

Al-Shabaab Attack on Garissa University in Kenya

On Thursday, April 2, gunmen attacked Garissa University in eastern Kenya, near the border with Somalia. The attackers killed 147 and injured 79 before detonating suicide vests when cornered by security forces. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack, which is believed to have been planned by Kenyan, Mohamed Kuno. START has developed this background report highlighting attacks attributed to al-Shabaab, attacks on educational institutions, and mass-casualty attacks.

AL-SHABAAB

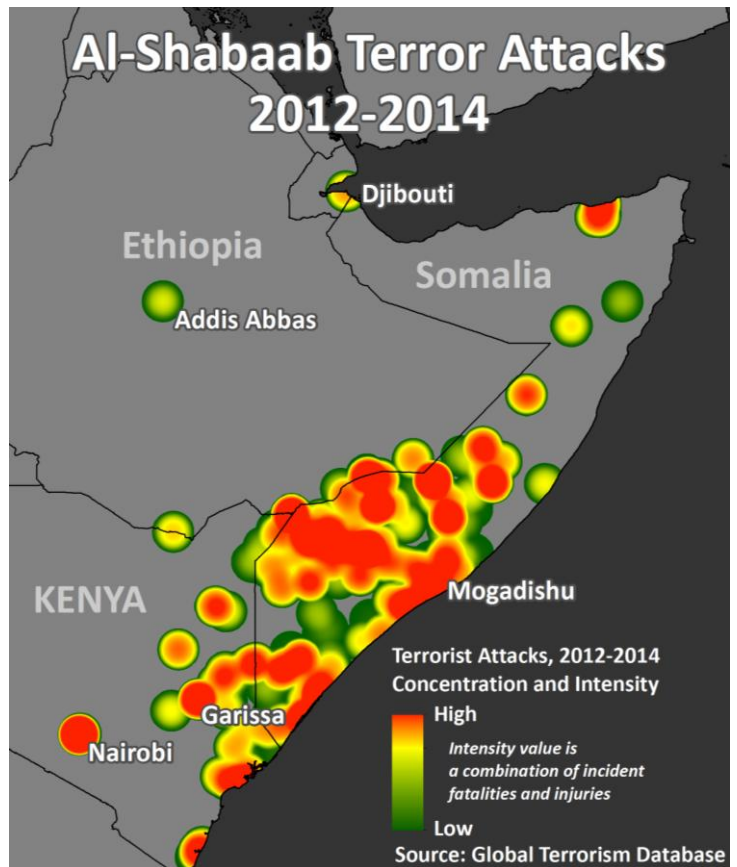
Al-Shabaab, which emerged from the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2007, was among the most active terrorist groups in the world in 2014, according to preliminary data from START's Global Terrorism Database (GTD). While al-Shabaab is most active in Somalia, it has also committed numerous attacks in Kenya, which has contributed troops to military missions in Somalia and hosts large numbers of Somali refugees.

Since it emerged from the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2007, al-Shabaab has carried out more than 1700 terrorist attacks, killing more than 4,000 and wounding more than 4,000. The number of attacks attributed to al-Shabaab has increased rapidly from less than 10 in 2007 to more than 800 in 2014.

The number of casualties caused by al-Shabaab increased at an even greater rate; however, the lethality of the group's attacks (2.4 deaths per attack, on average) have actually declined somewhat over time.

As al-Shabaab's activity increased in Somalia, the group also expanded its activity into Kenya in response to Kenyan forces intervening in Somalia. In 2014, al-Shabaab committed more than 80 attacks in Kenya, more than doubling the number of attacks (37) that it committed in the country in 2013. These attacks primarily occurred in Mandera (19 attacks), Nairobi (9 attacks), Mombasa (9 attacks), Garissa (7 attacks), and Wajir (5 attacks).

Recent high-profile attacks by al-Shabaab include the Sept. 21, 2013, attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. Assailants with automatic weapons and grenades held the mall and an unknown number of patrons hostage for four days until security forces were able to secure the facility. At least 72 people, including five assailants, were killed and at least 201 people, including five U.S. citizens, were injured. Ahmed Godane, the leader of al-Shabaab, claimed responsibility for the attack and stated that it was intended to punish Kenya for sending security forces into Somalia.



