



KENYA, ISRAEL AND THE WAR AGAINST AL-SHABAAB

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ABSTRACT

Kenya sent troops into Somalia in late 2011, after accusing al-Shabaab of killing and abducting tourists and aid workers. The military defeat of al-Shabaab in Somalia forced al-Shabaab to retreat back into society and to re-establish itself as a guerrilla and terror force able to strike back in the region.

In June 2014, at least 65 people died in a terror campaign in Kenya. The last attacks in Mpeketoni and the nearby village were the most deadly attacks in Kenya since September 2013, when at least 67 people were killed during a siege by al-Shabaab fighters at Nairobi's Westgate shopping Centre.

The government of Kenya has been criticized by the local opposition party for their apparent weaknesses in the face of attacks that many believe were orchestrated by al-Shabaab.

On June 19, 2014, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman arrived in Nairobi, Kenya. Lieberman said that Israel was ready to help Kenya and other African nations to fight terrorism. "Israel condemns terrorism in Africa and elsewhere; we are ready to assist Africa with everything we can".

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

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Dr .Shaul Shay (June 2014)

In June 2014, at least 65 people died in a terror campaign in Kenya. In the first attack, on June 16, al-Shabaab militants attacked hotels, restaurants, banks, government offices and a police station in the Kenyan coastal town of Mpeketoni. At least 48 people were killed.¹

Encouraged by their easy success that first night, the terrorists came back the next night for a second attack on the nearby Majembeni village, leaving at least nine more dead², and again a few days later.³

Mpeketoni nearby Lamu Island is a popular tourist destination with ancient architecture that is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The attacks come ahead of the Kenya's high season for tourists. The end of June, July and August account for almost 80 percent of the industry's annual revenue.⁴

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The attack in Mpeketoni

On June 16, 2014, approximately 20 heavily armed attackers, flying the al-Shabaab flag, took part in the first attack, in Mpeketoni.⁵ Witnesses said that the gunmen, who had their faces covered, threw explosives into the local police station before entering and stealing weapons. The policemen at the local station, fled into the bush – despite the fact that senior intelligence officials in Nairobi had warned regional commanders three days before that a terrorist attack might be imminent.⁶

¹ District deputy commissioner Benson Maisori said the AFP news agency reports.

² Andy Cush, Death toll tops 50 in Kenya after second terror attack in two days , GAWKER, June 17, 2014.

³ Michael Meyer ,Kenya's Deadly Night Riders, Mareeg Media , June 26, 2014.

⁴ Ilya Gridneff, Kenya Bids to Revive Tourism as al-Shabaab Vows Broader War , Bloomberg ,May 23, 2014.

⁵ District deputy commissioner Benson Maisori said the AFP news agency reports.

⁶ Michael Meyer ,Kenya's Deadly Night Riders, Mareeg Media , June 26, 2014.

The attack was described by residents as well planned. The gunmen split into three groups, one headed toward the cinema where many were watching a World Cup match, another toward two hotels and a third to the center of town. The attackers took aside some of the men watching the world cup matches at the Breeze View Hotel, and then shot and killed them in front of the women. The gunmen shouted "God is great!" and in some cases asked men to recite Quranic verses before shooting those who couldn't, they said.⁷

The gun battles lasted several hours, while several buildings were set on fire. The Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) says no foreigners were in the town at the time of the attack and all those killed, at least 48 people, were locals.⁸

Al-Shabaab statement

In a statement sent to Al Jazeera the group said that the attacks would continue, adding that the Kenyan government was "fighting a losing war" and telling tourists to stay away.⁹ The group said they targeted the coastal town of Mpeketoni because it was originally a Muslim area that was "invaded and occupied by Christian settlers". "The Mpeketoni raid was carried out in response to Kenyan military's continued invasion and occupation of our Muslim lands and the massacre of innocent Muslims in Somalia. The prospect of peace and stability in Kenya will be but a distant mirage," the statement said. "Brace yourself for the depredations of war and that which you have with your hands sown."

The attack on Majembeni, village

David Kimayo, Kenya's police inspector general, said the latest attack took place Monday night, June 17, 2014, in Majembeni, which is near Mpeketoni. "Nine people lost their lives," he said. "One suspect has been arrested." The Kenyan news media and other government officials reported that 15 people had been killed.¹⁰ The attack came as top officials were flying into the area to coordinate security operations.

The Al-Qaeda-linked Islamist group said its fighters carried out the latest attack on a village, and that its commando unit had managed to return to base unhindered after two

⁷ Andy Cush, Death toll tops 50 in Kenya after second terror attack in two days , GAWKER, June 17, 2014.

⁸ Kenya attack: Mpeketoni near Lamu hit by al-Shabab raid, BBC News, June 16, 2014.

