

1. Introduction

In early January the al Shabaab terrorist group perpetrated a sophisticated attack on a US military base near the coastal port of Lamu. The attack led to the deaths of three US nationals, the highest US casualty rate in Africa since 2017. The incident highlighted the weaknesses the defences of the military base perimeter and led to the destruction of valuable surveillance aircraft. There was also an attempt to enter a British Army base in Laikipia County in central Kenya. However, it is unlikely that the effort was connected to the attack on the US base.¹

The incidents in January indicate a shift by the terrorist group from solely targeting Kenyan security services, to the targeting of allies such as the USA, which provide significant counter-terrorism support to the governments of Kenya and Somalia. While al Shabaab continues to look for high profile targets, the majority of its attacks have focused equally on Kenyan security personnel and civilians. Attacks on teachers in the Northern province are a continuation of a pattern noted in late 2018 and 2019, and the persistent attacks on non-Muslim and non-local teachers constitute a deliberate strategy that has been replicated in attacks on commercial passenger vehicles. Ethnicity and religion remain a focus for the group's attacks in Kenya's Lamu, Garissa, Mandera and Wajir counties, all of which border Somalia.

Kenya is also addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, there are 374 confirmed cases and 14 deaths. The government has implemented stringent measures to restrict the spread of the respiratory illness. Additionally, like nations around the world, the government is also responding to the economic crisis. There is some concern that the pandemic will plunge already vulnerable communities into poverty. Particularly for vulnerable youth in communities where al Shabaab has succeeded in their recruitment, there is concern that the group will switch their strategy to take advantage of current developments. However, some analysts suggest that the group's operations are not primed for a serious recruitment campaign.²

¹ Reuters, 'Kenya arrests three men for trying to breach British army camp', 6 January 2020 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-kenya-security/kenya-arrests-three-men-for-trying-to-breach-british-army-camp-idUKKBN1Z50PJ>

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xML_FP5NcJg Dr Martine Zeuthen comments at 26.36 – 38.36.

³ Daily Nation, '10 GSU officers killed in Garissa IED attack', 12 October 2019 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/10-GSU-officers-killed-in-Garissa-IED-attack/3444784-5309226-153qour/index.html>

⁴ Standard, 'Somalia authorities hand over two Al-Shabaab suspects to Kenyan police', 24 October 2019

2. Al Shabaab attacks on the Kenya-Somali border

2.1 Garissa County

On 12 October 2019 10 General Service Unit (GSU) officers were killed while on patrol when their vehicle ran over an IED suspected to have been planted by al Shabaab militants on Degoh Road in Garissa County. A joint patrol team consisting of Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), Administration Police, Rapid Response Police Unit and Kenya Police Service were dispatched to pursue the attackers.³

Somali police handed over two suspected al Shabaab members to Kenyan police on 23 October. One of the suspects was found with an AK47 rifle belonging to Kenyan police. The men were suspected of having perpetrated the attack that killed the 10 GSU officers in Garissa County before fleeing across the border. They were identified as Farah Ahmed Sanbul (alias Faragon) and Mihat Daar Khalif, both of whom are known al-Shabaab members. The men were also found with an AK47 belonging to Somali police with five magazines and 117 bullets. A third AK47 with four bullets and a pistol which had five magazines with 40 bullets was also discovered.⁴

On 29 October 2019 al Shabaab used AK47s and RPGs in an attack on Dadajabula Police Station in Wajir County which took place at around 8pm. The militants killed two prisoners who were being detained under terrorist charges and injured three police officers. The number of attackers is unknown. The police called for military assistance, but the prisoners had already been killed by the time they arrived. The station was also burned. A team of officers from the KDF, Administration Police, Rapid Border Patrol Unit and Kenya Police Service were sent to scan the area.⁵

At around 1pm on 4 December, heavily armed militants destroyed a communication mast and diesel generator at Diiso in Garissa Country. Explosions were heard 40km away. Initially, there were concerns surrounding missing camp officers, but they were subsequently found. The attackers are believed to have fled towards the Kenya-Somalia border.⁶

