

Kenya: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On February 10, 2020, the U.S. Department of State and the FBI announced that they have partnered with Kenya to establish the first ever Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) outside of the United States. The Kenya-led team will be based in Nairobi, will follow the U.S.-based JTTF structure of a multi-agency counterterrorism force, and receive continued support from an FBI Special Agent mentor. The creation of the Kenyan Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF-K) was initiated following an al-Shabab attack on the DusitD2 Hotel in Nairobi in January 2019 that left over 20 people dead. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [1], [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) [2], [Washington Post](#) [3])

On January 7, 2020, al-Shabab militants opened fire near Saretho village in Garissa county. The attackers killed four children and wounded three others before being repelled by security forces. The assailants were targeting a telecommunications mast. Kenyan authorities later claim to have seized bomb-making materials following the attack. On January 5, 2020, al-Shabab militants launch an attack on the shared U.S.-Kenyan Manda Bay Airfield, near Kenya's border with Somalia. The attack, which involved indirect and small-arms fire, kills three Americans. Among those killed are U.S. service member Henry Mayfield Jr., and two Department of Defense contractors. Two U.S. military contractors were also injured. The assailants managed to destroy six civilian aircraft and three military vehicles before being repelled by Kenyan Defense Forces and U.S. African Command. The attack was the first al-Shabab attack against U.S. forces inside Kenya. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [4], [Reuters](#) [5], [Wall Street Journal](#) [6], [Military Times](#) [7], [New York Times](#) [8], [ABC News](#) [9])

Overview

Kenya has been a frequent target of terrorist attacks. The largest, most high-profile attack occurred in 1998 when [al-Qaeda](#) [10] operatives bombed the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, killing more than 220 people. In recent years, the Somali-based [al-Shabab](#) [11] has perpetrated two largescale attacks in Kenya: the September 2013 siege of Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall that left 67 people dead, and the April 2015 attack on Garissa University in northeastern Kenya in which militants killed 148 people. The Somali terror group has increased attacks in Kenya in order to dissuade the country from sending its military to help stabilize neighboring Somalia. (Sources: [CNN](#) [12], [Reuters](#) [13], [Reuters](#) [14], [Reuters](#) [13])

Al-Shabab is the most active extremist group in Kenya, but is not solely responsible for the country's extremist violence. The separatist organization Mombasa Republican Council, for example, has used violence in its quest for the city of Mombasa's secession from Kenya. Police have accused the group of planning attacks including an attack on a casino in March 2013. Separately, [ISIS](#) [15] is not believed to have a foothold in Kenya, though Kenyan citizens have traveled abroad to join the international terror group. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [16], [Reuters](#) [17], [Reuters](#) [18], [Reuters](#) [19])

The Kenyan government has taken an aggressive approach to countering extremism at home and abroad. As terrorist forces have grown in strength, the central government in Nairobi has invested more resources to disrupt terrorist financing and thwart their operations. In April 2015, the Kenyan government began construction of a wall along Kenya's Somali border to keep out al-Shabab militants and illegal immigrants. Northeastern Regional Commissioner Mohamud Saleh said in January 2018 that the construction of the wall had helped lower border attacks to "almost zero." However, lack of payment for construction workers and political quarrels between the Kenyan and Somali governments have slowed development of the wall. The counter-extremism agenda has also suffered from government corruption. Security services have been accused of rampant abuse and torture in the conduct of their operations and detainment policies. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) [20], [Guardian](#) [21], [Telegraph](#) [22], [Shanghai Daily](#) [23], [Premium Times](#) [24])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Radicalization

Kenya has become a prime location for al-Shabab radicalization and recruitment amid the terror group's rise in Somalia. As early as 2012, reports indicated that al-Shabab was attracting a large number of Kenyan converts to Islam. By December 2014, it was estimated that Kenyans comprised around 25 percent of the terror group's ranks. Al-Shabab has primarily recruited within Muslim communities along the Kenyan coast. School heads in these communities have said that al-Shabab militants have infiltrated their institutions, influencing students and recruiting youth to their cause. In December 2017, Kenyan police raided an Islamic school in Likoni, Mombasa, arresting two to four teachers and taking 100 students

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into protective custody. The children were being indoctrinated to an extremist Islamist ideology, according to authorities. (Sources: [Global Post](#) [25], [BBC News](#) [26], [BBC News](#) [26], [Reuters](#) [27], [The Star](#) [28], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [29], [Reuters](#) [30])

Al-Shabab recruiters with links to both Kenya and Somalia pose a major security threat to Kenya. For example, well-known al-Shabab militant Abdukadir Mohamed Abdukadir is a Kenyan national of Somali origin and an effective liaison between extremists in the two countries. Abdukadir, also known as Ikrima, is able to travel freely between the two countries and leverage his linguistic and cultural knowledge to radicalize young Kenyans and convince them to enlist with al-Shabab. A 2018 study by U.S.-based NGO PeaceTech Lab found that al-Shabab had expanded its recruitment inside Kenya to include Kenyan Muslims as well as the Somali diaspora. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [31], [BBC News](#) [31], [PeaceTech Lab](#) [32])

Kenyans have perpetrated violent extremist attacks inside Kenya. Kenyan national Elgiva Bwire Oliacha, for example, carried out an al-Shabab grenade attack in Nairobi in 2011 that wounded over two dozen people. Oliacha pled guilty and was sentenced to life imprisonment, though his sentence was later reduced to 15 years. In April 23, 2014, Kenyan national Abdul Hajira attacked a Nairobi police station with a car bomb, killing two police officers—though media outlets have not linked Hajira to any specific group. More recently, in August 2016, a police raid targeting a former police officer who had deserted the force recovered three AK-47 rifles and 178 rounds of ammunition. The suspect was reported to have been planning an attack on an elite police force and was believed to have been radicalized by al-Shabab. (Source: [Global Post](#) [25], [The Nation](#) [33], [STRATFOR](#) [34], [Standard Digital News](#) [35], [The Star](#) [36])

