

Attack on Westgate Shopping Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, September 2013 *Analysis and Insights*

** It is important to note that the information provided in this analysis is derived from information collected from open sources only and made available to date to the general public. There is still much information regarding the attack not reported or made public at this time.*

Brief Timeline of Major Events

DAY 1: Saturday September 21

- At around noon local time on September 21, 2013 a reported 10 to 15 gunmen stormed the Westgate Shopping Centre armed with assault weapons and grenades from three points: (1) drove up to the main entrance; (2) via a rooftop car part; and, (3) down a ramp to a basement area.
- At the time of the attack, the building complex, which has six levels housing shopping, eating and leisure as well as offices and a basement, was packed with shoppers and people having lunch.



Westgate Mall diagram, Nairobi, Kenya

- Witness reported that the gunmen went from store to store shooting people and then took hostages.
- The Somalia-based Al-Shabaab terror group claimed responsibility for the attack as retaliation for Kenya's involvement in an African Union military effort against the group, which is al Qaeda's proxy in Somalia. In 2011, the Kenyan military was part of a peacekeeping force that defeated al-Shabaab forces to liberate the key Somali port of Kismayo.



Scenes from inside the Shopping Centre and people fleeing the mall following the attack

- Al-Shabaab stated that the attackers targeted non-Muslims and vowed that they would not negotiate for the lives of the hostages. According to reports from surviving witnesses,

gunmen asked customers whether they were Muslim and allowed Muslims to escape from the mall.

- Police and security force response was initially focused on rescuing civilians trapped inside the mall. Approximately an hour into the attack, security forces entered the building and a gun battle ensued between police and the attackers. Armed forces and helicopters were deployed. Gunfire and explosions continued overnight.

DAY 2: Sunday September 22

- Gunfire erupted at various times throughout the day between al-Shabaab terrorists and security forces inside the mall and surrounding perimeter areas as Kenyan military and security forces decided to launch an assault on the mall. Helicopters landed on the roof late in the afternoon in an operation to retake the mall.
- According to Kenyan reports, 'most of the hostages' and survivors were evacuated from the shopping centre area and security forces were able to take control over 'most parts' of the mall.

DAY 3: Monday September 23

- Sporadic gunfire and loud explosions continued as security forces launched a renewed assault. Reports of the dead and wounded began to leak out to the public.
- Fire erupted in parts of the building and some interior floors and part of the car park collapsed. Three floors of the mall collapsed during the government counter-offensive against the terrorists.



Two of the al-Shabaab terrorists identified by CCTV cameras in the Shopping Centre

- Kenyan officials announced that they were in control of the mall, giving the terrorists little chance of escape.

DAY 4: Tuesday September 24

- On Tuesday evening, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta announced that the siege had ended and that security forces killed five terrorists at the mall and arrested 11 others for possible involvement in the attack.

- To date, there are an unconfirmed number of dead, wounded and missing. Closest estimates given by the Red Cross place the number of casualties at 67 people with an additional 39 people unaccounted for; however, those figures are unconfirmed by the Kenyan government. An additional 175 people are reported wounded. The partial collapse of the building, due to the detonation of explosives, contributed significantly to the figures of dead, wounded and missing.

Analysis and Insights

- The Westgate Shopping Centre attack is the deadliest terror attack in Kenya since al Qaeda blew up the United States Embassy in 1998, killing 213 people.
- Several sources have confirmed that Kenyan security forces and several ministers had received warnings of a possible attack by Islamic militants prior to the attack. Although it would appear that the information received was general in nature, it directs attention toward the need to determine protection levels during periods of threat.
- Media reports quoting senior security sources stated that the al Shabaab terrorist group rented a shop in the Westgate Shopping Centre in the weeks leading up to, or, as some reports claim, up to a year prior to the attack. The shop gave access to service lifts, enabling the attackers to stockpile weapons and ammunition. The claim is supported by reports that the levels of weapons and ammunitions involved in the attack suggest long-term planning.
- According to several reports, British and American citizens were among the group of militants who took part in the attack.
- Al Shabaab used Twitter to convey messages to the public throughout the attack. The group released a series of Twitter messages claiming that 137 hostages had been killed to date and that foreigners were involved in carrying out the attack, among other statements.
- There are a number of reasons why Kenya may have been identified as an attractive target for carrying out an attack, in addition to Kenyan military involvement against al Shabaab in Somalia. The Kenyan population is comprised of a high percentage of Muslims (11 percent) as well as a large Somali refugee community which enables the adversary to blend in and utilize local infrastructures.