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001346721/somalia-officers-hand-two-al-shabaab-suspects-to-kenyan-police>

⁵ Standard, 'Al-Shabaab gunmen raid police station, kill two detained militants', 30 October 2019

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001347389/al-shabaab-gunmen-raid-police-station-kill-detained-militants>

⁶ Standard, 'Al Shabaab destroy communication mast', 5 December 2019 <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001352087/shabaab-destroy-telecom-mast>

Two construction workers were killed on 17 December 2019 in Fafi, Garissa County. The workers were attacked at 6pm by unknown assailants, and an investigation was launched to confirm whether al-Shabaab was behind the attack. Police initially stated communication issues made it difficult for them to obtain a full picture of the developments on the ground.⁷

In January 2020 a teacher and child were among those killed in a pre-dawn attack in Dabaab during which an attempt was made to destroy a Safaricom mast near Saretho Boarding Primary School. Four civilians and two suspected militants were also killed. Two IEDs and two AK47s were recovered from the scene, and the school was closed indefinitely.⁸ Malid Bilaal, previously a madrasa teacher from the area, is believed to have been the ringleader of the attack. An operation has been launched to trace the other eight al-Shabaab attackers across the Kenya-Somalia border.⁹

Three non-local teachers were killed by al Shabaab terrorists on 13 January in a pre-dawn attack on Kamuthe Boarding Primary School in Garissa County. The militants attacked the teachers' residence at 1am. In addition to the three fatalities, a fourth teacher was injured and was later transferred to a hospital. A Muslim teacher was also abducted and remains missing. A female nurse was reportedly spared due to her gender.¹⁰ The terrorists also attacked a communications mast and a police station in the area. Garissa County Regional Education Officer Yusuf Karayu confirmed the school had been closed and all teachers working on the border with Somalia would be transferred.¹¹ One teacher, Lucy Wanjira, told national media that she hid under a bed with her one-year-old child for hours during the attack. She reported that the attackers spoke Kiswahili, with one who she identified as the commander giving the order 'Hakikisha umewamaliza' which translates to 'make sure you finish them all'. Other

eyewitnesses reported that there were approximately 20 militants involved in the attack.¹²

Two people died when an ambulance hit an improvised explosive device in Garissa County on 15 March. The ambulance was transferring a patient from Sangailu Dispensary to a hospital in Hulughoto. At the time of the incident, there were four people in the vehicle. A woman died at the scene, another passenger died later, and two others were injured.¹³

2.2 Lamu County

On 28 December 2019 a pastor, boda boda operator and a teacher were admitted to Mpeketoni Sub-county Hospital with machete wounds to their heads and limbs after they had been ambushed by an attacker at 7:30pm. 29-year-old pastor Morris Muli, who leads the Neno Evangelism Church in Mpeketoni, told local media that he was attacked while he was taking a passenger from Mpeketoni town to Hongwe. The attacker had stopped the boda boda operators by appearing to request transport. He proceeded to attack the riders and then fled into the bushes. Residents have asked for an increase in police patrols of the area. Mpeketoni divisional police commander (OCPD) Harrison Njuguna said more police officers had been deployed in the area.¹⁴

On 2 January 2020 a convoy of passenger buses travelling from Mombasa to Lamu town were attacked near Nyongoro, close to Witu town in Lamu County by suspected al Shabaab gunmen.¹⁵ Six heavily armed men in civilian clothing attempted to stop the Mombasa Raha, Simba Coach and TSS buses that were travelling. As the driver of the Mombasa Raha bus drove away from the armed men at speed the bus was sprayed with bullets, but no one was killed or injured. The other buses were stopped, and passengers were made to lie on the ground. Each passenger was forced to show their ID cards. Some were asked to state their religion, and others were asked to recite the 'Shahada,' a tenet of the Muslim faith.¹⁶ Three people were shot dead,

⁷ Daily Nation, 'Construction workers attacked in Garissa', 18 December 2019 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Construction-workers-attack-Garissa/3444784-5389812-dqjhyd/index.html>

