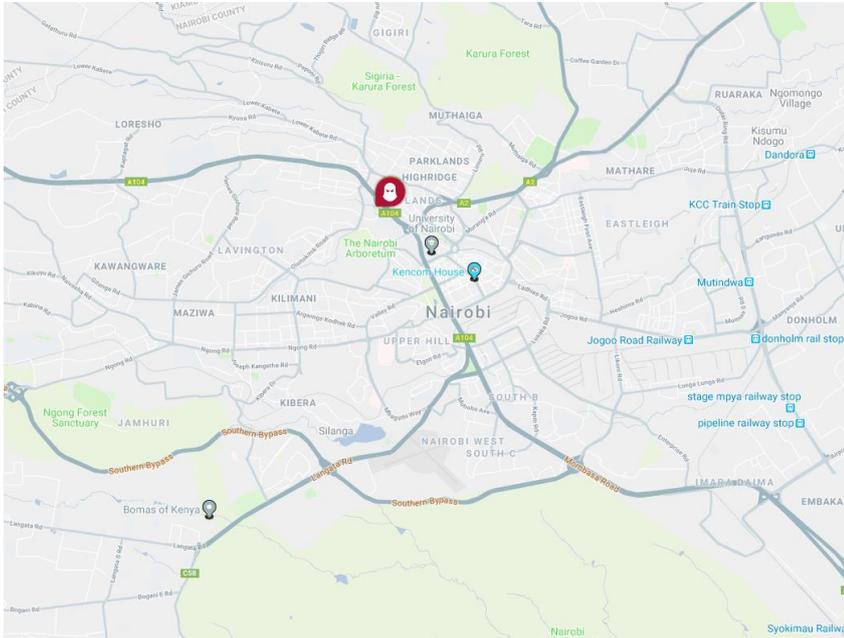


TRAVEL ADVISORY • 15 JANUARY 2019

The Ramifications of the Al-Shabaab Attack on the DusitD2 Hotel in Nairobi



KEY EVENTS



**Kenya:** MODERATE travel risk



Terrorism Risk: **Moderate**

**Nairobi:** Business travel can continue as planned; however, expected heightened security measures to be in place throughout the capital.

KENYA



KEY POINTS

- At least 21 people were killed when militants stormed the DusitD2 hotel on 16 January in the high-security Riverside complex. The siege took place less than a mile away from the Westgate Mall; the scene of a similar terror attack in 2013.
- The hotel was considered one of the most secure accommodations in the city due to the stringent security infrastructure and a substantial number of international companies used the site to conduct business activities.
- The ease in which the heavily armed attackers entered the hotel, and the city, will be a concern for Kenyan officials and travellers in the city. Travel Risk Managers should now revisit and update their accommodation policies.

At least 21 people are known to have died when militants loyal to Islamist group al-Shabaab stormed the luxury DusitD2 hotel compound in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. The attack, which was led by between four and six attackers, one being a suicide bomber the rest gunmen, resulted in a 19-hour siege which ended once the five remaining militants had been “eliminated”. The attack is the worst in the country since the 2015 Garissa attack which killed almost 150 people. While terror attacks are not occurring at the same rate that they did between 2011 and early 2015, the threat of terror attacks remains elevated in the country.

The attack is also significant in that the target, the DusitD2 hotel complex, which was considered one of the most secure hotels in Nairobi. The hotel was filled with Western and African travellers as well as local Kenyans; with at least one British and one US citizen being killed. The hotel is situated on 14 Riverside Drive and shares neighbourhoods with three Western embassies; the Australian, Dutch and German. The complex also houses a number of offices belonging to international companies; such as Colgate Palmolive, Pernod Ricard and SAP SE. This makes the hotel, and the area, a popular location for business people, Western diplomats and affluent Kenyans to stay, stop for a drink or conduct business meetings.

