

ANOTHER KENYAN TRAGEDY—A PATTERN TOO FAMILIAR

By George F. Ward

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Abandoned shoes lie next to the Elgon A hostel inside the Garissa University College compound that was the scene of an attack by al-Shabaab gunmen, in Garissa, Kenya. Kenya launched air strikes against al-Shabaab Islamic militants in Somalia, following the extremist attack that killed 148 people, a military spokesman said. (Source: AP Photo.)

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Former rebel leader Pierre Nkurunziza holds in his right hand on Burundi's national flag and another symbolizing the unity of Burundi's ethnic groups as he takes the presidential oath in parliament in the capital, Bujumbura, in this file photo. (Source: AP Photo/Riccardo Gangale.)

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IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Garissa—New Evidence of al-Shabaab's Evolution

The facts of the tragic terrorist attack on Garissa University College have been widely reported. Four al-Shabaab gunmen, one of whom was the [son of a Kenyan official](#) and a 2013 law graduate of the University of Nairobi, brushed by token security, gained entrance to Garissa University College, and began to murder students. Those killed were mostly Christian, but Muslims were also among the victims. Security forces present in Garissa, both army and police, were not able to stop the slaughter. The incident came to an end 12 hours after it began, when a special police unit arrived from Nairobi, having been delayed by the unavailability of transport aircraft. The four terrorists were killed.

The Garissa attack was unfortunately not unique, but only the latest and most deadly example of al-Shabaab's evolution. As the terrorist organization has been progressively weakened by the efforts of the Somali government and international forces inside Somalia, it has increasingly focused its attacks on Kenya. According to Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, who have maintained a database of al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya, after the fall of the Somali port of Kismayo to Kenyan troops in late September 2012, over [550 people have died](#) in Kenya at the hands of al-Shabaab. Since the October 2013 attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, there have been several other high-profile incidents of violence, some of which have [targeted Kenya's Christian majority](#). In November 2014, al-Shabaab attacked a bus in Kenya and killed those who could not recite the Muslim profession of faith. In December 2014, 36 quarry workers, mostly Christian, were murdered in Mandera County. Earlier in 2015, al-Shabaab attackers launched a [raid on Wajir](#), around 100 kilometers from the Somali border, and killed four persons by locking them in a shop that they then set on fire.

Al-Shabaab—A Kenyan Brand

As reported in the [October 10, 2014, issue of Africa Watch](#), al-Shabaab's leadership in Kenya is largely in the hands of Kenyans. The organization in Kenya emerged from [al-Hijra](#), a covert group of Muslim extremists, which in turn had its roots in Nairobi's Muslim Youth Center, formed in 2008. Although most adherents of al-Shabaab in Kenya are probably of Somali ethnicity, Matt Bryden, director of a Nairobi-based think tank, [asserts](#) that al-Shabaab has actively recruited "hundreds, if not more than a thousand . . . non-ethnic Somali Kenyans." Some of those recruited are converted Christians. The group's members communicate routinely in Swahili, the *lingua franca* of Kenya, rather than in Somali.

The [reaction](#) of the Kenyan government and security forces to past instances of al-Shabaab violence in Kenya has included crackdowns on Kenyans of Somali ethnicity and on Somali refugees living in Kenya, threats to close the large refugee camps that shelter refugees from Somalia, and extrajudicial killings of radical Muslim leaders. This harsh counterterrorism strategy has been a major factor in the success of al-Shabaab's recruitment inside Kenya. In a study

based on interviews with al-Shabaab adherents, [Anneli Botha](#), a South African researcher, discovered, “The single most important factor that drove respondents to join al-Shabaab, according to 65 percent of respondents, was government’s counterterrorism strategy.”

The Kenyan Government Reaction—*Plus ça change*

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* one year ago, [Paul Hidalgo](#) predicted, “Kenya is on its way to becoming the world’s next hotbed of extremism as a result of al-Shabaab’s active and growing presence there. And so far, the Kenyan government has been its own worst enemy in attempting to reverse this trend.” The writer doubtless had in mind the kind of counterterrorism strategy described above.

Unfortunately, the tragedy at Garissa displayed striking similarities to previous incidents, indicating that little has changed. Once again, the reaction by Kenyan security forces was slow. Once again, there was a lack of coordination between police and army on the ground. And once again, the Kenyan government’s reaction in the immediate aftermath was to target ethnic Somalis. Kenya’s deputy president told the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to [shut down the Dadaab refugee camp](#), which has a population of around 350,000, within three months or else Kenya would shut it down itself. A similar ultimatum had been issued after the Westgate Mall attack, and nothing came of it. The refugee agency [responded](#) that a forced repatriation of refugees would violate international law. The only other concrete step by the Kenyan government that has been reported was a decision to close 13 money transfer firms to prevent their use by terrorists. This step triggered an immediate protest by international nongovernmental organizations over the loss of the principal means of transferring both international humanitarian aid to Somalia and remittances by ethnic Somalis living in Kenya to their families in Somalia.