⁸ Daily Nation, 'School closed after Shabaab attack in Dadaab', 7 January 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/School-closed-after-attack-in-Dadaab/3444784-5409710-nc8nwzf/index.html>

⁹ France 24, 'Kenya: Four schoolchildren killed in al Shabaab attack', 7 January 2020 <https://www.france24.com/en/20200107-sadio-mane>

¹⁰ Washington Post, 'Al-Shabab militants kill three teachers in Kenya, abduct one', 13 January 2020 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/al-shabab-militants-kill-3-teachers-in-kenya-abduct-1/2020/01/13/4f76a550-35cd-11ea-a1ff-c48c1d59a4a1_story.html

¹¹ Daily Nation, 'Shabaab kill three in Monday Garissa attack', 13 January 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Shabaab-kill-three-teachers-Monday-Garissa-attack/1056-5415970-6wh9haz/index.html>

¹² Standard, 'Attack survivor: I hid under the bed with my baby for hours', 14 January 2020

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001356392/attack-survivor-i-hid-under-the-bed-with-my-baby-for-hours>

¹³ Daily Nation, 'Suspected Al-Shabaab IED attack leaves 2 dead in Garissa', 15 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Garissa-IED-attack-leaves-2-dead/3444784-5491998-fiav89/index.html>

¹⁴ Daily Nation, 'Alarm after 3 injured in Lamu machete attacks', 29 December 2019 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/lamu/3-hurt-in-Lamu-machete-attacks/3444912-5401066-l3x2n8/index.html>

¹⁵ Daily Nation, 'Travellers shun buses after Al-Shabaab raid in Lamu', 5 January 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/lamu/Travellers-shun-buses-Lamu-Al-Shabaab-raid/3444912-5407596-qgxb8xz/index.html>

¹⁶ Standard, 'Suspected Al-Shabaab gunmen hijack Lamu bus', 2 January 2020 <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001355130/suspected-al-shabaab-gunmen-hijack-lamu-bus>

including the driver of the Simba Coach, and one man was shot in the arm, while another was shot in the head. All those shot are believed to have been Christians. The injured men were rushed to Garsen and Witu dispensaries, respectively. A Government Spokesman, Cyrus Oguna, said that there were five attackers, four of whom had been rounded up and killed, while another was arrested and helping with investigations. Bus companies have said the recent attacks have caused them to lose business, with passengers choosing to fly rather than take the dangerous route. Drivers also said they need a full police escort in order to operate safely. Extra security has been deployed to the area, and officials are working with bus companies, lorry and truck drivers to find a sustainable solution.¹⁷

On 5 January 2020 a dawn attack on the US-Kenya military base in Lamu by al Shabaab left three Americans dead, as well as two light aircraft and two US army helicopters destroyed.¹⁸ The Americans killed were identified as a soldier and two Pentagon contractors. The terrorists had cut power to the area before the attack and set alight the fuel tanks located at the airstrip, and locals reported seeing dark plumes of smoke rising from the area. Colonel Paul Njuguna from the Department of Defence said that this did not prevent them from repelling the Al-Shabaab insurgents and killing four of them.¹⁹ However, ten militants are believed to have escaped into surrounding villages, killing many villagers. The Kenya Civil Aviation Authority temporarily closed the civilian airport in Lamu and was monitoring the situation. A curfew was also imposed on Lamu indefinitely.²⁰ The attack resulted in the largest military fatalities in Africa since October 2017.