Kenyan youth face economic, religious, and social coercion to convince them they have no alternative to joining extremist organizations, Lambert Mbela, a Christian pastor in Mombasa, told Religion News Service. According to Mbela, some youth convert to Islam for the promise of economic benefits or even just food. A June 2018 report by PeaceTech Lab report found that increased economic opportunity was one of the primary reasons for conversion to Islam among the region's Christians. The report noted that east African Christians who convert to Islam are often more at risk of radicalization due to social isolation. PeaceTech Lab researchers focused on the area of Mombasa and found that the families and friends of Christian converts to Islam tend to break their ties, increasing the converts' isolation and susceptibility to recruitment. (Sources: [Religion News Service](#) [37], [Xinhua](#) [38])

Foreign Fighters

Hundreds of young Kenyans comprise the largest contingent of foreign fighters in al-Shabab. Kenyan authorities continue to arrest Kenyan citizens on their way to join the terror group. In June 2017, for example, authorities arrested five Kenyan youth—all below the age of 20—on suspicion of attempting to join al-Shabab in Somalia. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [39], [Standard Media](#) [40])

In recent years, Kenyans have also sought to join ISIS in the group's strongholds abroad. In October 2016, Kenyan authorities arrested a female microbiology student and convert to Islam for attempting to join ISIS. That incident preceded the high profile arrest of attempted foreign fighters in October 2017, when South Sudanese security agents arrested three Kenyans for allegedly attempting to join ISIS in Libya. Two days after that arrest, three Kenyan girls returned home after escaping ISIS in Libya. More recently, in March 2018, Kenyan terror suspect Mohamed Shukri Abdiwahid Yarrow successfully joined ISIS in Yemen, according to Kenyan security sources. (Sources: [News 24](#) [41], [Associated Press](#) [39], [Nairobi News](#) [42], [Standard Media](#) [43])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

DusitD2 Compound Attack

On January 15, 2019, five Somali militants stormed the DusitD2 hotel and business complex in Nairobi where they opened fire and detonated an explosive. The 19-hour siege claimed the lives of at least 26 and injured another 28. The attack was aimed at wealthy Kenyans and foreigners as the upscale complex contained the offices of multiple international companies. In addition to sixteen Kenyans, one British national and one American were among the casualties. The five militants were killed by security forces with another 12 suspects being held for questioning. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [44], [Reuters](#) [45])

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Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that the attack was carried out in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. As Kenya continues to support U.S. airstrikes against al-Shabab, the insurgents have increased the frequency of their attacks throughout the country, particularly on Kenya's border with Somalia. Furthermore, Kenya, and Nairobi in particular, hosts international high-value targets—from two U.N. agencies to multiple international media houses—that al-Shabab can target to quickly gain international coverage. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [46], [Washington Post](#) [47], [Voice of America](#) [48], [Al Jazeera](#) [49])

Garissa University

On April 2, 2015, al-Shabab militants launched a 15-hour attack on Kenya's Garissa University, killing 148 students and faculty. The Islamist group targeted victims on the basis of their Christianity, and said the attack was a direct result of Kenya's military presence in Somalia. The massacre was the country's deadliest attack since the 1998 al-Qaeda bombings. (Sources: [Time](#) [50], [Wall Street Journal](#) [51])

Al-Shabab swiftly claimed responsibility for the attack, exclaiming: "Our Mujahideen brothers today managed to carry out a successful operation in Garissa town. We told the Kenyans to withdraw their army from Somalia. They did not want to listen us, so this is our message to them." Garissa University is located 90 miles from the Somali border. The porous Kenyan-Somali border allows for the relatively free flow of al-Shabab militants between the two countries. Garissa County also hosts Dadaab—one of the largest refugee camps in the world with over 336,000 Somalis—making the area is especially vulnerable to al-Shabab attacks. (Sources: [Time](#) [50], [Wall Street Journal](#) [52])

The Kenyan government did not immediately respond to the attack, but launched retaliatory airstrikes against al-Shabab camps in Somalia several days later. The government also clamped down on businesses and individuals suspected of providing material support to al-Shabab and announced that it was planning to construct a wall along the Kenya-Somalia border to cut off the flow of al-Shabab fighters. Construction of the wall began in mid-April 2015. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [53], [Time](#) [50], [Time](#) [54], [Telegraph](#) [22], [Shanghai Daily](#) [23])

Westgate Mall

Al-Shabab's second-largest massacre in Kenya came in September 2013 when gunmen attacked the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi. Al-Shabab claimed the attack was in response to Kenya sending troops to neighboring Somalia in support of the U.N.-backed government. Between 10 and 15 gunmen stormed the mall on September 21, shooting indiscriminately and moving store to store to take approximately 36 hostages. According to witnesses, the gunmen specifically targeted non-Muslims and told Muslims to flee before executing other hostages. On September 24, security forces retook control of the mall and the Kenyan government announced the end of the hostage crisis. Security forces had allegedly killed five terrorists and arrested 11 people suspected of involvement. Not including the attackers, 67 people were killed and 175 were injured during the siege. In 2015, the U.S. targeted and killed Somalia-based Adan Garar, the mastermind behind the attack. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [55], [Telegraph](#) [56], [Associated Press](#) [57], [Independent](#) [58], [International Business Times](#) [59])

