

Nairobi DusitD2 Attack Post-Incident Report

17 January 2019



Executive Summary

- ◆ At approximately 1500hrs local time on 15 January 2019, a group of armed men conducted a coordinated assault against the DusitD2 Hotel, in the 14 Riverside Drive commercial compound of Nairobi's Westlands district. The Complex attack on the facility incorporated Small Arms Fire (SAF) and explosives, including a suspected Suicide Vest Improvised Explosive Device (SVIED).
- ◆ At approximately 1020hrs local time on 16 January 2019, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta announced that the siege at the Dusit D2 Hotel complex had come to an end. At the time of writing there have been 21 confirmed deaths, while the Kenya Red Cross has reported that dozens more remain unaccounted for.
- ◆ The attack was claimed by Al-Shabab, an Islamist militant group predominantly operating in Somalia and across Kenya's eastern border. Kenya has been a prime target for Al-Shabab following the deployment of Kenyan soldiers into Somalia in 2011 to combat the country's insurgency.
- ◆ There is a heightened risk of terrorism in Nairobi due to ongoing instability in neighbouring Somalia. Al-Shabab have demonstrated the ability to conduct sophisticated mass casualty attacks in the Kenyan capital, including an attack on the upscale Westgate Shopping Mall in 2013 which left 67 people dead. This week's terrorist incident may signal a return to attacks that have more of an international nature rather than recent assaults targeting Kenyan security agencies in remote border territories.
- ◆ Unlike the Westgate Mall attack, the Inspector General of Police remained in command for the duration of this national incident and accepted assistance offered by security partners including the UK and US.

Incident Overview

At approximately 1500hrs local time on 15 January 2019, at least five heavily-armed, suspected Al-Shabab militants stormed the 14 Riverside Drive compound, making for the DusitD2 complex and forcing security guards to open the gate by opening fire on them. The attackers advanced and hurled explosives into vehicles at a car park, setting fire to three cars, before splitting into two groups. One group attacked a nearby office building with Small Arms Fire (SAF) and a Hand Grenade (HG), while the other directed SAF at the Secret Garden Café. One of the attackers subsequently detonated a SVIED at the restaurant/café, before the remaining assailants converged on the DusitD2 Hotel, opening fire indiscriminately on civilians.



One of the suspected Al-Shabab militants caught on CCTV during the DusitD2 attack. (News24)

Authorities initially believed the incident to be an armed robbery, though as reports of civilian casualties mounted, it was treated as a terrorist attack. Security forces deployed to the area, cordoned off the complex and began an

evacuation operation. According to President Kenyatta, in a televised address at 1020hrs local time from State House Nairobi on 16 January, some 700 civilians were escorted to safety from the 14 Riverside Drive compound during the attack. Dozens of hotel guests were only freed however after many hours trapped inside the building during the security operation, with the attackers engaging security forces once they arrived on the scene. Heavy gunfire continued throughout the afternoon and evening of 15 January, with the gunmen barricading themselves on the hotel’s top floors having reportedly taken hostages, prompting an almost 20-hour siege. Shooting also continued during the night and following morning, despite Kenyan police announcing overnight that all buildings in the hotel complex had been secured. On the morning of 16 January, anti-terror units were reported to have secured all levels of the hotel and shot dead two of the remaining attackers in a prolonged armed exchange which ended at approximately 0900hrs. At least one of the other assailants was killed in a suicide bombing toward the beginning of the attack, while the remaining militants were likely killed at some stage during security operations (in his address President Kenyatta claimed that all of the attackers had been killed). Over the course of securing the complex and aftermath of the incident, it was also reported that security forces detonated a vehicle suspected of containing explosives and arrested nine individuals believed to be linked to the attack.

By mid-morning on 16 January 2019, the security operation to secure the 14 Riverside Drive compound had been completed and all remaining civilians evacuated. The area has now been secured while forensic teams and bomb disposal experts comb the complex for explosive remnants and evidence. At present, there were 21 confirmed deaths, including a US citizen and a British citizen. The Kenya Red Cross also reported that potentially as many as 50 people believed to have been in the complex remain unaccounted for, signifying the death toll may be higher. At least 30 people have been transferred to local hospitals to treat wounds received during the attack.

Analysis & Assessment

The Complex attack on the 14 Riverside Drive compound, in the upscale Westlands area of Nairobi, is being treated as a terrorist attack and a full counter-terrorism investigation is underway.

The al-Qaeda-linked militant group Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack in a two-page statement. The incident bears resemblance to the attack Al-Shabab conducted against the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in 2013, in which militants launched a protracted siege that left 67 people dead. In both instances, Al-Shabab extremists targeted complexes containing foreigners and high-profile Kenyan businesses and offices. The group, though predominantly active in neighbouring Somalia, has conducted numerous attacks in Kenya that have left hundreds of people dead over the past eight years. In its deadliest attack in the county, Al-Shabab



Suicide bomber detonates himself outside the Secret Garden Café shortly after 3:05 pm according to a witness. Many bodies seen.

3:32 p.m. CCTV footage shows **four armed men running across the parking lot.** They split into two groups in a car park with the round circle in it. One team goes into the Hanover building, the other head for Secret Garden Café area.