Following attacks in Lamu County, villagers from areas that border the Manda military base were forced to flee due to fears of an increase in terrorist activity. Villagers felt they were easy targets. In Sina Mbio Village, fewer than 10 out of 86 families remained.²¹

2.3 Mandera County

Al-Shabaab is reported to have attacked a construction site in Mandera at dawn on 22 December 2019. While there were no casualties, site equipment worth KSh38 million (USD 376,618) was destroyed during the attack.²²

On 12 March two people were killed and one was reported missing after a suspected al Shabaab attack in Mandera County. The terrorists ambushed vehicles travelling on the Rhamu-Elwak road, stopping a lorry, a motorcycle and a passenger bus. A passenger on the bus, Ali Abdikarim, later said that 30 armed men appeared from the bushes, ordered everyone to disembark and instructed the women to remove their veils in order to see whether any non-Muslims were disguising themselves as Muslims. Only one non-Muslim was found on the bus and was taken away by the terrorists.²³

2.4 Wajir County

On 6 December 11 people, including eight police officers, two teachers and a doctor were killed by al Shabaab terrorists in a bus attack in Wajir. The militants ordered the bus to stop as it journeyed to Mandera, 950 km northeast of Nairobi. All non-locals were forced to alight, and the bus was allowed to continue, but the captives were shot.²⁴ The attack was similar to previous attacks in which passengers were targeted due to their ethnicity and religion. Special Forces were deployed, and eight members of a criminal gang from the Marehan clan were arrested on 19 December. The police reported that al Shabaab is colluding with locals who want to benefit from the attacks. On 18 December residents who were constructing the Khorof Harar-Konton road were kidnapped by members of the terrorist group in a hijacked Toyota Hilux KBL 463 L and a tractor, which were used to move the abductees across the border. The police identified Issack Okolla as the ringleader. He told members of the Degodia clan that the abduction was a warning shot

¹⁷ Daily Nation, 'Police to tighten Lamu road travel rules after attacks', 6 January 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/lamu/Police-tighten-Lamu-travel-restrictions-Shabaab-attacks/3444912-5408080-udjcxvz/index.html>

¹⁸ Standard, 'Al-Shabaab attacks joint US-Kenya military base', 5 January 2020 <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001355385/al-shabaab-attacks-joint-us-kenya-military-base>

¹⁹ Washington Post, 'Al Shabaab attacks joint US-Kenyan base but assault repulsed with four militants killed', 5 January 2020 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/al-shabab-attacks-joint-us-kenyan-base-but-assault-repulsed-with-four-militants-killed/2020/01/05/6208f5a2-2f82-11ea-9b60-817cc18cf173_story.html

²⁰ Standard, 'Al-Shabaab attacks joint US-Kenya military base', 5 January 2020 <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001355385/al-shabaab-attacks-joint-us-kenya-military-base>
BBC, 'Camp Simba: Three Americans killed in Kenya base', 5 January 2020 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-50997769?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cwz46ej9qekt/al-shabab&link_location=live-reporting-story

Standard, 'Al-Shabaab attacks joint US-Kenya military base', 5 January 2020 <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001355385/al-shabaab-attacks-joint-us-kenya-military-base>

²¹ Daily Nation, 'Lamu villagers flee after Al-Shabaab's Manda Bay attack', 6 January 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/lamu/Afraid-of-Shabaab-Lamu-villagers-flee/3444912-5408458-5ahm44/index.html>

²² Standard, 'Al-Shabaab raid a construction site in Mandera', 23 December 2019 <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001354197/al-shabaab-raid-a-construction-site-in-mandera>

²³ Daily Nation, 'Two killed in suspected Al-Shabaab attack in Mandera', 12 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/mandera/Two-killed-in-suspected-Al-Shabaab-attack/1183298-5488198-diepy2z/index.html>

²⁴ Standard, '8 cops, 2 teachers and doctor among 11 killed in Wajir bus attack', 7 December 2019 <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001352390/wajir-bus-attack-kills-8-cops-two-teachers-and-doctor>

and that further attacks could be averted by the payment of taxes and ransoms.²⁵

Two police officers were killed and seven injured when their patrol vehicle hit an improvised explosive device (IED) on 27 December 2019. The officers were on a routine patrol when their camp Landcruiser hit the IED in the Wajir East Sub-County at 4pm. Four of the officers sustained head injuries, while three others sustained bruising to the back and chest.²⁶