Conclusion

When the Kenyan government sent its armed forces into Somalia in October 2011, one of its goals was to establish a buffer zone in southern Somalia that would help prevent the type of terrorist attacks that are now occurring. A buffer zone of sorts has been created, but violence inside Kenya has only increased. Criticism of President Uruhu Kenyatta, who is beset by problems on several fronts, is increasing day by day. There is probably no short-term solution to the problem of al-Shabaab terrorism in Kenya, but it is clear that a new strategy needs to be put in place.

What elements might that strategy include? First, President Kenyatta needs to take steps to address the concerns of Kenya’s Muslims, the vast majority of whom are not extremists. Arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial violence should cease. Second, he needs to gain better control of Kenya’s border with Somalia, which is currently porous. That is a task with which the Kenya Defense Force, more effective and less corrupt than the Kenyan police, could help. Third, he needs to review the mission and effectiveness of the Kenyan military presence in Somalia. [Allegations by United Nations investigators](#) of complicity of members of the Kenya Defense Force in the illegal trade in Somali charcoal, which finances al-Shabaab, persist. If these allegations are true, then the blood of Kenyans murdered by al-Shabaab is on the hands of other Kenyans who have put illegal profits ahead of country.

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Third Term's the Charm?

The battle over the presidency in Burundi began long before the onset of the official campaign season, which, according to the constitution, should begin no more than [16 days before the election](#). Nkurunziza, president since 2005, attempted to change the constitution in 2014 to remove term limits, among other measures. [Parliament voted down](#) the amendment 84 to 16, just one vote shy of the 85 percent necessary to approve a change to the constitution.

Since that failed attempt, Nkurunziza has made no attempt to conceal his desire to run for a third term as president in 2015. His spokesman stated in February that should his party select him as its candidate, Nkurunziza would absolutely [accept the nomination](#). The president's supporters have insisted that the specific language of the constitution allows Nkurunziza to run in 2015 because he was selected president in 2005 by parliament—not elected—and therefore should be allowed to stand for election a second time. Those in opposition claim that a third bid would undermine the spirit of the Arusha accords, which marked the end of Burundi's nearly decade-long civil war. The ruling party is set to announce its formal candidate after its party conference later in April.

Writing at the end of July 2014, Amnesty International characterized the political space as “[shrinking](#),” the result of “a crackdown on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and a sharp increase in politicized violence” before the elections. Amnesty noted also that the youth wing of the ruling party, the Imbonerakure, had been attacking political opponents and their supporters with impunity.

The situation nearly nine months later appears to be much the same. Riots, protests, and assassination attempts are common. The Imbonerakure [reportedly continues to receive weapons](#) and training from the party. There are many reports of recent attacks by the Imbonerakure [against opponents of the regime](#). In mid-March, the [wife of opposition politician Agathon Rwasa](#) was shot in what he alleges was an assassination attempt planned by the government. Thousands of Burundians have already [fled to Rwanda](#) out of fear of impending violence.

Divisions within the Ruling Party

Nkurunziza's party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), has been in power since 2005. The party currently enjoys a supermajority in the legislature, with more than 80 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. The party's dominance, however, masks the growing division within it over Nkurunziza's candidacy. In a [document leaked to the media](#) in February, the National Intelligence Service (SNR) advised the president against seeking a third term, warning that it could trigger significant conflict and violence. The head of SNR, General Godefroid Niyombare, and two of his deputies were fired shortly after the leak.

One of Nkurunziza's political rivals, Hussein Radjabu, was [broken out of jail](#) on March 1. He allegedly had support from party and security officials. Radjabu, former general secretary of the CNDD-FDD, was once considered



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[the most powerful man in Burundi](#) until a dispute with Nkurunziza landed him in jail in 2007. He was charged with plotting against the state and sentenced to 13 years in prison. Although it is unlikely that Radjabu himself will run for president, he will have some influence over the party's nomination process.

In mid-March, [several members of the ruling party](#), some high-ranking, delivered a letter to Nkurunziza asking him not to present his candidacy for president. In response, party leadership suspended dozens of its members, including the president's spokesman, three members of parliament, and a provincial governor. Although the exact size of the faction is unknown, it is clear that there is a growing divide within the party. In a move seen as countering the mounting pressure against the president and his party, on April 11, [more than 10,000 CNDD-FDD party supporters](#) marched in the capital city, Bujumbura, to show unity. Many were chanting Nkurunziza's name and wearing shirts with his likeness.

Conclusions

International and domestic actors alike have appealed to Nkurunziza to abandon his attempt to seek a third term as president. [Tanzania](#), which helped to broker the peace in the early 2000s, has warned that violence could break out if Nkurunziza is allowed to run for a third term. Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, whose second term as president is set to expire later in 2015, called upon all parties to adhere to the Arusha peace agreement. The [head of the Catholic Church in Burundi](#), which is very influential, has said that he does not believe the president should run again.

Despite these pleas, it seems as though Nkurunziza is intent on pursuing a third term as president. By doing so, he has put his party—and perhaps his entire country—at risk. In Burkina Faso, long-time president Blaise Compaoré was ousted in a coup d'état in October 2014, after similarly insisting that term limits be repealed so that he be allowed to run for elections for a fifth time. As the party and country continue to take sides in the matter, the stability of Burundi is very much in question.

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