Critics charge that the Kenyan government was unable to respond effectively and immediately to the attack because of poor cooperation between the army and police. For example, Kenya's Special Forces soldiers shot the commander of an elite police unit in a friendly-fire incident during the attack. The government response was also hindered by corruption. Video footage taken during the siege shows soldiers looting stores in the mall for goods. The attack was Kenya's worst since the 1998 al-Qaeda bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [60], [BBC News](#) [61], [Guardian](#) [62])

- **January 7, 2020:**Al-Shabab militants open fire near Saretho village in Garissa county, near the border with Somalia. The attackers kill four children and wound three others before security forces repel the assailants. The extremists were targeting a telecommunications mast. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [4], [Reuters](#) [5]
- **January 5, 2020:**Al-Shabab militants attack the shared U.S.-Kenyan Manda Bay Airfield near Kenya's border with Somalia. The attack kills one U.S. Service member and two U.S. military contractors. Two other contractors are also wounded. The attack is the first against U.S. forces inside Kenya. Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [6]
- **January 2, 2020:**Al-Shabab militants attack a convoy of three buses along the eastern coast of Kenya, on the way to Lamu. The attack kills four civilians and injures two others. Source: [Associated Press](#) [63]

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- **December 6, 2019:** Suspected al-Shabab militants attack a bus in Kotulo, Kenya near the border with Somalia. The attack kills at least 10. Sources: [Reuters](#) [64], [Al Jazeera](#) [65]
- **October 12, 2019:** A Kenyan police vehicle strikes a homemade bomb near the border with Somalia. At least ten police officers are killed. Al-Shabab is suspected to have planted the bomb. Source: [Reuters](#) [66]
- **October 1, 2019:** Kenyan police raid a suspected extremist hideout in the suburbs of Mombasa. The raid kills three men, suspected of planning attacks throughout the city. shoot dead three men suspected of planning militant attacks in the coastal city of Mombasa. It is suspected that the men were members of al-Shabab. Source: [Reuters](#) [67]
- **September 13, 2019:** A rocket propelled grenade hits a convoy of armored vehicles belonging to the Kenya Defence Forces and Anti-Stock Theft (ASTU) Unit in Elwak, Mandera County. At least five security officers are killed along with 20 other personnel. It is suspected that al-Shabab is responsible for the attack. Source: [Standard](#) [68]
- **July 26, 2019:** Kenyan police dismantle an improvised explosive devices (IED) assembly site reportedly operated by al-Shabab. Source: [Hivisasa](#) [69]
- **July 15, 2019:** Three suspected al-Shabab extremists detonate an improvised explosive device on the Kenyan-Somali border. The three assailants are killed by border police while two officers are injured in the attack. Source: [Associated Press](#) [70]
- **July 3, 2019:** A court in Kenya sentences al-Shabab militant Rashid Charles Mberesero, to life in prison for his role in the 2015 Garissa University College attack, which killed over 148 people. His two other accomplices Mohamed Ali Abikar and Hassan Edin Hassan each receive a 41 year sentence. Source: [BBC News](#) [71]
- **June 21, 2019:** Security forces in Kenya kill three suspected al-Shabab militants following an attack on a police outpost in Garissa county. No security personnel were injured in the operation. Source: [Reuters](#) [72]
- **June 15, 2019:** A roadside bomb hits a police vehicle near Kenya's border with Somalia. The blast kills at least 11 officers who were in pursuit of recovering three police reservists kidnapped by Islamic insurgents the previous day. Al-Shabab claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [Guardian](#) [73], [Al Jazeera](#) [74]
- **April 24, 2019:** A Kenyan court finds British national Jermaine Grant guilty of possessing bomb-making materials. Grant is believed to be a part of an al-Shabab linked cell that planned multiple attacks in December 2011. Source: [Associated Press](#) [75]
- **April 13, 2019:** Two Cuban doctors working for the Kenyan government are kidnapped by gunmen reportedly affiliated with al-Shabab. One police officer is shot and killed during the abduction. It is suspected that the gunmen took the doctors to Somalia. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [76]
- **January 18, 2019:** A Kenyan court orders that six suspects—five Kenyan and one Canadian national—be held in connection to the hotel siege in Nairobi on January 15, 2019. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [77], [Associated Press](#) [78]
- **January 15, 2019:** Four gunmen and one suicide bomber storm a complex in Nairobi. The 19-hour siege claims the lives of 26, including the attackers, and injures 28. Al-Shabab claims responsibility for the attack as it was “a response to the witless remarks of U.S. president, Donald Trump, and his declaration of al-Quds [Jerusalem] as the capital of Israel.” Sources: [Washington Post](#) [3], [CNN](#) [79], [NPR](#) [80]
- **November 20, 2018:** Six armed men open fire in Kilifi. The gunmen kidnap an Italian charity worker and wound five others. The attack is reportedly the work of al-Shabab. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [81]
- **August 29, 2018:** A military vehicle runs over a roadside bomb in Lamu County, killing five soldiers and wounding 10. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. The Kenya Defense Force cites “lurking terror elements.” Sources: [Reuters](#) [82], [Al Jazeera](#) [83]
- **August 21, 2018:** A vehicle carrying General Service Unit officers runs over an improvised explosive device in Garissa County, killing five and wounding three. Authorities suspect al-Shabab. Source: [Kenya.co.ke](#) [84]
- **August 13, 2018:** A construction vehicle heading toward the Kenya-Somalia wall drives over a landmine, killing at least three and wounding two. Al-Shabab claims responsibility through its Radio Onduras station. Sources: [The Star](#) [85], [Xinhua](#) [86]
- **August 8, 2018:** A military truck runs over an improvised explosive device in Lamu County, killing five soldiers. Al-Shabab claims responsibility and claims the blast killed nine soldiers. Sources: [Reuters](#) [82], [Reuters](#) [87]
- **July 5, 2018:** A military vehicle strikes a roadside bomb along the Lamu-Garissa border, reportedly killing six soldiers. The Kenyan military denies that any soldiers died in the attack. Al-Shabab is suspected. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [83], [Daily Nation](#) [88]
- **June 17, 2018:** A security patrol drives over an improvised explosive device in Wajir County, near the Somali border. After the explosion, militants begin shooting at the patrol. The attack kills at least eight and wounds one. Authorities