3. Tensions on the Kenya Somali border

On 2 March tensions between the Federal Government of Somalia and Jubaland forces in the town of Bula Hawa, Somalia, spilt over into the Kenyan town of Mandera.²⁷ The clash resulted in one death and ten injuries, and led to the suspension of regular business in Mandera, closing county government offices, the county assembly and law courts. Business owners in Mandera reported to local media that they were monitoring Somali radio stations to prepare for another battle and close their shops. The clash centred on the escape of fugitive Jubaland Security Minister Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur who escaped from prison in Somalia and has sought refuge in Mandera. Jubaland forces and the Federal Government of Somalia's army wanted the Jubaland Forces to move from their base. The Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta, sent a security delegation led by the Interior Cabinet Secretary Fred Matiang'i to meet with the president of Somalia and de-escalate the tensions. Global Partners, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the UN, also welcomed the move.²⁸

4. Attacks on police reservists

On 7 February suspected al Shabaab militants killed an 80 year-old-man in Ijera, Garissa County.²⁹ A group of militants entered the home of Mr Abdullahi Farah Gab in the village of Sangole at 1.30am and shot him dead. Police investigating the incident were seeking five to ten men who they believed perpetrated the event and were still in the area. It is thought

that the group was after Mr Gab's son, who is a police reservist, and killed the father to warn the family and community against working with the security services that are actively pursuing al Shabaab.

On 12 February al Shabaab terrorists kidnapped two people and torched shops and three homes belonging to National Police Reservists in Sangailu, Ijera Sub-County, Garissa County. The assailants kidnapped 80-year-old Mohammed Bashir Mursal and his 30 year-old son Abdi Mohammed and forced them to identify the homes of security officers. The father was released, but the whereabouts of the son remains unknown.

Police have noted a reluctance in the local community to give detailed information about the movements of suspected al Shabaab militants. Local MP Sofia Abdi Noor said that the perpetrators attacked locals before leaving. During the altercations, they accused the local community of 'allowing their sons to join the KDF'.³⁰ A resident who did not want to be named told the Daily Nation Newspaper that members of the terrorist group had been seen in the area walking in groups with AK47 rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, and fetching water in local wells.³¹ The North Eastern Regional Co-ordinator Nicodemus Ndalana suggested the spike in al Shabaab attacks on Police reservists in Ijera is due to the belief that they are providing security services with information on the movements and plans of the group. On 20 February the home of another police reservist was razed to the ground by an unknown number of suspected al Shabaab militants in Sangailu, Ijera Sub-County in Garissa.³² The attack took place at 9pm, and due to a quick response from the security services, who repelled the assailants, there were no further attacks or injuries.

Local activists have pushed for the national government to take action, as the region has borne the brunt of the group's attacks, though they are rarely reported in the national press. This underscores the need for an inclusive and community-centred response to the pursuit of al Shabaab in the county.

²⁵ Standard, 'Police arrest suspected killers of 10 Wajir passengers', 19 December 2019

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001353850/police-arrest-suspected-killers-of-10-wajir-passengers>

²⁶ Standard, 'Two police officers killed, seven injured in IED attack', 27 December 2019

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001354602/two-police-officers-killed-seven-injured-in-ied-attack>

²⁷ Daily Nation, 'Normalcy yet to return to Mandera after Somalia military clash', 9 March 2020

<https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/mandera/Tension-still-reigns-in-Mandera-town/1183298-5484258-fimx9az/index.html>

²⁸ Daily Nation, 'Global partners welcome Somali move', 10 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Global-partners-welcome-Somali-move/1056-5484942-100fdigz/index.html>

²⁹ Daily Nation, 'Garissa: Militants kill old man at his home', 7 February 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Suspected-Shabaab-kill-old-man-in-his-home/3444784-5447456-ri523n/index.html>

³⁰ Daily Nation, 'Shabaab attackers torch homes in Garissa', 13 February 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Shabaab-attackers-torch-homes-in-Garissa/3444784-5454064-lwwdmxz/index.html>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Daily Nation, 'Suspected Shabaab torch reservist's home in Garissa', 21 February 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Suspected-Shabaab-attackers-torch-reservist-s-home/3444784-5463444-jfc0h5/index.html>

5. The recruitment of non-ethnic Somali youth

Al Shabaab has intensified efforts to recruit non-ethnic Somalis in order to evade detection. The Dusit 2 attack in January 2019 was the first major terrorist attack led by a non-ethnic Somali, Ali Salim Gichunge, who was the operational commander, and was partly raised in Nyeri County, 150km north of Nairobi.

