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KANSAS INTELLIGENCE FUSION CENTER

LESSONS LEARNED: WESTGATE MALL ATTACK

(U//FOUO Version)

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(U//FOUO) Executive Summary



(U) Abdul Haji reaches out to 4 year old Portia Walton during the initial stage of the Westgate Mall attack on September 21, 2013 ⁽¹⁾

On Saturday, September 21, 2013, members of Al Shabaab, a Somali based Islamic terrorist organization affiliated with the international Al Qaeda network, executed a complex terrorist attack on an upscale shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya. The attackers simultaneously entered the mall from two different entrances, shooting shoppers with assault rifles and throwing hand grenades. The terrorists remained in the mall, engaging government security forces for the next four days, resulting in a major fire and partial collapse of the mall. The Kenyan government has officially reported 72 deaths and more than 200 injured as a result of the attack. A significant number of those killed and injured were foreign citizens, including 6 U.S. citizens who were injured in the attack.

This product is intended to provide an overview of the attack and its aftermath for government leaders, law enforcement officers, emergency responders and private sector partners who operate public venues, including shopping malls so that they can review their facilities, security measures and plans in the face of the tactics used by Al Shabaab.

What is Al Shabaab?

Al-Shabab - meaning "The Youth" in Arabic - are the largest group among several armed Somali groups and clans that aim to topple Somalia's government and impose Islamic law. The group was formerly the military wing of the deposed Islamic Court Union (ICU) - which controlled much of central and southern Somalia in late 2006.

Al-Shabab, which announced its affiliation with Al-Qaeda in 2012, is regarded by the U.S. and many other governments as a terrorist organization. The FBI has expressed concern that the group may be expanding its reach and actively recruiting western nationals to fight in Somalia.

Under the direction of Emir Mukhtar Abu Zubayr, Al-Shabaab has been transformed from an insurgent outfit focused on Somalia into a terrorist group capable of devastating attacks beyond its borders, including the suicide bombings against bars in Uganda's capital Kampala in 2010, and September's Westgate mall siege in Nairobi, Kenya. ^{(2) (3)}



(U//FOUO) Summary of Lessons Learned

- The level of planning and the magnitude of the attack indicate that **Al Qaeda in general and Al Shabaab in particular remain a serious threat.**
- The fact that all the preparation for this attack, from gathering intelligence on the target, to training, equipping and moving the terrorists to their target, was done in secrecy demonstrates a **sophisticated knowledge of operational security and communication security measures.**
- **Active shooter scenarios continue to be a viable threat to public venues** and need to be addressed by both law enforcement agencies and private security.
- **The attack may have been carried out by as few as four terrorists,** despite early reports that ten to fifteen attackers took part.
- During an attack of this type, there is **no intent by the attackers to take hostages or negotiate** with law enforcement. The longer the attackers remain operational, the more victims will be killed or injured in the attack.
- **Rapid initial response by available law enforcement and security forces,** even if disorganized, saves lives during the initial phase of an active shooter attack.



(U//FOUO) Summary of Lessons Learned

- **Asymmetric, hit and run, tactics by a small number of terrorists are effective against law enforcement** officers entering and clearing a large public venue. Attackers who have advanced, detailed knowledge of a facility can use that knowledge to ambush and flank security forces, effectively engaging (and in some cases, pinning down) a far larger group of officers.
- First responders to an attack of this type **must consider the possibility of advanced tactics**, ambushes targeted on first responders, supporting sniper fire and the possibility of remotely controlled improvised explosive devices emplaced near command posts or staging areas.
- **Command and control measures** are essential, including use of the incident command system, accountability for all personnel at the scene, planning for operations, and establishment of interoperable communications between all responders.
- Community leaders, responding agencies and owners of public venues must have a plan in place before an incident to cooperate in providing **timely, consistent and accurate information to the public** during an emergency.
- The United States has seen a number of extremists travel to Somalia and surrounding countries to train and fight with Al Shabaab. However, **at some point it is possible that these experienced fighters, with a knowledge of our country, will return to attack within our borders.**



(U) Background

Westgate Mall (photo at right) (10)

