

## **Blurred Lines: Kenya's predicament, fighting Al-Shabaab, fighting Somalia**

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**K**enya is a key route used by Islamist militants entering or leaving Somalia due to its locality and police officers who turn a blind eye on crimes in exchange for money.

Kenya is also a recruiting and training



ground for Islamist groups and an economic hub for East Africa. According to a United Nations Security Council Report it was estimated that Somali terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, earned more than \$25 million a year in illegal charcoal traffic to the Gulf Arab states (Reuters, September 26, 2013). Millions more are made from the sale of contraband sugar into Kenya.<sup>1</sup> The Somali Diaspora, proliferating Islamist

organizations and pirates, are known to heavily invest in Kenya's property market due to Kenya's weak anti-money laundering guidelines.

Corruption is the norm in Kenya.

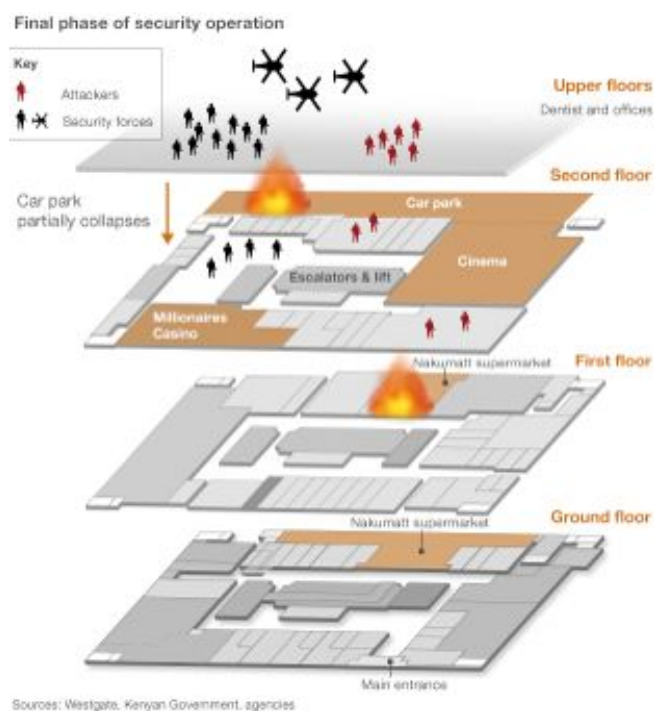
According to a report published by Transparency International on 6<sup>th</sup> of August, Kenya ranked the fourth most corrupt nation in the world. The public is accustomed to bribe their way to secure a service or escape accountability for their actions. In 2010, Kenyan police mistakenly released Australian terrorist Hussein Farah wanted in connection with Sydney's Holsworthy Army Barracks terrorist plot (AAP, March 23, 2010). At the time of his arrest, Farah was reported to be in possession of nearly \$30,000 in cash. The Kenyan police force is notorious for corruption, winning them the unenviable badge for the most corrupt state institution in the country. They are also among the lowest paid public servants.

The Westgate shopping terrorist attack that left more than 69 civilians dead and over 200 hundred injured, was an attack that was entirely preventable.



According to a leaked Kenyan National Intelligence Service (NIS) report, Kenya's government had knowledge of a possible terrorist attack at Westgate shopping centre back in 2011. The leaked NIS report affirms that Kenyan National Intelligence agency officials were also advised of an imminent terrorist attack

at the Westgate shopping centre the day before the strike and on which Kenya's government officials now refuse to comment (AFP, September 28, 2013). Many questions remain unanswered, but it is a fact that the Kenyan government acted carelessly and failed to take necessary measures to protect civilians. The attackers are known to have rented a shop at the Westgate shopping centre and for eight months was stockpiling ammunition using the service lift, (BBC, 27 September, 2013).



Al-Shabaab brutality is nothing new. The terrorist group is notorious for using atrocities to intimidate a target population and its governing polity.<sup>2</sup> However, the atrocities committed at Westgate smelled of desperation.<sup>3</sup> The Somali Al-Qaida affiliated terrorist group, once a dominant occupying force, lost its last strong-hold in the southern Somali port city of Kismayo, to Kenyan

forces in September of 2012. Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) entered Southern Somalia in pursuit of Al-Shabaab after a series of bombings and kidnappings, which left dozens dead and injured. The Kenyan government's ultimate goal is to push Al-Shabaab out of Southern Somalia and to create a buffer zone for the return of tens of thousands of undocumented refugees living in urban areas and in refugee camps. Kenyan troops liberated Al-Shabaab's stronghold Kismayo with little resistance. Al-Shabaab fighters, unable to confront Kenyan forces, abandoned their positions, cleverly referring to their failure as a 'tactical withdrawal'.

### Proxy War

Kenyan authorities continue their support for the new autonomous state of Southern Somalia, Jubaland, which means that Kenyan forces are now in the heart of Somali clan warfare.