A young man referred to as Joe grew up in Nyeri and completed his high school education in the capital city and was planning on staying with a friend in the Eastleigh area of Nairobi, where the majority of inhabitants are from the Somali community. The young man and his friends started work by selling goods in the local area and would also frequent the Jamia and Majengo Mosques.

*"I am not a Muslim, but I was used to living with Muslims. Even while we were still in school, we would sneak out together with other Muslim students to go to the mosque on Fridays. For us, it was for leisure and the thrill of not having to be in class on Fridays."*³³

During the visits to the mosque, they met with recruiters who promised them a salary of KSh10 million (approximately \$93,524) if they joined the Somali Army and moved to Somalia for work. Before receiving any training, they were required to convert to Islam and take new names. The initial training took place in Nairobi, where the group were taught Sharia law and Islamic doctrine, followed by lessons on al Shabaab. They were subsequently sent to El Wak in Mandera and asked to leave all their personal belongings and identification documents behind. When they reached their destination, they were moved to a village on the border with Somalia, where they met other militants who appeared to be from Pakistan.

"Our training started by being shown a lot of propaganda videos of Al-Shabaab missions and a lot of talk about Jihad. They would show some of the militants and claim that they used to be Kenyan police officers. During the day, they taught us how to use guns; they started by showing us how to operate a pistol."

Joe began to review his situation and feared the realities of joining the group. He decided to run away from the camp

and return to Nairobi and managed to escape when his group were asked to run errands in El Wak town. He was able to reach Nairobi, where he remained in hiding for a short period. Fearful of being arrested by the police or found by the group, Joe eventually returned to his town of origin in Nyeri.³⁴ In an account given to local media, he stated that promises given by recruiters of significant financial rewards are lies. Still, he acknowledged that the offer would be tempting enough for economically marginalised youth.

In Nyeri, the security services have been tracking al Shabaab recruitment patterns. Nyeri county has been identified by security agencies as a key recruitment ground for the terrorist group, which targets unemployed youth, including teenagers. The Majengo slum is one of the critical recruitment areas for al Shabaab. The slum is inhabited by Muslims from the Kikuyu ethnic group; part of their appeal for al Shabaab is that they are not from ethnic Somali tribes. Recruitment approaches have included promises of employment or football contracts. For some young people who have been in trouble with the police, joining al Shabaab is a way of starting a new life and escaping police harassment.³⁵

In 2017 the KDF's routine recruitment was interrupted when 22-year-old Hosea Ng'ang' a threatened to join al Shabaab if he was not hired.

5.1 Treatment of suspected al Shabaab returnees

The pastor of the church in Mombasa called the police after hearing a man confess to being an al Shabaab militant while seeking prayer at his church. The man was arrested on 7 January 2020, Prosecutor, Eric Masila, informed local media that he believed the man would provide useful information to the security forces in preventing future attacks. His identity is being protected while he provides valuable information on the group.³⁶

A man suspected of being an al Shabaab returnee was shot at close range and killed while returning to his home on New Year's Eve. Omar Salim Unda, 27, was driving when his car was blocked by two other vehicles, causing him to veer off the road. He was subsequently dragged from the vehicle and shot three times in the head and neck.³⁷ Speaking to local media, Salim Unda, the father of the deceased, said they had had lunch together on 31 December 2019, and his son was called by an unknown person who asked to meet

