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NJOHSP

INTELLIGENCE NOTE

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School Security: Lessons from a Kenyan University Attack

During the 15-hour attack on Garissa University in Kenya by the Somali militant group al-Shabaab, inadequate communication was demonstrated at all levels. On April 2, four al-Shabaab gunmen attacked the university, taking more than 700 students hostage, killing at least 148 people, and wounding another 79. Poor execution of emergency response planning led to this event being the third deadliest terrorist attack in the world since 2010. While the US and Kenya are not comparable in terms of government resources and emergency management procedures, this incident provides a recent case study for educational institutions to consider when reviewing their preparedness plans.

- ***Threat information disseminated by a government agency requires additional action and should not go unmonitored once received.*** The Kenyan government warned several universities of a probable attack by al-Shabaab. Garissa University posted memorandums on student bulletin boards and canceled classes, but neither the school nor the government made certain that the perceived audience understood the information, much less took it seriously –students assumed that the warnings posted were an April Fool’s Day joke.
- ***Suspicious Activity Reporting should be integrated into operations.*** Hand-written threats from al-Shabaab were posted on campus and suspicious persons were sighted, leading the university to request additional security. However, police disregarded the request, and only two guards were present at the time of the attack.
- ***Emergency response plans, standard operating procedures, and scheduled exercises are critical as preparation for an attack.*** Reports indicate that Kenya had devised an emergency response plan, but that it was not used during the attack, and standard operating procedures for information sharing between organizations did not exist. These shortcomings led to miscommunication, a delay in response, and convoluted decision making by authorities.

Contact Information

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