The Westgate Mall is an upscale shopping mall located in the Westlands neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya. The five-story mall opened in 2007 and includes 350,000 square feet of retail space and houses more than 80 stores. Nakumatt (a large, multi-story grocery and department store) and Planet Media Cinemas are the primary anchors of the mall. Other large businesses include Identity, Mr. Price Home, Artcaffe, and Barclays Bank on the ground floor, and Millionaires Casino on the third floor. Smaller stores include outlets for international brands such as Adidas, Bata Shoes, CFC Stanbic Bank, Converse, FedEx, and Samsung Mobile. (7)

Threat Stream

Due to its high profile clientele and western businesses, the Westgate Mall had been the subject of numerous threats since its opening. The Kenya National Intelligence Service (NIS) reported Al Shabaab was planning attacks in Nairobi and specifically listed the Westgate Mall as one of the targets that had been considered. (25)

Mall Security

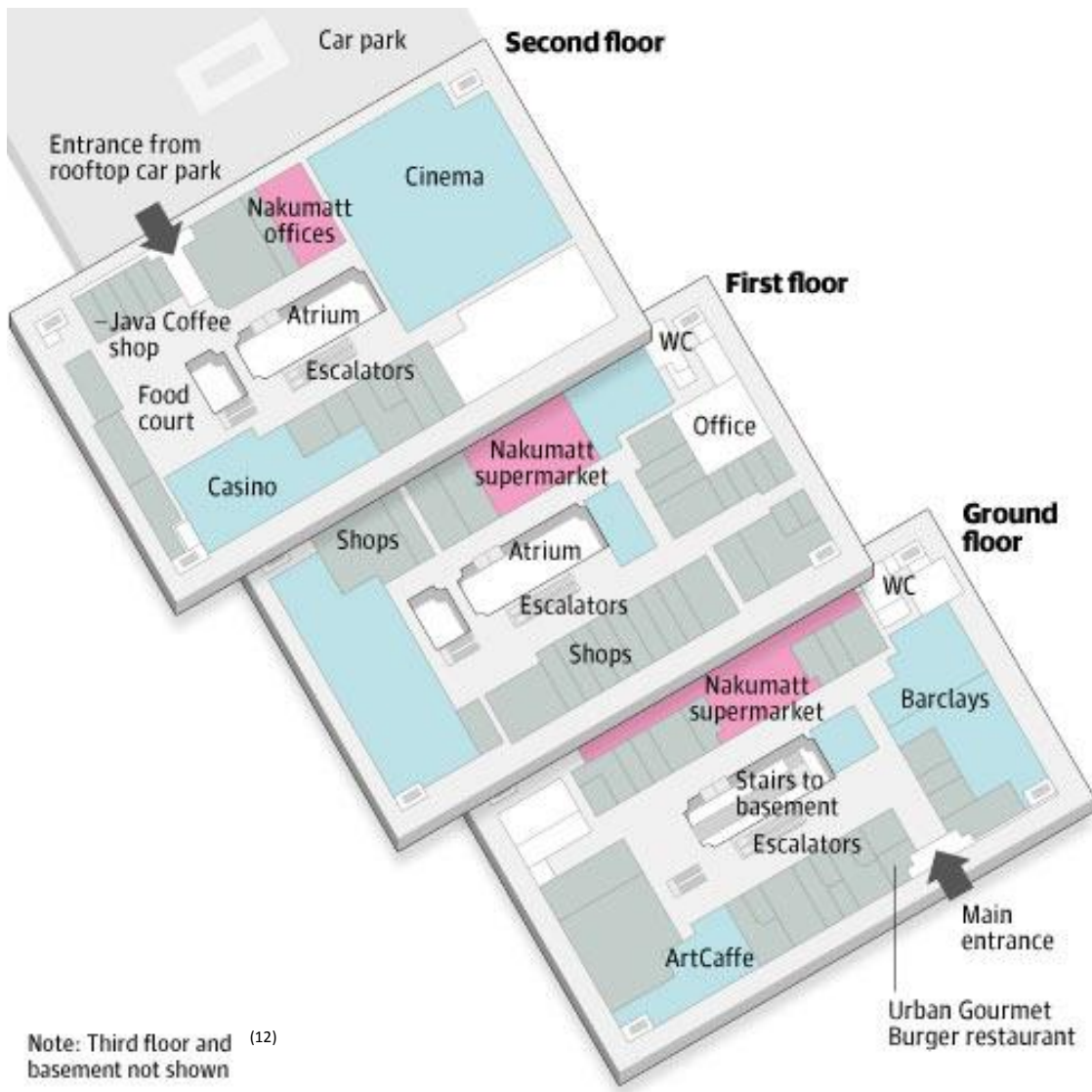
The mall employed approximately 40 private security guards who manned entrances and searched vehicles before they were permitted into the shopping center garages. Mall guards searched bags, used electronic wands to search for weapons and checked vehicle interiors, trunks and underneath to check for weapons and bombs. (8)(9)