³³ Daily Nation, 'It's all lies, returnee says of Shabaab promises to youth', 16 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/nyeri/How-I-was-lured-to-join-Al-Shabaab/1954190-5493122-1eq7vjz/index.html>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Daily Nation, 'Al-Shabaab changes tack, targets jobless youths in Nyeri slums', 1 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Al-Shabaab-targets-youth-in-Nyeri-slums/1056-5474832-xagos9z/index.html>

³⁶ Standard, '<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001355385/al-shabaab-attacks-joint-us-kenya-military-base>

³⁷ Daily Nation, 'Mystery surrounds killing of 'Al-Shabaab returnee' in Kilifi', 2 January 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/kilifi/Al-Shabaab-returnee-shot-dead-Watamu/1183282-5404768-1prdlg/index.html>

him in the evening. When he went to the meeting, the person did not arrive, and on his way back, the two vehicles chased him and blocked his path. "It's extrajudicial killing; I can say that without fear, but I cannot say so, and so did this. It has been a case, he had a previous case; he was arrested, went to court for six months; he was not charged. He then trained as a welder and opened a workshop, but then he disappeared just like the others who were arrested previously."³⁸

Owen Baya Kilifi North MP said "We must stop these extrajudicial killings in this country. If a person has any criminal case, let him be arrested, charged in court if he is proved to have committed those crimes, let him be jailed. But to come here and take the life of a young person the way they did here is something that must remain condemned."³⁹

6. KDF response to al Shabaab

North-Eastern Regional Commissioner Nicholas Ndalana confirmed that Special Forces killed six al Shabaab terrorists in Jirole, Garissa County in the early hours of 13 March. One militant was injured and is receiving treatment. The police expressed hope that he would help with their investigations into the activities of the group.⁴⁰

The KDF confirmed that they had killed 12 al Shabaab militants after raiding their base in Boni Forest, Lamu County on 19 March. During the attack one of the group's commanders in the region was also killed. The commander had been responsible for providing intelligence and logistical support to the group based in Boni Forest,⁴¹ which has been a known al Shabaab hideout. The Kenyan government launched a multi-agency operation named Linda Boni in September 2015 to flush out the elite al Shabaab group that has been operating from the forest since 2012.

On 21 March security agencies reported they had successfully repelled ten heavily armed al Shabaab terrorists. The militants were attempting to enter H-Young Construction Company's camp in Milihoi area in Lamu.⁴² They were making a second attempt to enter the camp when they were repelled by the KDF on 9 February. Militants reportedly fled back into Boni forest, and security agents

increased their patrols of the area, urging the public to report anyone acting suspiciously.

In November 2019 ethnic-Somali communities living on the Kenya-Somalia border reported that they were caught between al-Shabaab on the one hand and the KDF on the other. According to these villagers, they experience a cycle of persecution, and the KDF, whose job it is to protect them, rarely does so. Instead, the army accuses up Kenya's ethnic Somali population of joining forces with al-Shabaab, and frequently round them up as a form of collective punishment for al-Shabaab attacks in the region. The KDF continues to deny such allegations and does not allow for any external investigation into the situation. Members of the communities are frequently forced to join the KDF and found dead several weeks later. This has caused some in the community to join forces with al-Shabaab to avenge their mistreatment by the KDF.

Isiolo North MP Hassan Odha has called for new efforts from clergy, village elders and residents to prevent youth from the local area from joining the terrorist group. Although young people cross the border into Somalia in the hope of opportunities to support their families, Odha warned them that this hope is a false one, and that they will end up causing significant harm. The MP hopes to end the radicalisation of the local youth, which is occasioned by poverty and marginalisation, and support programmes to increase literacy in the region.⁴³

7. Coronavirus response

The Kenyan government responded to the threat of coronavirus by applying restrictive measures on the general population. Public meetings have been suspended, a curfew implemented, and all those arriving in Kenya from countries affected by the disease are required to observe strict quarantine. The government has also severely restricted freedom of movement across the country.

The policing of the coronavirus containment measures have come under severe criticism. In one incident, 13-year-old Yassin Hussein Moyo was killed by a stray bullet when police descended on a community to implement a curfew. Shortly after the killing, the Kenyan president apologised for the use of excessive force.