TARGETS AND TACTICS

In an effort to (re)gain control of territory in Somalia, al-Shabaab has most commonly attacked military targets (48.8% of all attacks since 2007), which come from various nations, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Turkey, and Uganda, as well as multinational AMISOM forces. In addition to attacks on military forces, al-Shabaab targets have included private citizens and property (26% of all attacks), general government (12.9%), police (8%), businesses (6.1%), diplomatic entities (2.0%), and journalists and media (2.0%).

The group's most lethal attacks are often characterized by assaults on military targets leading to extended clashes. For example, in November 2014, the group attacked government forces on Kudhaa Island, leading to an extended fight that killed more than 90 people. The group also commonly uses suicide attacks to target government officials and civilians. Since 2007, al-Shabaab has carried out more than 70 suicide bombings, which killed more than 670 people including the attackers.

AL-SHABAAB'S INFLUENCE ON TERRORISM IN KENYA

Between 1970 and 2014 there were more than 440 terrorist attacks in Kenya. These attacks killed more than 1,400 people and wounded more than 5,800 others. More than half of the terrorist attacks in Kenya were concentrated in six cities: Nairobi (76 attacks), Garissa (53 attacks), Mandera (50 attacks), Mombassa (27 attacks), Wajir (23 attacks), and Dadaab (17 attacks).

The most lethal terrorist attack in Kenya occurred when al-Qa'ida targeted the United States Embassy in Nairobi in August 1998. A suicide truck bomb killed more than 200 people, including 12 Americans, and wounded 4,000 others. This was part of a coordinated attack in which a similar device detonated almost simultaneously at the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killing 11 and wounding 85.

More recently, al-Shabaab has spearheaded a rapid and substantial increase in terrorism in Kenya.

- From 1970-2007, Kenya experienced 190 terrorist attacks, an average of just over 5 attacks a year.
- Since 2008, when al-Shabaab launched its first attack in the country, Kenya has experienced more than 330 attacks, an average of approximately 47 attacks a year.
 - Al-Shabaab has been responsible for the majority of these incidents, carrying out at least 200 attacks between 2008 and 2014, which accounts for 63 percent of all attacks in Kenya during this time period.

Perpetrators of Terrorist Attacks in Kenya, 1975-2014	Attacks	Fatalities	Wounded
Al-Qa'ida	3	240	4000
Al-Shabaab	213	520	1160
Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya	2	1	0
God's Oppressed Army	2	0	0
Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK)	3	0	5
Kenya African National Union (KANU)	5	5	8
Kisii Activists	1	4	0
Maasai	1	3	4
Maskini Liberation Front	3	27	100
Merille Militia	4	7	4
Mombasa Republican Council (MRC)	11	47	10
Mungiki Sect	4	8	2
Mwakenya Dissident Movement	2	4	0
Nandi Tribe	4	0	32
National Development Party (NDP)	1	0	2
Oromo Liberation Front	2	1	1
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	3	15	85
Sabaot Land Defense Force (SLDF)	4	19	11
Sabaot Tribe	2	40	0
Sungu Sungu	1	5	0
Toposa and Dongiro Tribes	2	89	0
United Somali Congress	1	1	2
Unknown/Other	162	373	445
Grand Total	446	1435	5886

ATTACKS ON EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Between 1970 and 2014, more than 3,800 terrorist attacks targeting educational institutions took place in 111 countries. These attacks comprised 2.7 percent of all terrorist attacks worldwide during this time period.