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- blame al-Shabab. Source: [Voice of America](#) [89]
- **June 6, 2018:**A Kenyan police vehicle strikes a roadside bomb near the Kenya-Somalia border, killing five officers and wounding three.
Police suspect al-Shabab planted the improvised explosive device. Source: [Reuters](#) [90]
 - **May 6, 2018:**A Kenyan military vehicle traveling to a Somali military base runs over an improvised explosive device near the Somali town of Dhobley, killing nine.
The vehicle was part of a convoy returning to their camp on the outskirts of Dhobley from northern Kenya. Al-Shabab claims responsibility while claiming the attack killed 15. Sources: [Daily Nation](#) [91], [Agence France-Presse](#) [92]
 - **March 2, 2018:**Militants kill five Kenyan police officers and wound three others near the Kenyan-Somali border. Authorities blame al-Shabab. Source: [Reuters](#) [93]
 - **February 15, 2018:**Suspected al-Shabab operatives kill three teachers at a primary school in Qarsa, Wajir County. Sources: [Voice of America](#) [89], [Standard Media](#) [94]
 - **December 19, 2017:**Kenyan police raid an Islamic school in Likoni, arresting two to four teachers and taking 100 students into protective custody.
The children were being indoctrinated to an extremist Islamist ideology, according to authorities. Source: [Reuters](#) [30]
 - **December 8, 2017:**Police shoot dead a suspected al-Shabab recruiter in Likoni Division, Mombasa County. Source: [Standard Media](#) [95]
 - **October 10, 2017:**Gunmen kill two university staff members in the south of Mombasa.
Police say that either terrorists or robbers are responsible. Source: [Reuters](#) [96]
 - **October 7, 2017:**Three Kenyan girls are returned home after escaping ISIS in Libya.
At least one of the girls had been lured to the group by an online recruiter offering a job. Source: [Nairobi News](#) [42]
 - **October 5, 2017:**South Sudanese security agents arrest three Kenyans for allegedly attempting to join ISIS in Libya. Source: [Associated Press](#) [39]
 - **September 7, 2017:**Four people are beheaded in Lamu West by 30 armed men in military gear.
County Commissioner Gilbert Kitiyo says it is unclear if the killings are terrorist-related. Source: [Daily Nation](#) [97]
 - **September 4, 2017:**Suspected al-Shabab militants shoot and kill two police guarding a church in the southern town of Ukunda.
Source: [Japan Times](#) [98]
 - **August 18, 2017:**Kenyan anti-terror police shoot and kill al-Shabab operative Hussein Said Omar, responsible for the attacks in Mpeketoni in 2014 that left over 60 people dead.
Source: [Standard Media](#) [99]
 - **July 8, 2017:**Al-Shabab militants behead nine civilians in Jima village in southeastern Kenya.
Source: [Times of Israel](#) [100]
 - **July 5, 2017:**Al-Shabab militants, using rocket-propelled grenades and gunfire, kill three Kenyan policemen in a raid on a police station in the northeastern Kenyan town of Pandanguo.
The raid follows a series of al-Shabab attacks in Kenya that killed at least 28 people in the previous six weeks, most along the border with Somalia. Source: [Reuters](#) [101]
 - **June 8, 2017:**Kenyan authorities arrest five Kenyan youth—all below the age of 20—on suspicion of attempting to join al-Shabab in Somalia.
Source: [Standard Media](#) [40]
 - **June 6, 2017:**Four Kenyan aid workers are killed when their vehicle hits a landmine near Dadaab refugee camp in the eastern county of Garissa.
A regional leader says al-Shabab is suspected of having planted the mine. Analysts say al-Shabab has called the attacks revenge for Kenya's military role in fighting the group in Somalia. Sources: [VOA News](#) [102], [VOA News](#) [103]
 - **June 1, 2017:**Suspected al-Shabab militants burn down a school in northeastern Kenya, killing one teacher and abducting another, according to a Kenyan parliament member from the area where the attack occurred.
Source: [VOA News](#) [104]
 - **May 31, 2017:**A landmine kills seven police officers and one civilian riding in a truck on a road along Kenya's northern coastline, according to a police report filed at Kiunga police station in Lamu.
Al-Shabab claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Reuters](#) [105]
 - **May 30, 2017:**Two civilians are killed when their vehicle hits an improved explosive device in Galgala highland, where Puntland state security forces are fighting al-Shabab.
Source: [VOA News](#) [106]
 - **May 25, 2017:**A roadside bomb kills two Kenyan police officers near the Somali border.
Garissa County police commissioner James Kianda tells Reuters the attack was "the work of al Shabaab." Source: [Reuters](#) [107]
 - **May 24, 2017:**Nine Kenyan police officers are killed in two separate roadside bombings in Eastern Kenya.
Al-Shabab claims responsibility for both attacks. A day earlier, Kenyan police said they were "on alert" for an increase in violence after al-Shabab fighters were detected moving into Kenya in small groups. Sources: [Reuters](#) [108], [Reuters](#) [107]
 - **May 15, 2017:**Suspected al-Shabab militants kill a local administrative chief in an attack in an area in the north of Kenya bordering Somalia.

