

Al Shabaab Terror Attacks on Kenya. Geopolitical Implications

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This week's Al Shabaab attack on a hotel and office complex in the Kenyan capital wasn't the first time that the terrorists struck the comparatively prosperous East African country, but it more than likely won't be the last since such attacks might become more common in the future due to the group's exploitation of Somali nationalism and its possible employment as a Hybrid War proxy against China.

Kenya is reeling from the [latest terrorist attack](#) by Al Shaabab that killed at least 15 people in an upscale hotel and office complex in the capital, reminding everyone that the comparatively prosperous East African country still remains one of the Somalian-based group's primary targets. While terrorism can never be justified or defended, some of its patterns can nevertheless be explained, and a deeper analysis of why Al Shabaab occasionally attacks Kenya reveals that the regional leader will probably remain in its crosshairs for years to come.

The most obvious reason why Al Shaabab says that they strike Kenya is because the country dispatched troops to Somalia as part of the AU's [AMISOM](#) peacekeeping mission there that the group considers to be part of an international occupation. Terrorists all across the world are known to target countries on their home turf that deploy forces to combat them on theirs, and Kenya is of course no exception to this trend. In its defense, however, it believes that stability in the neighboring country is essential for ensuring its own, but there are also other reasons behind its participation in this campaign as well.

Most observers outside of the region who are unfamiliar with its ethno-cultural complexity don't know that Kenya's former Northeastern province (nowadays divided like the rest of the country into myriad counties following the promulgation of the new decentralized constitution in 2013) is mostly populated by ethnic Somalis and is claimed by their nationalists as part of Greater Somalia for historical reasons dating back to a controversial territorial delineation during the colonial period. Al Shabaab has attempted to exploit this nationalist narrative, hence why some terrorists think they are attacking "Kenyan occupiers" when they target civilians in other parts of the neighboring state.

This narrative is very dangerous because of just how appealing it could be, and given that the ethno-administrative issue of the majority-Somali former Northeastern province's incorporation into Kenya instead of Somalia won't be going away anytime soon because Nairobi considers the region to be an integral part of the country, it's very likely that more misguided youth might be recruited in the future to carry out more terrorist attacks on this supposed basis. In addition, this sentiment could be weaponized and guided from abroad for [Hybrid War purposes](#) in order to "contain" China.

Kenya is one of China's most important African partners and the People's Republic just finished constructing part of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) megaproject between the largest East African port of Mombasa and Nairobi that Beijing hopes to one day extend to [Uganda](#) and possibly even beyond to the mineral-rich [Congo](#). Furthermore, the port of Lamu – which serves as the terminal point of the Chinese-envisioned LAPSSET megaproject between Kenya, South Sudan, and Ethiopia – lies in extremely close proximity to the part of eastern Kenya claimed by Somali nationalists and easily within Al Shabaab's reach.

Bearing in mind the [preexisting identity tensions](#) that facilitate Hybrid War chaos within Kenya, as well as the [US' openly stated desire](#) late last year to challenge China all across Africa, it wouldn't be surprising if its intelligence services attempt to take advantage of Al Shabaab's weaponized version of Somali nationalism in order to steer the group towards attacking Chinese [Belt & Road](#) megaprojects that have the long-term potential of strengthening the Kenyan state. As the [modern-day "Scramble for Africa"](#) shows no signs of abating and is poised to become a major factor in the [New Cold War](#), this "dark scenario" certainly can't be precluded.

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