

Fighting continues for third day in Nairobi, Kenya mall attack

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Renewed bursts of gunfire were heard Monday afternoon from Nairobi's Westgate mall only an hour after Kenyan security forces claimed that all hostages had been released and that they had secured the building.

Ten to fifteen gunmen armed with rifles and RPGs and reportedly affiliated with the Somali Islamist militia Al Shabab stormed the shopping complex Saturday, taking 36 hostages. The attack resulted in a protracted standoff which continued into Monday afternoon, killing at least 68 and wounding over 200.

Fighting may still be taking place around the scene of the attack. Reports have indicated a heavy military response to the Westgate assault, including truckloads of Kenyan troops and helicopters, with the support of US and Israeli advisors and special forces. Another major attack was reported to have been disrupted in the Nairobi area shortly before the Westgate attack began.

Al Shabab, which was established in 2006 and has been formally aligned with Al Qaeda from 2012, claimed responsibility for the attacks via Twitter. Al Shabab means youth or "the lads" in Arabic. The organization's ranks are filled with impoverished youth and led by jihadist operatives with ties to US-backed Arab regimes.

According to All Africa, "foreign jihadists have overrun the Somali nationals previously in charge of Al Shabab" and the foreign elements are responsible for "the movement's new posture as an exporter of terrorism and a threat to peace and stability in East Africa and beyond."

According to a statement on Al Shabab's Twitter account, the attack was carried out by nine militants including three from the US, two from Somalia, and one each from Canada, Finland, Kenya, and the UK. Julius Karangi, head of the Kenyan general staff, said,

"we are fighting global terrorism here," and claimed that participants in the attack were drawn from "all over the world."

Comments released by Al Shabab stated that the attack was launched in response to the Kenyan military's intervention in Al Shabab-dominated areas of Somalia in support of the country's corrupt US-backed Transitional Federal Government. These operations are effectively an extension of the US "Global War on Terrorism."

"The attacks are just retribution for the lives of innocent Muslims shelled by Kenyan jets in Lower Jubba and in refugee camps," Al Shabab stated in an online post. "For long we have waged war against the Kenyans in our land, now it's time to shift the battleground and take the war on their land."

In response to the attack Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta pledged to continue waging the "war on terror" in Somalia against Al Shabab. Kenyan forces invaded Somalia in 2011, and have targeted Al Shabab strongholds in coordination with the US military.

US President Barack Obama Sunday called Kenya's president, Uhuru Kenyatta, who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for inciting mass killings following a 2007 presidential election, affirming "the strong and historic partnership between the United States and Kenya as well as our shared commitment to combating terrorism."

Important questions remain to be answered about the Nairobi killings. To what extent is the attack a manifestation of "blowback" connected to the criminal operations carried out by the US government in Libya, Syria and elsewhere? Is the flooding of Al Qaeda-linked groups with cash and weaponry by US imperialism and its allies, the monarchical Persian Gulf Arab regimes, playing out in the form of an escalation

in the frequency and scale of terror attacks?

The attack takes place in the context of ongoing US support for Al Qaeda-linked militias in Syria, including forces which have carried out hundreds of terror attacks targeting civilians. Washington also destroyed the Gaddafi regime in Libya using forces similar to Al Shabab as its proxies.

The political and media establishments have called attention to the potential global reach of groups like Al Shabab. US Army General Carter Ham has asserted that Al Shabab is coordinating with two other militant Islamist groups located in strategic portions of the African continent, Boko Haram of Nigeria and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. “Each of these organizations is, by itself, a dangerous and worrisome threat,” Ham stated during a seminar held early this summer at the Defense Department. “But what really concerns me is that the three organizations are seeking to coordinate and synchronize their efforts.”

A posting on the Council on Foreign Relations web site Monday morning titled “Is the Nairobi Mall Carnage Bigger than Just Kenya?” raised the possibility that similar acts of terrorism could be staged in the US.

“The jihadist and millenarian movements in sub-Saharan Africa remain so diverse and so rooted in particular local circumstances that it makes a future ‘twin towers’ style attack on the United States highly unlikely,” the posting stated. “However, that does not preclude a small band of the home-grown disaffected actors from wrecking mayhem and appealing to an international context, as has already happened in the United Kingdom.”

Speaking to CNN on Sunday, CNN security analyst Bob Baer similarly warned of smaller scale attacks on soft targets: “The worst case scenario is a bunch of these kids coming back, buying weapons in the United States some place like Minneapolis or Chicago and going after one of our malls here. Baer continued saying “They are indefensible especially with a well-trained group. There’s nothing you can do about it. And I guarantee you that the FBI is going to be on it today.”

Clearly, there are concerns within ruling circles that involvement by the CIA and other Western intelligence with such groups, the double-dealing that inevitably goes along with such involvement, and the hatred generated by centuries of colonialism and current

neocolonial wars of aggression will give rise to similar attacks on US and European soil.

Whatever the immediate cause of such attacks, they will be exploited to justify further moves toward dictatorship at home and imperialist militarism abroad.



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