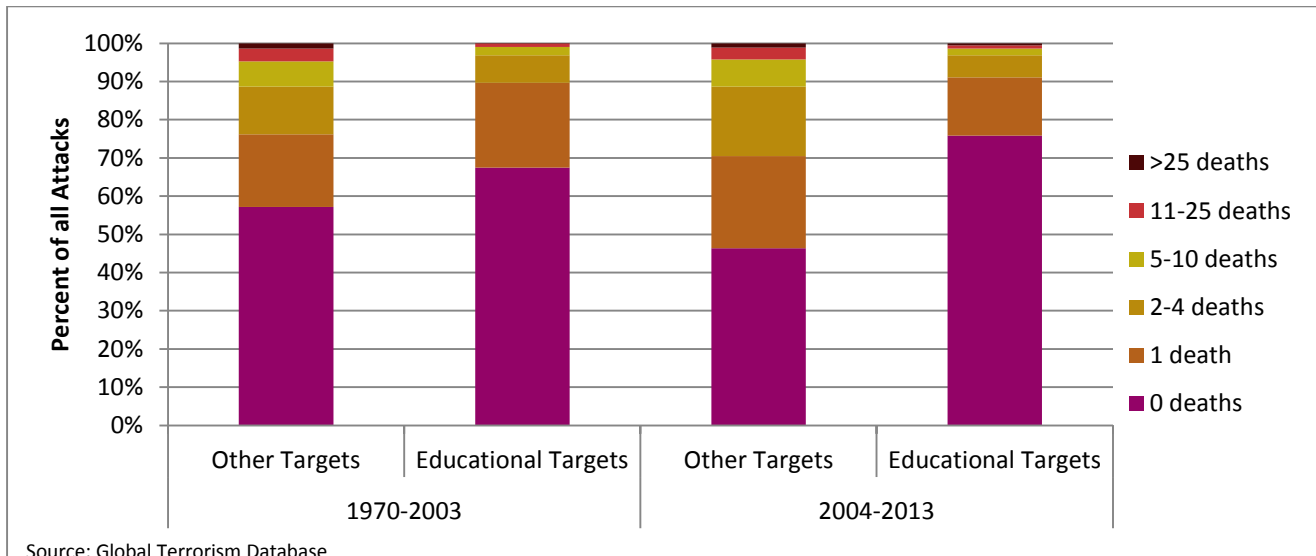
LETHALITY

Although attacks on educational targets have the capacity to be highly lethal, this is certainly atypical. In fact, the average lethality of attacks on educational targets was 0.9 deaths per attack, compared to 2.14 deaths per attack on average for all other types of targets combined.

This alone makes the deadliness of the Garissa University attack (147 killed) extremely unusual and noteworthy. This attack, and the December 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar (more than 150 killed), are among the three most deadly terrorist attacks on educational targets on record since 1970.

Nearly 70 percent of all terrorist attacks on educational targets between 1970 and 2014 (2,637 attacks) caused no deaths, compared to approximately 50 percent of attacks on other types of targets. Many attacks against schools and universities took place when the buildings were unoccupied and targeted the facility rather than individuals. This produced a considerably lower likelihood that the attack caused any casualties. Between 2004 and 2014, the percentage of non-lethal attacks against education targets actually increased to 72.5 percent, while attacks against other types of targets were more likely to be lethal than they had been previously.

Lethality of Terrorist Attacks against Educational and Other Targets, 1970-2013



In contrast, a relatively small number of terrorist attacks on educational targets worldwide were highly lethal. In fact, there were only 15 attacks from 1970-2014 on educational targets that killed more than 25 people. However, it is worth noting that 14 of these attacks occurred in the last decade. The most lethal terrorist attack on an educational target took place in 2004 in Russia when several dozen Chechen and Ingush militants affiliated with the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs attacked School Number One in Beslan. The assailants, who were armed with firearms and wearing explosives, held approximately 1,200 staff and students hostage for three days. Ultimately, 344 people were killed, including more than 100 children, and more than 700 others were wounded making this one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in modern history. In addition to the Beslan and Garissa attacks, highly lethal attacks on educational targets have taken place in Croatia (1 attack), Iraq (3 attacks), Kenya (1 attack), Nigeria (4 attacks), Pakistan (1) and Syria (4 attacks).

In comparison to the rest of the globe, attacks on education targets in Kenya are remarkably rare. There have only been eight such attacks since 1970. In comparison, during this period, there were more than 850 attacks on education in Pakistan, the country with the most attacks on educational targets.