⁹ Al-Shabab claims deadly Kenya attack, Al Jazeera, June 16, 2014.

¹⁰ Ismail kushkush and Dan, Kenyan Leader Blames Domestic Foes, Not Shabab, for Attacks June, The New York Times, 17, 2014.

nights of carnage. “We carried out another attack last night. We killed 20 people, mainly police and Kenyan wildlife wardens. The commandos have fulfilled their duties and returned peacefully to their base,” he added, without saying if the attackers were still inside Kenya or had driven back across the Somali border, around 100 kilometers to the north.¹¹

Abdullahi Abdi, Chairman National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF), along with members of the Muslim Council of Kenya, condemned the killings as savage acts and warned that they should not divide Kenyans along religious lines.¹²

The visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in Kenya¹³

On June 19, 2014, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman arrived in Nairobi, Kenya. It was part of an “Africa tour” with 50 Israeli executives, which included visits in Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Ethiopia and Kenya. Lieberman’s visit took place against the backdrop of the severe terrorist attacks in Kenya over the past two weeks that resulted in the deaths of dozens of innocent people.

Mr. Lieberman told Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta that “we are dealing together with an axis of evil that stretches from the Middle East to West and East Africa.”

“All these organizations, such as ISIS in Iraq, Hamas in the Palestinian Authority, Boko Haram in West Africa and Al-Shabaab in East Africa are part of a global Jihad network,” he said.

According to Lieberman, the international community “had proven to be unable to respond to the global terror threat effectively while the terrorist organizations have established a single, coordinated global network that operates almost without hindrance.”

He proposed an information exchange between Middle East and African countries to counter the threats that beset both regions and to help provide faster and more effective responses to those threats. Lieberman said that he will push for the Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab militant groups active in Kenya to be added to the blacklist of terror organizations in accordance with Israeli law.

¹¹ At least 15 dead in fresh al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya, The People, June 17, 2014.

¹² Kenya’s president blames political leaders inside Kenya for planning and executing 2 attacks, A.P, June 17, 2014.

¹³ Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman in Kenya : ‘We are dealing together with an axis of evil that stretches from the Middle East to West and East Africa’ ,EIPA, 20 June 2014.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and his Kenyan counterpart announced the resumption of direct flights between the two countries. Twelve years after direct flights from Israel to Nairobi stopped because of terrorist attacks against the Israeli-owned Paradise hotel and missiles fired at an Arkia airliner in Mombasa.¹⁴

Lieberman said that in addition to strengthening tourism between the two states, the flights, five a week that will begin in October 2014, will serve as a transit point to and from other countries in Africa as well. Lieberman: The direct flight were terminated because of terrorist attacks, their resumption is a “victory of life over terror.” The Kenyan government expects its trade with Israel to rise rapidly following plans by Kenya Airways to launch direct flights to Tel Aviv.

Summary and conclusions

Kenya sent troops into Somalia in late 2011, after accusing al-Shabaab of killing and abducting tourists and aid workers. The military defeat of al-Shabaab in Somalia forced al-Shabaab to retreat back into society and to re-establish itself as a guerrilla and terror force able to strike back in the whole region. The attack at Westgate was a painful indication of their new asymmetric warfare. Al-Shabaab has said it wants to take revenge for Kenya's deployment of troops in Somalia. Sheikh Fuad Mohamed Khalaf, a leader of al-Shabaab, said that the group is committed to “shifting the war” in Somalia to Kenya and Uganda because both countries have soldiers fighting in Somalia. Since then, al-Shabaab carried out numerous attacks in Nairobi, Mombasa and the north-eastern region of Kenya .The attack in Mpeketoni was the biggest since the deadly Westgate Mall raid in September 2013 which left 67 people dead.

Since 2012 al-Shabaab has started a terror campaign against the "soft belly" of Kenya – the economy and the tourist industry. Attacks frequently carried out by al-Shabaab target foreigners.

The past year's insecurity has taken a toll. Kenyan businessmen complain that growth is slowing, along with foreign investment. Tourism is Kenya's second-biggest source of foreign currency after tea, generating \$1.1 billion last year. Tourism has fallen sharply, particularly at resorts along the coast. Arrivals fell by almost a fifth to 1.4 million last year.

¹⁴ Israel's FM Lieberman: Israel-Kenya Direct Flights to Resume in October, PortzPort, June22, 2014.

Africa is a key objective in the foreign policy of Israel and relations with African countries including Kenya have strategic importance for Israel, from a security, political and economic point of view. On the background of the growing terror threat to Kenya Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said that Israel is ready to help African nations fight terrorism. "Israel condemns terrorism in Africa and elsewhere; we are ready to assist Africa with everything we can". Israel has long history of military cooperation with Kenya and can share with Kenya its experience combating terrorism and can supply advanced surveillance and military equipment.