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- According to a police report of the attack, four suspected al-Shabab members broke into the administrator's office and interrogated him before shooting him dead. Source: [VOA News](#) [109]
- **May 15, 2017:**A roadside bomb planted by al-Shabab strikes a passenger vehicle near the town of Liboi. The attack kills all four occupants including one child. Source: [VOA News](#) [109]
 - **May 12, 2017:**Suspected al-Shabab militants kill two quarry workers in Mandera county. Source: [VOA News](#) [109]
 - **March 10, 2017:**In a raid involving more than 30 Kenyan counterterrorism officers, six terror suspects are arrested in the coastal town of Malindi. Source: [Africa Review](#) [110]
 - **January 27, 2017:**A suicide car bomb and shooting attack by al-Shabab militants against a Kenyan military base in southern Somalia reportedly kills at least 57 Kenyan soldiers and an undisclosed number of al-Shabab members. Source: [New York Times](#) [111]
 - **November 26, 2016:**Kenyan police say they have thwarted a terror attack in Garissa County after discovering a large cache of weapons and ammunition, including improvised explosive devices and a suicide vest. The cache is believed to have belonged to al-Shabab militants who snuck into the country across the border with Somalia. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [112]
 - **November 2016:**Kenyan police issue an alert following alleged plans by al-Shabab and ISIS to attack public service vehicles, particularly along the Kenya-Somalia border. Source: [Standard Media](#) [113]
 - **October 27, 2016:**A police officer shoots and kills an unidentified assailant outside of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi. Source: [CNN](#) [114]
 - **October 25, 2016:**Al-Shabab gunmen attack Bisharo Hotel in Mandera, killing 12 people. Sources: [Tuko.co.ke](#) [115], [The East African](#) [116]
 - **October 6, 2016:**Approximately 20 assailants attack a residential building in Mandera, which housed mainly non-ethnic Somalis and non-Muslims. The attack leaves six dead and injures at least 25 others. The site of the attack was located less than a kilometer from the Somali border town of Beled Hawa. Authorities disputed whether al-Shabab or local criminals were responsible. Sources: [Standard Media](#) [117], [The East African](#) [116], [Evening Standard](#) [118]
 - **October 5, 2016:**Kenyan authorities arrest a female microbiology student for attempting to join ISIS abroad. Source: [News 24](#) [41]
 - **September 21, 2016:**Al-Shabab militants attack Amei Police Station in Garissa and abduct four police officers whom are later executed in Somalia. Al-Shabab also steals several weapons, ammunition, and a Land Cruiser vehicle. Sources: [Tuko.co.ke](#) [115], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [29]
 - **July 14, 2016:**Abdihakim Maslah attacks the Kapenguria Police Station, killing seven police officers, before authorities are able to subdue him. According to some reports, the assailant was a suspected al-Shabab fighter. Other reports say that the gunman may have been a police officer himself. Sources: [Tuko.co.ke](#) [115], [Sky News](#) [119], [Daily Nation](#) [120]
 - **May 3, 2016:**Police foil an alleged attempt by ISIS affiliates to conduct "large scale" biological attacks in Kenya using anthrax and to recruit university students to join the group in Libya and Syria. Police arrest Mohammed Abdi Ali, a medical intern at the Wote District Hospital in Makueni County, and his wife, a medical student in Uganda. Two alleged accomplices, also medical interns, remain at-large. Source: [Associated Press](#) [121]
 - **January 15, 2016:**Al-Shabab militants ambush an African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) base in El Adde, Somalia. Soldiers from the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) had a military camp at that base. The official number of KDF casualties has not been released, but al-Shabab claims to have killed "more than 100" Kenyan soldiers. Sources: [BBC News](#) [122], [Washington Post](#) [123], [The Star](#) [124]
 - **April 2, 2015:**Al-Shabab militants storm Garissa University, killing at least 148. The Islamist outfit targets a vast majority of the student victims on the basis of their Christian faith. Source: [Washington Post](#) [125]
 - **December 3, 2014:**A court charges 13 people with being members of al-Shabab after they were arrested during police raids in mosques in the port city of Mombasa. Al-Shabab said it killed 28 people outside the northeastern town of Mandera near the Somali and Ethiopian borders in retaliation for the mosque raids. Source: [Reuters](#) [126]
 - **November 30, 2014:**An improvised explosive device explodes and wounds one person in a market in the eastern Kenyan town of Garissa. Source: [Reuters](#) [127]
 - **November 22, 2014:**Al-Shabab militants ambush a Nairobi-bound bus outside the town of Mandera near the border with Somalia and Ethiopia. The gunmen ordered non-Muslims passengers off the bus and shot 28. Al-Shabab said the attack was in retaliation for November 17 raids on Mombasa mosques police believed were being used to recruit militants and store weapons.