(U) PHOTO: Inside the Nukumatt Supermarket prior to the attack



(U) Westgate Mall Layout



Note: Third floor and basement not shown ⁽¹²⁾

(U) Multi-story Nakumatt Supermarket and Department Store located under the rooftop parking garage (area of collapse) ⁽²⁶⁾



Central atrium of the Westgate Mall before the attack ⁽¹¹⁾



(U) Background

Nairobi

Nairobi is the largest city (population 3.1 million) and capital of the east African nation of Kenya. Kenya was a British Colony until it gained its independence in 1963 and remains heavily westernized. It has become one of the most prominent cities in Africa both politically and financially. Nairobi is home to over 100 major international companies and organizations, including the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the main headquarters for the UN in Africa & Middle East. ⁽⁴⁾

Kenyan defense forces take part in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a peacekeeping mission operated in Somalia by the African Union with the approval of the United Nations. It supports the transitional government, implements a national security plan, trains the Somali government security forces, and assists in creating a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid. As part of its duties, AMISOM also supports the Federal Government of Somalia's forces in their battle against Al-Shabaab militants. ⁽⁵⁾

Kenya Law Enforcement and Internal Security

Law enforcement is provided by the national Kenya Police force, made up of approximately 35,000 officers. Within the Kenya Police, internal security and counter-terrorism is the role of the General Services Unit (GSU) that was established by the colonial government to battle Mau Mau rebels during the fight for Kenya's independence. The GSU now has around 9,000 paramilitary officers of which 2,000 are Israeli trained and battle hardened (Recce group) that forms most of the Presidential guard, VIP and Diplomatic protection. ⁽⁶⁾

(U) PHOTO AT RIGHT : Members of the Kenya Police General Services Unit (GSU)





(U) DAY 1– Saturday, September 21, 2013

Initial Attack

At the time of the attack, the Westgate Mall was crowded with an estimated 800 to 1000 shoppers, a normal Saturday. On the Mall's upper parking deck, a film crew was recording *MasterChef Junior* and the play area's bouncy castle and trampolines were packed with dozens of children. ^{(12) (13)}

Around 12:30, Closed circuit television (CCTV) footage taken by security cameras inside the mall indicate that two terrorists entered through the main entrance to the mall while two others made their way up a ramp to the rear parking deck. The attackers were initially reported to be armed with pistols, fully automatic AK-47 assault rifles and hand grenades, which they reportedly threw with impunity at victims.

During the initial attack and throughout the siege, Kenyan authorities repeatedly stated that there were 10 to 15 attackers in the Westgate Mall. However, at the time that this is written, review of the CCTV footage, recovered bodies and weapons indicate that only four terrorists took part in the attack. In addition, despite claims during the attack that one of the terrorists was a Caucasian female, all evidence now shows that all the attackers were dark skin adult males. ^{(15) (24) (26) (28)}

Mall patrons and employees took cover around the mall and hid from the attackers inside stores, stairwells, air vents and beneath tables. Despite news reports, the terrorists made no attempts to take hostages during the attack. ⁽²⁸⁾

On more than one occasion, victims reported that the attackers asked cornered victims if they were Muslim's, asking questions such as the name of Mohammed's mother or demanding that they quote from the Koran. Witnesses report that terrorists allowed those who were Muslim to leave the mall, those who were not were shot. CCTV footage confirms these reports, showing instances of terrorists ushering people out of the mall and others where terrorists appear to question individuals and then execute them. ^{(13) (14) (28)}



(U) Photo above- Aftermath of the attack at the cooking competition on the rooftop parking lot.



(U) Photo above– An image of two of the terrorists caught on closed circuit security cameras shortly after the beginning of the attack.