The portrayed perception of Somalia fighting against Islamist militants with foreign sponsors and ideology, is a portrait only half painted. Al-Shabaab fighters' stronghold is Mogadishu and it is from there that the majority of their fighters and leaders originate. Somali Islamist groups were always part of the ongoing civil war between Northern and Southern Somalia – both parts of a fractured Somalia, home to the country's largest and most influential clans. The struggle for control of Southern Somalia between Jubaland President, Mohamed Ahmed Islam, and Somalia's Federal

President, Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud, reached a breaking point on July 26, 2013, when a group of Al-Shabaab fighters wearing government military uniforms and Somali government forces, crossed over from Al-Shabaab controlled areas in Southern Somalia under the command of Colonel Abbas Abdi Gurey, Deputy Commander of Somali Federal government troops in Gedo region, Southern Somalia.

Somali government forces from Mogadishu and Al-Shabaab, clashed with Kenyan-led African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces stationed in Kismayo. Abbas Gurey and Al-Shabaab fighters were arrested by AMISOM. Somalia's government responded, demanding Abbas' release to continue his military duties in Southern Somalia and the withdrawal of Kenyan forces. This is not the first time Al-Shabaab fighters wearing government military uniforms staged an attack. In 2010, *“two Al-Shabaab fighters dressed in army uniforms carried out a small arms assault on the Muna hotel near the Presidential Palace in Mogadishu, before detonating their devices, killing six member of the parliament, a total 31 people were killed”*, (Australia National Security, 2010).<sup>4</sup> In March 2013, the Somali federal authorities admitted that members of the Presidential Guard have been selling AMISOM owned weapons to Al-Shabaab, two weeks after the United Nations partially lifted the Somali Arms Embargo. The UN estimated that 90% of captured weapons from Al-Shabaab in 2011 were from AMISOM stock a year earlier. The UN Monitoring Group on

Somalia and Eritrea Report in July 2013, stated that Somali government officials in Mogadishu *“outsource contract killings to Al-Shabaab”*. The UN report also claimed that the Somali Defense Minister who was the former Director of the Somali National Security Agency, Abdihakim Mahmoud Haji-Faqi, *“enjoys a close relationship with Al-Shabaab”*.

### **Kenya's Predicament**

Kenya is amongst the world's 30 poorest nations and home to the world's largest refugee camp. Dabba refugee camp is located in Kenya's poorest region and is home to more than 500,000 refugees, mainly from war torn Somalia. In the drought stricken Dabba, Kenyans desperate for aid are turned away by aid agencies. They often pose as Somali refugees as a last resort – an act of desperation. The refugee influx is a great economic burden on Kenya, where more than half of its population live on less than one US dollar a day. On July 26, 2013, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) welcomed Kenya's High Court Ruling against Kenya's Government policy to relocate Somali refugees from urban areas into refugee camps. A win for the estimated 51,000 Somali refugees living in urban Kenya and for human rights groups. The decision however, spelled a security disaster for the Kenyan government fighting with Somali Islamist Al-Shabaab in Southern Somalia and at home. The diplomatic relationship between the Kenyan government and the Somali government in Mogadishu, is at an

all-time low. Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta (according to the International Criminal Court in The Hague – a war criminal), told the Somali government “*to put their house in order...if their desire is for Kenya to pull out of Somalia, all they need to do is what they should have done 20 years ago*”, (Reuters, October 1, 2013). Kenyan forces are threatening the survival of Al-Shabaab and corrupt clan-based officials in Mogadishu, who are determined to keep fuelling the war.

The demand by Al-Shabaab and the Somali government to force Kenyan troops to withdraw from Southern Somalia will not contribute to the peace process that Somalia and the international community need. It is inevitable that Somalia will need Kenya’s help to achieve security and stability in the region.

*Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of SAGE International*

#### Images accessed 17/10/2013 –

Map of Kenya in Africa:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kenya\\_\(orthographic\\_projection\).svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kenya_(orthographic_projection).svg)

Westgate casualty image:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2013/sep/21/kenya-nairobi-shopping-centre-rescue-in-pictures#/?picture=417914300&index=1>

Kenyan security forces counter-terrorist operation at Westgate image:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24412315>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Backgrounder, Al Shabaab*, Council on Foreign Relations, Updated September 23, 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabab/p18650#p7> date accessed: October 17, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2060 (2012): Somalia*, United Nations Security Council (UNSC), July 12, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> McGregor A., *Westgate Mall Attack Demonstrates Al-Shabaab’s Desperation, Not Strength*, Jamestown Foundation Hot Issue, September 23, 2013, posted on Aberfoyle International Security <http://www.aberfoylesecurity.com>, date accessed: October 17, 2013

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this fact was borne out by observations in the following report: *Security and protection in Mogadishu and South-Central Somalia* Joint report from the Danish Immigration Service’s and the Norwegian Landinfo’s fact finding mission to Nairobi, Kenya and Mogadishu, Somalia 16 April to 7 May 2013.