The hotel was a base for Western corporations and attracted a globalised clientele making it a symbolic target for Al Shabaab, who were able to access the building despite the presence of armed guards. The proximity of the DusitD2 to the three Western embassies only added to the global attention that a terror attack would draw. Since the Westgate mall attack in 2013 international

## TRAVEL ADVISORY • 15 JANUARY 2019

media attention has skirted over Al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya. Over the last four years, Al Shabaab have focused their attacks in the northern counties of Kenya, which they consider part of Greater Somalia and include Lamu, Mandera and Garissa. The international traveller footprint is significantly lower in these areas resulting in minimal media attention. Even the Garissa Massacre in 2015, the worst terror attack in Kenya since the US Embassy bombing in 1998, received far less coverage than the DusitD2 attack or Westgate.

Despite the negatives, the Kenyan security forces were reportedly able to evacuate some 700 people. It is unclear if this was due to the hotel's unique characteristics; the single-track entrance should have worked in the favour of the attackers. It is being reported that the number of victims could have been a lot higher; especially given the ease that the attackers walked into the supposedly secure compound.

It has also been reported that Western intelligence officials warned Kenyan officials that al-Shabaab was planning a high-profile terror attack on a significant target in the Christmas/new year period. Though a Kenyan official has stated that there was a lack of detail in the warning, the country had been on high alert and given the high-profile nature of the hotel, it remains surprising that security was not upscaled. The attackers may have changed target locations; possibly at the last minute due to increased security in other areas. As such, allowing them to confuse security officials that were trying to track the militants. This theory has some traction as, despite the heavy armament of the attackers, and the casualties inflicted, the rapid response by Kenya security forces kept the casualty numbers below those of the Westgate Mall attack or the Garissa University Massacre.

Following the attack on the Westgate Mall in 2013, Kenya implemented enhanced security measures. As such, in Nairobi, and in other major metropolitan areas in eastern Africa, shopping centres, supermarkets and hotels are all typically protected by gates and staffed by security guards. It is routine for vehicles that visit high-end complexes, like the one that the DusitD2 hotel was situated in, are checked for explosives before being allowed to enter. In Nairobi, those travelling to Jomo Kenyatta International Airport must exit their vehicles some distance from the entrance and pass through metal detectors on the side of the road while their vehicles are checked separately.

Kenya has tried to balance convenience with safety. However, should the threat continue, as demonstrated by the most recent attack, this balance will likely need to change. Which will require the hardening of targets and making responses more effective. While it will not be possible to completely prevent such attacks. It should be possible to make them less deadly and less frequent. Indeed, the work done so far has proven that by investing in intelligence and security measures these attacks can become rarer and less deadly.

Future attacks remain likely, the al Qaeda-linked group has been able to exploit a largely unguarded border that stretches for hundreds of miles separating the most remote reaches of Kenya from lawless areas of Somalia. According to a UN investigation, bribery is rife at the border, with guards accepting money in exchange for not checking suspected militant vehicles. These bribes can often be as little as US\$20. Kenyan officials have denied the UN report and denied allegations of corruption. Once in the country, the militants can use the estimated 1.5 million Somalis inside Kenya, many of them refugees, to help them move around the country without detection.



TRAVEL ADVISORY • 15 JANUARY 2019

## MODERATE TRAVEL RISK



- Travel to Nairobi can continue as planned. Remain vigilant for suspicious behaviour and bags.
- Continue to anticipate a heightened police and military presence throughout the city; especially around other major international hotels, shopping malls, government buildings and other areas of interest. Additionally, exercise vigilance and follow all official directives.
- The DusitD2 Hotel and the wider 14 Riverside Drive complex remains closed; travellers intending to stay or visit the hotel should make alternative arrangements. Additionally, expect road closures, or disruption, to be present in the area and plan accordingly.
- Carry personal identification documents at all times in case you need to transit through a checkpoint.
- Consult local media, in country contacts and Solace Global Alerts for continued updates on the situation in country.
- Security managers should update their escalation and evacuation plans for Kenya, focusing on what protocols staff members should follow in light of the recent attack and in view of a possible copycat or should a follow-up attack occur.
- Standing travel advice to Nairobi continues, there is a high risk of crime and vigilance should be employed throughout the city.



Solace Global remains available to provide the full range of Travel Risk Management services to clients. Solace Global is also able to provide comprehensive crisis management, in-country journey management, tracking, response, and evacuation services.

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