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- Police arrested almost 400 people during the raids. Sources: [Reuters](#) [128], [Reuters](#) [129]
- **November 17, 2014:** Approximately 1,000 people protest in Nairobi after a string of mob attacks on women wearing mini-skirts and other clothing deemed immodest. Source: [Reuters](#) [130]
 - **November 4, 2014:** Islamic cleric Salim Bakari Mwarangi is shot and killed. Mwarangi was a vocal critic of al-Shabab and radicalization among the youth. More than 20 clerics disappeared or were killed between 2000 and 2014. The perpetrators flee on a motorbike. Source: [Reuters](#) [131]
 - **November 1, 2014:** Unidentified gunmen ambush and kill at least eight Kenyan police officers in the northwest of Kenya. Source: [Reuters](#) [132]
 - **October 18, 2014:** Al-Shabab militants open fire on Kenyan soldiers near the Ethiopian border. Five militants are killed in the clash, and Kenyan soldiers discovered a vehicle filled with explosives. Source: [Reuters](#) [133]
 - **September 18, 2014:** Kenyan police arrest two Iranians suspected of plotting an attack. The Iranians were trying to board a flight to Belgium at Nairobi's airport using fake Israeli passports. Both plead guilty and a Kenyan court sentenced them to two years in prison or a large fine. Source: [Reuters](#) [134]
 - **July 25, 2014:** Kenyan police shoot and kill two armed men suspected of planning an attack on a ferry in Mombasa. One of the militants tried to throw a grenade at the police. Their association is unknown. Source: [Reuters](#) [135]
 - **March 11, 2014:** Police arrest two men in a vehicle filled with 381 pounds of explosives. Police said they were targeting a Mombasa shopping mall. Police link the suspects to al-Shabab militants responsible for the 2013 Westgate mall attack. Source: [Associated Press](#) [136]
 - **July 18, 2014:** Al-Shabab gunmen kill seven on a bus and attacked two trucks along the Somali border. Al-Shabab said the attacks were in response to Kenya's deployment of more troops along the African coast. Source: [Reuters](#) [137]
 - **June 2014:** Police arrest 13 members of the separatist group Mombasa Republican Council. Police accuse the separatists of planning ethnically-motivated attacks. Source: [Reuters](#) [19]
 - **June 15, 2014 - June 16, 2014:** Al-Shabab militants kill at least 65 people in multiple attacks in and around the coastal town of Mpeketoni. In one offense, militants execute 50 people gathered to watch the World Cup soccer tournament on television. Al-Shabab warns that "Kenya is now officially a warzone" and says the attacks are in response to Kenya sending military forces to Somalia and supposedly executing Muslim scholars. It is the group's biggest offensive since the September attack on the Westgate mall in Nairobi. Sources: [Reuters](#) [14], [Reuters](#) [13]
 - **June 10, 2014:** Unknown attackers kill Sheikh Mohammed Idris, chair of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, at a mosque south of Mombasa. Idris had frequently spoken out against radical Islam. Source: [Reuters](#) [138]
 - **May 19, 2014:** Al-Shabab militants kill at least 12 people in an ambush in northern Kenya. The attack came a day after Kenyan jets targeted al-Shabab bases in Somalia. Source: [Reuters](#) [139]
 - **January 2, 2014:** At least 10 people are wounded during a grenade attack at a nightclub outside of Mombasa. Source: [Reuters](#) [140]
 - **December 14, 2013:** A grenade attack on a minibus in Mombasa kills at least six people. Police said it was the first such attack since the al-Shabab September assault on the Westgate mall. Source: [Reuters](#) [141]
 - **September 21, 2013:** Al-Shabab gunmen attack Nairobi's Westgate mall. The attack sparks a four-day siege that leaves 67 dead and 175 wounded. Al-Shabab calls the attack retribution for Kenya's troop presence in Somalia. Source: [BBC News](#) [55]
 - **March 28, 2013:** Fifty Mombasa Republican Council raiders armed with machetes attack a casino in the coastal town of Malindi. Eight people are killed. Sources: [Reuters](#) [16], [Reuters](#) [19]
 - **December 15, 2012:** Kenyan police seize bows and arrows, machetes, and other weapons during a raid on what they believed to be a Mombasa Republican Council training camp. Source: [Reuters](#) [142]
 - **November 19, 2012:** Kenyan police used tear gas to disperse rioters attacking ethnic Somalis in the Nairobi district known as "Little Mogadishu." The rioters threw rocks and smashed windows in protest of a November 18 bombing that killed nine people. Sources: [Reuters](#) [143], [Reuters](#) [144]
 - **November 4, 2012:** A suspected grenade attack on a church in the eastern Kenyan town of Garissa kills one and injures at least 11 people. Source: [Reuters](#) [145]
 - **September 30, 2012:** Suspected al-Shabab sympathizers kill a 9-year-old boy in a grenade attack on a Nairobi church. Two Kenyan police officers are killed hours later near the Somali border. Source: [Reuters](#) [146]
 - **September 12, 2012:** Al-Shabab suicide bombers kill eight people at a hotel where Kenya's newly elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was delivering a speech.

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Source: [Reuters](#) [147]

- **June 19, 2012:** Kenyan police arrest two Iranians suspected of belonging to Iran's Quds Force. Police suspect Ahmad Abolfathi Mohammad and Sayed Mansour Mousavi of planning attacks against Israeli and American targets in the country. Source: [ABC News](#) [148]
- **December 2011:** Kenyan police arrest British national Jermaine Grant, his Kenyan wife, and an accomplice for planning to attack British, French and American targets. Samantha Lewthwaite, the widow of July 7, 2005, London bomber Germaine Lindsay, had also been part of the cell and reportedly escaped minutes before police arrived. Police found bomb materials in Grant's Mombasa apartment where he was arrested. Grant and his accomplices reportedly planned to blow up Western hotels along Kenya's coast during Christmas. Investigators connected the cell to al-Shabab. Sources: [Reuters](#) [149], [Telegraph](#) [150]
- **November 28, 2002:** Three suicide bombers kill 12 people at the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in Mombasa. The bombings came minutes after a group of terrorists fired shoulder-launched missiles at an Israeli passenger jet. Source: [New York Times](#) [151]
- **August 7, 1998:** Al-Qaeda bombs the U.S. embassy in Nairobi killing 224 people. The U.S. indicted Osama bin Laden and 20 other al-Qaeda members for the attack that killed 224 people, including 12 Americans, and wounded more than 4,600. Source: [CNN](#) [12]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Kenya launched its National Strategy to Combat Violent Extremism in September 2016. President Uhuru Kenyatta vowed that the plan would pool resources from government, civil society, and the private sector in support of counterterrorism efforts, and would emphasize de-radicalization over military tactics. The effort is headed by Kenya National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) director Martin Kimani. Three county governments—Lamu, Kwale, and Mombasa—have established their own CVE strategies as well. (Source: [Jamestown Foundation](#) [29], [U.S. Department of State](#) [152])

