)

The bodies of many of those killed by Islamist militants at a Kenyan university are being moved to the capital Nairobi for identification.

At least 147 people died when al-Shabab militants stormed Garissa University in north-eastern Kenya, near Somalia.

Four of the gunmen involved were killed by security forces.

Police in neighbouring Uganda say the country is on high alert after receiving information that Al-Shabab was planning a similar attack there.

The mortuaries in Garissa have been unable to cope, and many of the students killed came from other parts of the country.

The BBC's Anne Soy saw ambulances leaving the Garissa campus on Friday. Hundreds of survivors are also being sent home.

Burials for the Muslims killed in the attack are expected to start taking place.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed across north-eastern Kenya.

Christians targeted

The masked attackers rampaged through the campus at dawn on Thursday, shooting and shouting "we are al-Shabab".

A second-year student who hid for 10 hours in a wardrobe is one of about 500 survivors still being held at a military facility, where they are undergoing counselling.

Her father drove for four hours from Nairobi when he was unable to get hold of her during the siege. He told the BBC about his desperate search for his daughter at the mortuary, hospital and military airstrip. Late in the afternoon, when he had almost given up hope, he got a text: "Dad call me". They have yet to be reunited but his relief is palpable.

Questions are being asked about the university's security. One survivor, who hid in bushes for five hours, told the BBC that students had raised the issue at the end of last year, but only two armed guards had been provided. One of the few students from the local community, he said he would never set foot on the campus again.

Eyewitnesses describe attack

The heavily armed gunmen killed two security guards first, then fired indiscriminately at students, many of whom were still asleep in their dormitories. They singled out Christians and shot them, witnesses said.

Eric Wekesa, a student at Garissa, told Reuters he locked himself in his room before eventually fleeing.

"What I managed to hear from them is 'We came to kill or finally be killed.' That's what they said."

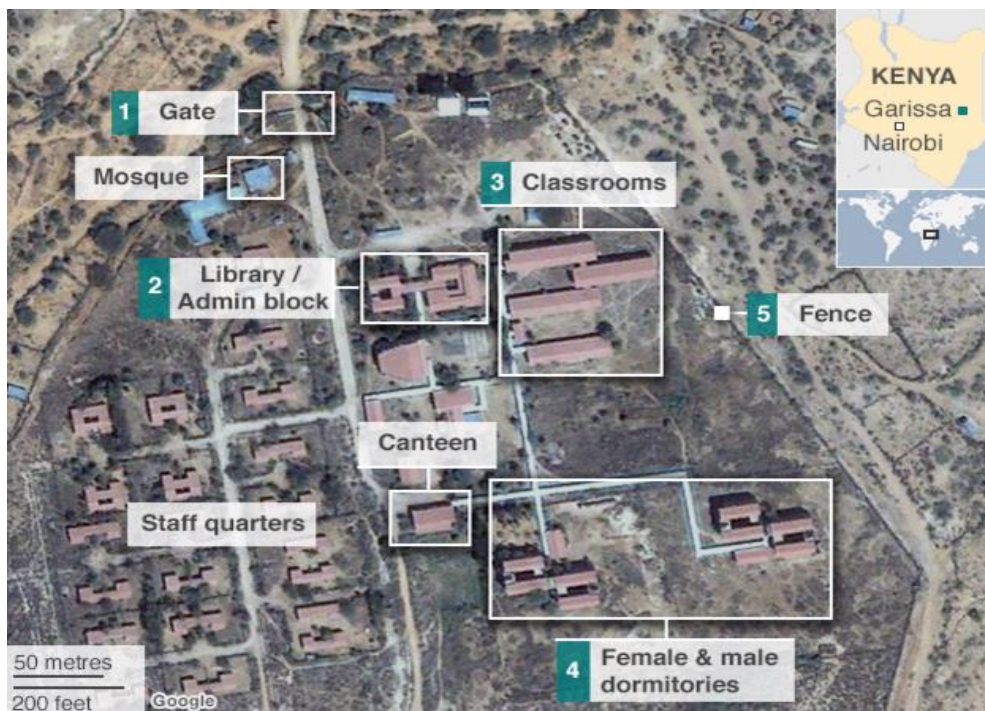
Another survivor, Helen Titus, told the news agency AP that one of the first things the gunmen did when they assaulted the campus was head for the lecture hall, where Christian students were gathered for morning prayer.

"They investigated our area. They knew everything," the 21-year-old said.

While many of the survivors speak to the media, little is known so far about those who were killed.

The BBC's Frenny Jowi says Kenyan media are cautious in their coverage because of a new anti-terrorism law that stipulates heavy fines for material "likely to cause fear".

How attack unfolded



1. Militants enter the university grounds, two guards are shot dead
 2. Shooting begins within the campus
 3. Students attacked in their classrooms while preparing for exams
 4. Gunmen believed isolated in the female dormitories
 5. Some students make an escape through the fence
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More than 20 security officers were killed by a sniper at the university, the BBC's Caroline Karobia reports.

The gunmen were eventually cornered in a dormitory by Kenyan security forces. Four of them died when their suicide vests detonated. A fifth gunman was reportedly arrested.

Al-Shabab, which is linked to al-Qaeda, said it carried out the attack. The group says it is at war with Kenya, which sent troops to Somalia in 2011 to fight the militants.

Al-Shabab was also blamed for the Westgate Mall massacre in Nairobi in 2013 in which 67 people died.

Kenyan authorities are to hold an emergency meeting to assess security in the region. There has been criticism that Garissa should have been better protected.

The government has offered a reward of \$53,000 (£36,000) for the man it says planned the killing - Mohamed Kuno, a former Kenyan schoolteacher, now thought to be in Somalia.

On Friday, the government also issued a list of nine other wanted al-Shabab leaders, urging the public to contact the police immediately if they spotted them.

At a joint news conference local religious leaders condemned the attack and appealed for unity.

Speaking during a Good Friday service in Mombasa, Anglican Church bishop Julius Kalu said "terrorists wanted to divide the country into religious factions and that must be resisted".

A student who left Garissa before the attack to go on her Easter break told the BBC there had been tension between the majority Christian student body and hardline Muslims in the town.

When she joined the university last year she was warned not to openly carry a bible to church on Sunday as Christian students had been attacked before.