Furthermore, poverty, porous borders, corruption, inept police, failed governments and rising disillusionment among young Islamists have made Kenya and other African nations easy targets and potential havens for global terrorists. Kenya, specifically, is a familiar region for terrorist organizations like al Qaeda who has both taken up refuge and operated in the country. It is known that arms smuggling along the porous borders, including the coastline, is routinely carried out from Somalia.

The Dilemmas of Protecting of Soft Targets

- The attack on the Westgate mall indicates a continuing trend of terror groups to attack soft targets including hotels, malls, sports events and schools. Soft targets are by definition assets that are either not protected or not protected to a high level. They are usually open to the public with very limited access control. The main dilemma with respect to soft targets is that there are almost an unlimited number of potential soft targets in a country and it is neither feasible nor possible for a nation's security forces to protect them all.

In addition, it is important to recognize that when the soft target is linked to tourism especially in countries that depend on tourism, the secondary economic impact can be almost worse than the attack itself.

As a result, it becomes vital to implement a risk assessment approach involving pro-active security solutions that achieve maximum protection without damaging the industry. Pro-active security solutions incorporate multi-layered security deployment, behavior pattern recognition and a community approach aimed at early detection of potential threats.

- The Westgate Mall in Nairobi is the country's most well-known and prestigious mall and is the main shopping and leisure center for middle class Kenyans, expatriate communities and tourists. As such, it could be considered iconic for Kenya and perhaps warranting of a higher level of protection

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- The level of planning and the magnitude of the attack indicate that al Qaeda in general and al Shabaab in particular remains a serious threat and that terrorists are continuing to seek to inflict severe consequences from their attacks.
- Armed assault scenarios continue to be a viable threat and need to be addressed by both government security agencies and private security sector alike.
- One of the major challenges security commanders on the ground are faced with during an armed assault/active shooter scenario is determining whether the attack is ongoing and innocent people are being killed, injured or put in harm's way or that the situation has become a hostage scenario. This is a crucial challenge as an ongoing attack required immediate intervention and a 'seek and engage' mindset whereas a hostage crisis requires almost the opposite. Wrongly characterizing the situation either way will have critical consequences.
- Structural hardening and other blast mitigation measures should be considered in the planning stages for new construction of shopping centers and other facilities.
- High profile shopping malls need to have trained security deployments with the necessary skill sets to deal with active shooter scenarios. Training in irregular behavior detection is

important for the early identification of potential threats and pre-attack reconnaissance. Security deployment must be proactive and create deterrence as unprotected assets create vulnerability which attracts the adversary.

We believe it is important to train security personnel to identify out of the ordinary, or tell-tale indicators (TTIs), which could point to the possibility of malicious intent. It is also possible to recruit non-security personnel, including shop workers, maintenance and cleaning personnel and even customers themselves into the security effort, adding eyes on the ground and serving as a valuable deterrent to potential attackers.

- Security vetting may serve as a potential counter measure for identifying attempts by the adversary to carry out pre-attack reconnaissance using the insider threat. Renters from unknown origins, i.e. not a well-known brand or retail chain, looking to rent shops or space in iconic shopping centres, may be subject to background checks or other forms of vetting.
- Partnerships between law enforcement and the private sector are important force multipliers for dealing with the issue of soft targets.
- This incident highlights the dilemma regarding how to evaluate warning and threat-related information as well as who should issue and what kind of directives should be issued and to whom to ensure an appropriate level of security and response in place. Security measures must be taken to meet relevant threat information.
- The wide use of Twitter by al Shabaab demonstrates the growing importance of social media as a terrorist tool. It is important to ensure that terrorist sites, mediums, message boards and posts are closely monitored by relevant security agencies as a valuable tool for early detection of potential threats, measuring social temperament and obtaining a situational picture during an attack.
- Due to the multitude of soft targets security commanders must use a risk management approach toward determining which assets need to be protected, what level of protection they will receive and how to raise protection levels when there is an increase in threat.
- It is clear that if a terror attack is not challenged and defeated or at least mitigated at the start of the incident the situation is likely to deteriorate rapidly with severe consequences. It is feasible for security forces deployed at protected facilities, whether police or private guards, to deal with armed assaults providing they have the right training, mindset and procedures. Security forces should also be able to put to good use their intimate knowledge of their own building which should not be able to be matched by the terrorists.



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