³⁸ The Star, 'Al Shabaab returnee shot dead in Watamu by unknown people', 1 January 2020 <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2020-01-01-al-shabaab-returnee-shot-dead-in-watamu-by-unknown-people/>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Daily Nation, 'Six Shabaab militants killed, one captured', 13 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Six-suspected-Shabaab-militants-killed-one-captured-/3444784-5489520-s2pydz/index.html>

⁴¹ Daily Nation, 'KDF troops kill 12 suspected Al-Shabaab in Boni Forest raid', 19 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/KDF-kill-12-suspected-Al-Shabaab-in-Lamu/1056-5497376-12v9t6ez/index.html>

⁴² Daily Nation, 'Military, police foil terror attack on camp as Shabaab flee into forest', 23 March 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Military--police-foil-terror-attack-on-camp-Shabaab-flee-/1056-5500808-dl1b2kz/index.html>

⁴³ Daily Nation, 'Help keep youth off terror cells, Isiolo North MP tells locals', 7 January 2020 <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/isiolo/Youth-radicalisation-worries-Isiolo-MP/1183266-5409524-jc86hb/index.html>

Impoverished communities feel mistreated and marginalised; in large towns like Kisumu, the main markets have been closed, causing a food shortage. One trader told reporters, "Let them close the markets after they have given out food because hunger and coronavirus are two different things. Hunger kills in seven days and coronavirus kills in 14 days, so which one is more important, preventing hunger or coronavirus? If you don't prevent hunger, you are just killing your people."⁴⁴

There are concerns that poorer communities have and will face a disproportionate response from the police during the coronavirus crisis. The family of Yassin Hussein Moyo has called for an investigation into his death, citing a pattern of police brutality on their predominantly Muslim community. Hussein Moyo, the father of the teenage boy, accused the police of entering communities with unnecessary force and creating panic and confusion as they fire teargas into homes and beat anyone in sight: "We are fighting corona [virus] during the day, and we have to deal with bullets in the night."⁴⁵

The evidence of police brutality in response to the coronavirus, coupled with the economic consequences of shutdown for poor communities poses a threat to marginalised youth who are rendered even more vulnerable to radicalisation. The police and security services owe a duty of care to ensure that their response to the public health crisis is proportionate, measured and within the law. The Kenyan government also has a duty to ensure the welfare of its citizens, with particular attention given to the most marginalised and impoverished communities. Ignoring and/or mistreating these vulnerable communities during this crisis may have unintended consequences for the fight against al Shabaab.

Recommendations

To the government of Kenya:

- Re-double efforts to clear the Boni forest and surrounding areas of al Shabaab fighters.
- Increase the numbers of security personnel deployed on targeted commercial routes to protect public transportation from being attacked.
- Ensure that educational facilities, especially those with residential quarters for staff or students, are adequately protected.
- Increase police and security presence around construction businesses in the border region.
- Ensure that the response to the coronavirus crisis does not exacerbate existing inequalities in society.
- Investigate all incidents of police brutality and disproportionate use of force both in response to the coronavirus, and also when investigating or pursuing al Shabaab suspects.

To the United Kingdom, the European Union and UN Member States:

- Strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and support for Kenya, with a focus on the Lamu and Garissa Counties.
- Assist the Kenyan Government in meeting the humanitarian needs of communities displaced or affected adversely by al Shabaab violence in Lamu and Garissa Counties.

To the government of the United States:

- Strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and support for the government of Kenya.
- Conduct coordinated assessments of the counter-terrorism strategy with the governments of Somalia and Kenya, and its potential impact on civilians in both countries.
- Ensure counter-terrorism support includes humanitarian assistance for communities on the Kenya-Somalia border.

⁴⁴ France 24 'Probe ordered into fatal shooting of Kenyan teenager during virus' curfew <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20200331-coronavirus-kenya-shooting>

⁴⁵ Ibid.