In March 2017, Kenya announced it had formed a committee to spearhead efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. The group is reported to include all principle secretaries and the Inspector General of Police. A government spokesman termed the effort a "cross-cutting, multi-agency national campaign" and said it would include "preventative, mitigation, and rehabilitative measures" to complement ongoing counterterrorism efforts. The committee operates under the country's CVE strategy announced in September 2016. In 2018, the NCTC began work with Kenya's Ministry of Education on a school program on countering violent extremism. (Sources: [Xinhua](#) [153], [Daily Nation](#) [154])

In 2018, Kenyan security experts noted that Kenya's military strategy had led to a general decrease in al-Shabab's violent activities but there had been a simultaneous increase in online radicalization. In September 2018, the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS) and the Institute of Development Studies jointly launched the Countering Violent Extremism Research Hub, an online library to support CVE research. The government-funded resource tracks extremist incidents in Kenya and details active CVE programming. (Sources: [Institute of Development Studies](#) [155], [Countering Violent Extremism Research Hub](#) [156], [Xinhua](#) [38])

The Kenya-Somali Border Wall

Kenya announced plans in March 2015 to build a wall along its border with Somalia to keep out illegal immigrants and al-Shabab militants. Construction of the wall began in mid-April 2015 in the coastal city of Lamu, Kenya. The 440-mile planned wall, which will stretch from the Indian Ocean to the city of Mandera where the borders of Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia converge. The proposed wall will consist of concrete barriers, fences, ditches, and observation posts. In March 2016, both countries ultimately agreed to establish shared exit and entry ports along the border so as to better monitor those moving between the two countries. Northeastern Regional Commissioner Mohamud Saleh said in January 2018 that the construction of the wall had helped lower border attacks inside Kenya to "almost zero." Kenya suspended construction of the wall in March 2018 after tensions arose over more than 60 houses along the proposed route. Talks between Kenya and Somalia collapsed that August after Somalia accused Kenya of restarting construction without an agreement. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [21], [Telegraph](#) [22], [Shanghai Daily](#) [23], [Premium Times](#) [24], [The Star](#) [157], [MENAFN](#) [158])

Security Measures

Since the April 2015 terrorist attack on Garissa University, Kenyan police have increased their presence in vulnerable

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areas including on college campuses. Kenya has also retaliated vigorously against al-Shabab forces, sending fighter jets to bomb the terrorist group's camps in Somalia. Kenyan military spokesmen claim uncertainty about what effect, if any, the bombing campaign has achieved. (Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [159])

While Kenyan authorities have expanded their campaign to stop violent extremists, the harsher aspects of its implementation have exacerbated historical conflicts between the Kenyan government and Kenyan Muslims. Kenya's sizable Muslim population has borne the brunt of these security measures. Some counterterrorism efforts have also enabled human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, and torture by government security forces. (Source: [Human Rights Watch](#) [20])

Counterterrorism Legislation and Human Rights Controversies

The Kenyan Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) has allegedly been responsible for extrajudicial executions, disappearances, and mistreatment of individuals arrested on terrorism charges. Instead of responding to these concerns, Kenyan lawmakers passed the Security Laws (Amendment) Act No. 19 of 2014, which further empowers security forces and inhibits the freedom of the media and other sources of independent scrutiny. This new legislation also allows Kenyan police to hold terror suspects for nearly a year, and gives authorities the power to monitor and tap phones. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) [20], [Al Jazeera](#) [160])

While Kenyan officials state that these measures are necessary to counter terrorism effectively, there is a great deal of controversy surrounding this legislation. Opponents claim that it is unfairly infringing on basic human rights. The law places restrictions on the media, for instance, that arguably violate the freedom of expression. In addition, the law strictly limits the number of refugees permitted to reside in Kenya, which critics argue also violates constitutional provisions. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, and opposition leaders have called the bill "suppressive" and "draconian." (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [160], [The Jurist](#) [161], [AllAfrica](#) [162])

On March 15, 2017, London-based Privacy International released a report accusing Kenyan security agencies of violating individual privacy rights and using information collected to commit human rights abuses, including targeted killings. Reports by other groups, including Human Rights Watch, claim that dozens of Kenyans suspected of links to extremist groups have disappeared and some were found executed. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) [20], [Guardian](#) [21], [Telegraph](#) [22], [Shanghai Daily](#) [23], [Star Tribune](#) [163])

International Counter-Extremism

On July 10, 2019, Kenya partnered with the U.N. to convene a two day Pan African Counter-Terrorism Summit in Nairobi. The forum devised new strategies in combatting the war on terror and violent extremism with specific focus on a "whole of society" approach. In February 2012, the U.N. Security Council authorized Kenya to join the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Kenya contributed about 4,000 troops to the mission. Later that year through AMISOM, Kenya's military forces captured Somalia's port city of Kismayo, which had served as a revenue source for al-Shabab. Following an al-Shabab ambush on Kenyan forces in El Adde, Somalia, the Nigerian and Somali governments expressed their preparedness to collaborate with Kenya to combat terror groups in the region. Kenya continues to participate in AMISOM. (Sources: [Global Times](#) [164], [United Nations](#) [165], [Congressional Research Service](#) [166], [Daily Nation](#) [167], [Capital News](#) [168])

Cooperation with the United States

Kenya is one of six countries participating in the United States' Security Governance Initiative (SGI), focusing on management, oversight, and accountability of security services. Kenya's SGI priorities include border security, administration of justice, and police human resource management, with each area having a special focus on countering violent extremism. Kenyan civil society organizations are actively engaged in countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [152])