(U) DAY 1– Saturday, September 21, 2013



(U) Photo - Initial responders evacuate employees and shoppers from the Westgate Mall.



(U) Some of the Al Shabaab “Official” Twitter messages sent during the first day of the Westgate Attack. Al Shabaab continually sent messages during the attack claiming responsibility, praising the attackers and claiming more attacks are to come. ⁽²⁹⁾

Al Shabaab Claims Responsibility

The Somalia-based Al-Shabaab terror group claimed responsibility for the attack as retaliation for Kenya’s involvement in an African Union military effort against the group, which is al Qaeda’s proxy in Somalia. In 2011, the Kenyan military was part of a peacekeeping force that defeated al-Shabaab forces to liberate the key Somali port of Kisumu.

Initial Response

Initially, the response to the terrorists consisted of an ad-hoc group of local police, armed security guards, armed local citizens and off-duty members of the police and military who had been in side the mall when the attack took place. While this response was very unorganized, it is credited with saving many people by providing them with a safe way to evacuate from the mall. ⁽¹⁾⁽¹²⁾

The terrorists are reported to have an intimate knowledge of the mall. Government forces report that they appear to have hidden caches of ammunition and explosives inside the mall prior to the attack. ⁽¹²⁾

Approximately 3 1/2 hours after the attack began, elements of the General Services Unit (GSU) “Recce Company”- Kenya’s primary internal anti-terrorism response force, arrived at the Westgate Mall. GSU Officers reportedly engaged the terrorists in a firefight and pinned them down inside the Nukumatt Store. ⁽²⁶⁾



(U) DAY 1– Saturday, September 21, 2013



(U) PHOTO– A woman and children take cover during the attack.

“Friendly Fire”

Members of the Kenyan Army Ranger Regiment also began to arrive and enter the Mall. There apparently was no attempt at communication or coordination between the police forces and the military forces that responded. Responding soldiers and police officers were equipped with incompatible radio systems, so they could not communicate tactically.

These factors are blamed for the “friendly fire” situation between Rangers and police early Saturday evening that claimed the life of one of the GSU “Recce Company” Commanders and wounded three other GSU officers. For the remainder of the attack, the response was fractured and conflicting information was released to the media from different elements of the Kenyan government. ^{(12) (16) (27) (28)}

Forces pull back overnight

As evening approached, the government forces, citing a lack of night vision gear, withdrew from the mall into perimeter positions. Overnight, survivors report that the terrorists walked through the mall, identified themselves as police helping with the evacuation and then executed anyone who revealed themselves.

Foreign Fighter Connection?

Early on September 22nd, a social media “Tweet” that allegedly came from Al Shabaab identified ten men, including three American citizens, that they identified as taking part in the attack at the Westgate Shopping Center. One of the individuals was reportedly from the Kansas City area. However, Al Shabaab “officials” later stated that the information provided and the social media account that sent the information were false. ^{(12) (13) (20)}



(U) PHOTO- A wounded woman is loaded into an ambulance outside the Westgate Mall in the early hours of the attack.



(U) DAY 2– Sunday, September 22, 2013

Assault Attempt

Under the command of the police chief, a joint unit comprised of police and army made a first attempt to enter and take control of the ground floor of Nakumatt, where they believed the bulk of the militants were. They came under fire from a sniper on one of the upper floors and were forced to withdraw after at least two of their men were shot, one of them fatally.

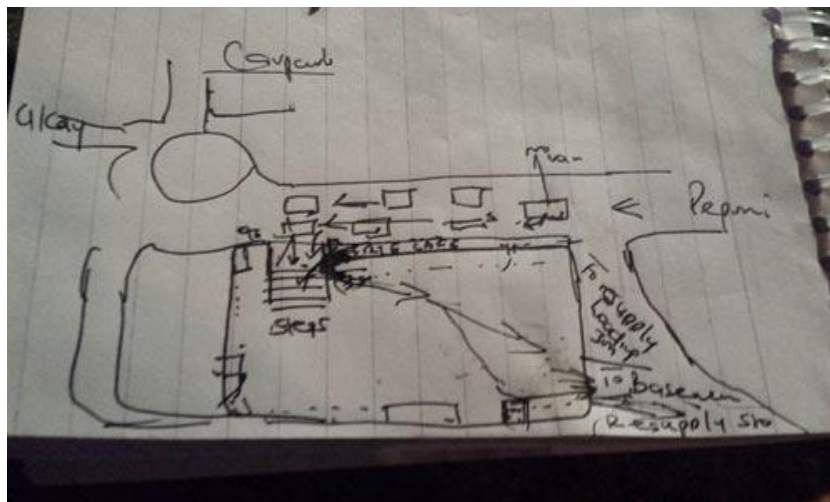
Citizens continued to hide inside the mall and communicate with loved ones and government forces via cellular phones. Social media sites, such as Twitter, were used throughout the siege by victims trapped inside, members of the military seeking information and Al Shabaab leadership. ^{(18) (29)}