3:17 p.m. CCTV footage shows **four attackers shooting** their way into dusitD2 hotel complex. Three militants go past the taxi rank. Another follows behind.

At 3:55 p.m. **three cars ablaze** at parking lot near hotel complex entrance.

Attackers fire shots on windows and ceilings of I&M Bank. Two bodies seen on by medics. Reuters witness sees a grenade. Time unknown

Sources: Reuters; Maps4News

14 Riverside Drive compound and hotel attack location. (Reuters)

militants assaulted Garissa University in 2015, killing almost 150 people. Furthermore, the 15 January 2019 DusitD2 attack marked the three year anniversary of an al-Shabab attack upon a Kenyan military base in Somalia, in which almost 200 soldiers were killed, demonstrating the group has actively conducted mass casualty attacks against both Kenyan civilian and military infrastructure. Al-Shabab has actively sought to attack Kenyan targets, in Somalia and Kenya, since 2011 following the deployment of Kenyan soldiers into Somalia to combat the insurgent group.

It is believed the attack against the DusitD2 compound and Hotel was intended to target a US conference at Gem Suites, in which 180 US citizens were in attendance. This is reinforced by the fact that a large number of other high profile business hotels are situated within a 1km radius of the incident, which would also likely be holding conferences and hosting many westerners. The predominant targeting of US assets corresponds to the attendant rise in recent US airstrikes targeting Al-Shabab in Somalia. 47 US strikes were recorded over the course of 2018, while five have so far been recorded in 2019. Indeed, in their statement claiming the attack, Al-Shabab referenced US President Donald Trump and his decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, indicating the D2 attack was retributory in nature. Previous reports were received in November that Al-Shabab were in the final stages of planning one or more spectacular attacks in Nairobi, with potential targets noted as shopping malls and Nairobi University, again both busy civilian areas likely containing foreigners. It is possible Al-Shabab delayed in executing their attack until after the Christmas/New Year period, having waited for security forces to relax their posture and become less vigilant.

The nature of the DusitD2 attack also corresponds with previous Al-Shabab activity in Kenya and Somalia. Following the compound being secured by Kenyan security forces, CCTV footage broadcast on local media showed at least five heavily-armed men entering the DusitD2 complex. The combination of a coordinated armed and explosive attack is a regular modus operandi employed by Al-Shabab in the perpetration of mass casualty attacks, particularly in the Somali capital of Mogadishu. Outside of military targets, the group regularly targets civilians, attacking markets, religious centers, hotels, government buildings and other busy areas. Since 2002, most attacks in Kenya have been against government targets and Kenyans. Westgate and now the DusitD2 attack may represent a shift of emphasis from government or Kenyan targets to targets of an international nature. In the attack against the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi on 21 September 2013, at least 19 foreigners of different nationalities were killed in addition to dozens of Kenyans.

With regard to the response of Kenyan security forces, while the initial response was slow, the overall evacuation of the complex was relatively well organised, and indicative that Kenyan security forces appear better equipped and trained than previously. By comparison, the Westgate mall attack endured for five days and resulted in dozens more casualties. Again, in contrast to Westgate mall, security forces worked together, with local media also reporting that US and UK Special Forces assisted in security operations. The Inspector General of Police also remained in command for the duration of DusitD2 attack, whereas during the Westgate mall attack, the police were usurped by the military, with numerous reports of armed exchanges between police and soldiers.

Nairobi Security Recommendations

The city of Nairobi and other major urban areas in Kenya have been in a heightened state of alert following the DusitD2 attack, with the potential for ongoing traffic and business interruptions within the capital as police and military resources are deployed to carry out post-incident operations. There remains an elevated threat of terrorism in Nairobi due to ongoing insurgent activity in neighboring Somalia and while historically Al-Shabab militants have not demonstrated a capability to deliver successive, high-impact attacks in the capital in quick succession, the risk of further arrests, intelligence warnings and potential plots against international businesses cannot be ruled out.

In accordance with the current threat situation in the capital, organizations are advised to:

- ◆ Limit movements of all personnel to the Westlands area of Nairobi, and other high profile international venues such as hotels, malls and conference centres while the short term risk of further attacks and armed police response remains high. Full clearance of ordnance and other hazardous items from affected buildings may last many days and vigilance should be maintained while the potential for affiliated militant cells or copy-cat attackers to launch similar incidents remains high.
- ◆ Ensure that emergency management and evacuation plans are up to date for Kenya and regional operations. Although less common than activity in Somalia and Kenya, insurgent groups have demonstrated their intent to carry out attacks in regional hubs such as Kampala and Addis Ababa and may seek to replicate the successes of the Nairobi attack in other regions over the coming weeks.
- ◆ Prepare for traffic disruptions and other interruptions to movements across central Nairobi in the event of further police lock-downs.
- ◆ Continue to suspend any travel to Kenyan border territories east of Garissa which remain at high risk of insurgent targeting.
- ◆ With Al-Shabab now potentially looking to strike multinational rather than purely Kenyan targets, review security procedures on how to respond to complex attacks involving IEDs and Active Shooters. Constellis is available to assist with assessments and training.

Constellis' intelligence analysts and security consultants produce bespoke political and security reports, threat assessments and security risk assessments to inform decisions and to protect people and assets across Africa, Europe and the Middle East.



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