U.S. aid to Kenya—approximately \$1 billion annually—has been intended to help Kenya develop economically and combat extremism militarily. The military portion of this aid seeks to enable Kenya to carry out more successful counter-extremist

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operations in the Horn of Africa. In July 2015, the U.S. government provided the Kenya Defense Force (KDF) with nearly \$100 million to combat al-Shabab. The Kenyan government used the funds to purchase equipment, training, and improve intelligence and logistics capabilities. (Sources: (Sources: [Congressional Research Service](#) [166], [Daily Mail](#) [169], [AllAfrica](#) [170])

On a visit to Kenya in 2015, then-U.S. President Barack Obama discussed increasing U.S. assistance to Kenyan security services to "improve intelligence capabilities." Part of \$95 million in U.S. aid to the Kenyan military in 2015 was used to "enhance" intelligence and help Kenyan security forces "identify and target" al-Shabaab operatives. In December 2016, the United States gave the Kenyan government six of eight promised Huey II helicopters for use in counterterrorism activity by the Kenyan Air Force. (Sources: [The Cipher Brief](#) [171], [SecurityAssistance.org](#) [172], [Congressional Research Service](#) [166], [Daily Mail](#) [169], [AllAfrica](#) [170], [Daily Nation](#) [173], [Government of Kenya](#) [174], [Defense News](#) [175])

On February 10, 2020, the U.S. Department of State and the FBI announced that they have partnered with Kenya to establish the first ever Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) outside of the United States. The Kenya-led team will be based in Nairobi, will follow the U.S.-based JTTF structure of a multi-agency counterterrorism force, and receive continued support from an FBI Special Agent mentor. The creation of the Kenyan Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF-K) was initiated following an al-Shabab attack on the DusitD2 Hotel in Nairobi on January 16, 2019 that left over 20 people dead. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [1], [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) [2], [Washington Post](#) [3])

Cooperation with the United Kingdom

The British army has trained 1,000 Kenyan military and police officers in the disposal of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) since 2015. During an August 2018 visit to Kenya, British Prime Minister Theresa May signed an agreement to further expand cooperation between the two countries. The agreement includes the expansion of a joint Kenyan-United Kingdom counterterrorism installation into a regional training facility on IED disposal. The facility is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2020. Under the agreement, the United Kingdom will also provide funding and material resources for Kenya to enhance its border and aviation security procedures. (Sources: [Daily Nation](#) [176], [Gov.uk](#) [177])

Cooperation with Somalia

Al-Shabab fighters have been reportedly crossing into Kenya through neighboring Somalia's Bula Hawa border region. In early April 2016, local government representatives from both countries' affected border regions met to discuss the issue. Both governments pledged to work together to fight terrorism and prevent cross-border crimes. Representatives of the respective governments met again the following year to continue discussing enhanced security relations and other bilateral issues. The two countries agreed to open two new border crossings and resume flights between Mogadishu and Nairobi. Kenya also committed to training Somali nurses and teachers, and to supporting technical training for at-risk Somali youth. The sides also agreed to continue regular meetings on bilateral relations. (Sources: [Republic of Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) [178], [AllAfrica](#) [179], [Daily Nation](#) [180])

Cooperation with Israel

In February 2016, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta met with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin to seek Israel's support for Kenya's counterterrorism efforts. Kenya was specifically interested in having Israel conduct "more overt" counterterrorism operations in the country and East African region. Cooperation between the two countries dates back to Operation Entebbe in 1976 when Kenya provided operational support to Israel during a hostage rescue mission in Uganda. Kenyatta was concerned about the safety of his country since the United States closed its drone base at Arba Minch in 2015 and stopped flying drones from Djibouti. Rivlin and Kenyatta agreed to further cooperation in the war against terrorism. Israeli Deputy Ambassador to Kenya Nadav Peldman stated that "Israel is ready and willing to assist Kenya...to fight terrorism." Israeli security advisers reportedly provided Kenyan forces with strategic assistance during the 2015 Westgate Mall siege. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [181], [Geeska Afrika](#) [182], [Haaretz](#) [183], [AllAfrica](#) [184], [Reuters](#) [185])

Public Opinion

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Public opinion is difficult to gauge in Kenya given the lack of public polling. Nonetheless, some basic trends can be discerned about how Kenyans assess the threats arising from Islamist violence. Compared to other African nations, Kenya is greatly concerned about the dangers posed by Islamic extremism.

A survey released by Aga Khan University's East African Institute in January 2016 suggests that the majority of Kenyan youth would do "anything to generate money and wealth regardless of its legality as long as they are not caught." This is particularly worrisome as unemployment is one of the main factors luring Kenyan youth to join al-Shabab. A State of National Security Annual Report to Parliament in 2016 found the terror group capitalizes on Kenya's youth unemployment and feelings of marginalization to recruit. (Source: [News24 Kenya](#) [186])

In a Pew Research Center survey published in March 2013, approximately 55 percent of Kenyans believe that terrorism constitutes a major threat to the country. According to data from 2014, 66 percent of Kenyans support Kenyan military presence against al-Shabab in Somalia. When asked to evaluate their government's performance in fighting terrorism, however, 51 percent of those surveyed believed their government was handling it "Very/Fairly badly." (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#) [187], [Afro Barometer](#) [188])

According to press reporting in June 2017, there were signs of increased public frustration with al-Shabab's continued ability to mount deadly attacks in Kenya. After a wave of attacks on security forces and civilians in northeastern Somalia between mid-May and early June 2017, five local officials in Garissa County threatened to arm civilians and blamed the national government for failing to protect them. A local member of parliament, Barre Shill, called on the national government to arm "the community" to defend itself against al-Shabab because "we are not being protected." Teachers and health workers who failed to report to work due to security fears added to the officials' concerns. (Source: [VOA News](#) [189])