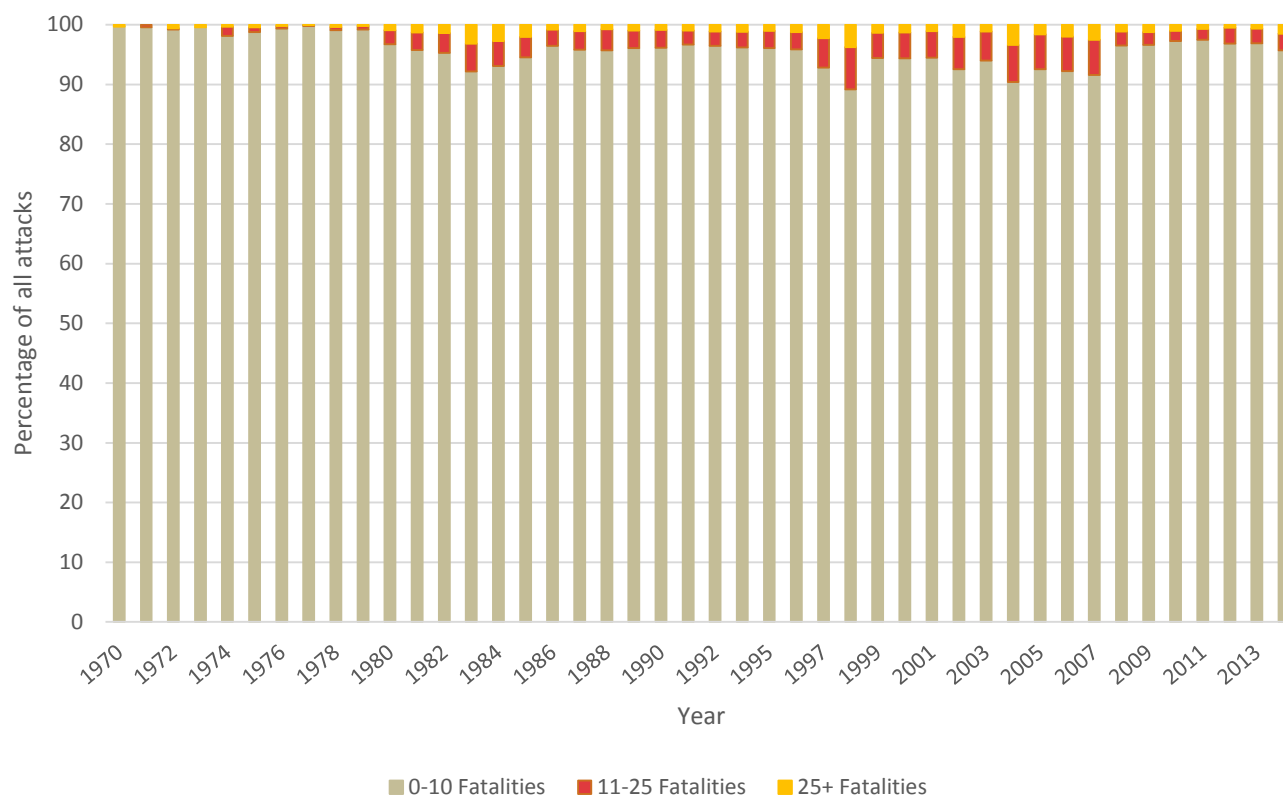
MASS CASUALTY ATTACKS

While catastrophic events like that of Garissa University demonstrate how deadly terrorists can be, data shows that most terrorist attacks do not inflict a large number of casualties (injuries and fatalities).

In fact, nearly 40 percent of all terrorist attacks since 1970 failed to kill or injure a single person and 96.9 percent of all attacks during this time period killed or injured less than 10 people.

Highly lethal attacks are especially rare, with only 1.2 percent of all attacks since 1970 producing more than 25 fatalities.

Mass Fatality Terrorism, 1970-2014



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This Background Report was funded through START by the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate's Office of University Programs through Award Number 2012-ST-061-CS0001, CSTAB 3.1. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the author and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or START.

Amy Pate, Michael Jensen and Erin Miller are the primary authors of this report, which is also drawn from previous reports on "[Terrorist Attacks on Educational Institutions](#)" and "[Al-Shabaab Attack on Westgate Mall in Kenya](#)," authored by Erin Miller. Questions should be directed to infostart@start.umd.edu.

The data presented here are drawn from START's Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and reports from news media. The GTD contains information on more than 125,000 terrorist incidents that have occurred around the world since 1970. For more information about the GTD, visit www.start.umd.edu/gtd.



The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is supported in part by the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through a Center of Excellence program based at the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information, contact START at infostart@start.umd.edu or visit www.start.umd.edu.