Hit and run battles between terrorists and military forces continue throughout the day. Wounded soldiers were seen being removed from the mall. Helicopters landed on the roof, disgorging troops in an apparent attempt to assault the mall from the top down.

By late night on Sunday, the Kenyan military claimed that most “hostages” had been rescued and that the mall was largely secured. ^{(12) (18) (19) (26)}



(U) PHOTO - A Kenyan soldier moves through the Nukumatt Store.



(U) PHOTO - A diagram quickly sketched by a soldier shows the interior of the mall during the siege. ⁽¹²⁾

(U) PHOTO AT RIGHT - Throughout the day on Sunday, survivors who were hiding in the mall (including in air ducts and vaults) were evacuated from





(U) DAY 3– Monday, September 23, 2013



Explosions and Fire

Around 6:45 AM, a huge blast shook the entire Westlands district, followed by bursts of gunfire. Around 1 PM, four more large blasts – the loudest during the siege – were heard from inside Westgate and a column of black smoke climbed into the sky. (photo at left)

Officials reported that there was a large fire burning inside the Nukumatt Store. Some government officials claimed that terrorists started the blaze but others indicate that the fire may have been started by government forces firing ant-tank weapons inside the mall. ⁽²¹⁾

“Belt Fed Machine Guns”

Government forces report that the terrorists have somehow moved belt-fed, heavy machine guns into the mall and that they have been continually pinned down by heavy fire. In addition, they report that the attackers have planted remote detonated explosives around the mall that they are blowing up as security forces move in. ⁽²²⁾

Around 3 PM, due to heavy smoke, military forces pull out of the mall.

At this point, more than 200 civilians have been rescued and 11 Kenyan soldiers have been wounded, the military said. ^{(19) (20)}



(U) Photo - Military forces staging outside the Westgate Mall.



(U) Examples of an Al Shabaab “Official” Twitter message sent during the Westgate Attack. Al Shabaab continually sent messages during the attack claiming responsibility, praising the attackers and claiming more attacks are to come. ⁽²⁹⁾



(U) DAY 4– Tuesday, September 24, 2013

Collapse and Mop Up

Government forces report that the ongoing explosions and gunfire inside the mall are coming from troops providing cover while bomb disposal teams remove booby traps from the mall.

The first photos of the area where the concrete parking structure has collapsed down through the three floors below it are shown by the media. ⁽²¹⁾

Tuesday evening, the Kenyan government finally announces that the building has been secured and that they will begin an investigation. They report that there are approximately 60 persons still missing and that bodies may be buried in the rubble of the collapsed Nukumatt Store. ^{(12) (13) (16)}

Torture & Mutilation

Military doctors reported to the media that the terrorists apparently tortured some of the victims they found in the mall. The terrorists reportedly severed hands, cut off noses and, in some cases, hanged hostages. Photographs of tortured and mutilated corpses were shared with the media to support those claims. ⁽²⁵⁾

Following the attack, government forces were accused of widespread looting of the mall throughout the attack. Commanders deny the accusations, however security camera footage clearly shows troops looting the mall during the attack. ^{(23) (28)}

The Westgate Mall attack was the deadliest terror attack in Kenya since Al Qaeda blew up the U.S. Embassy there in 1998, killing 213 people. Terrorism experts say this attack bears eerie similarities to the 2008 attack in Mumbai, India -- another upscale target with Western appeal. Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistani terrorist group, attacked targets in Mumbai for more than three days, killing 166 people. ⁽²⁵⁾



(U) Photo - Collapse of the parking deck through the Nukumatt Store.



(U) Photo - Collapse of the parking deck through the Nukumatt Store.



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