

Terror group's 'extraordinary' strike unpacked

Shortly before dawn last Sunday, a small column of armed militants emerged from a forest to launch a deadly attack on Camp Simba, a military airstrip in Lamu, Kenya. Fighting raged for more than five hours and, by the time it was over, six aircraft were damaged and at least eight people were dead. Five of the fatalities were gunmen aligned with al-Shabab, the Islamist militant group based in neighbouring Somalia. The other three confirmed deaths were of American nationals, including a soldier and two private military contractors. The Americans were there because the airstrip is not just a Kenyan military facility – it is also a US military base, one of dozens across the continent. Five alleged al-Shabab militants have been arrested, while unconfirmed reports suggest that another 10 militants may have escaped through the forest. A [Mail & Guardian](#) analysis notes that the significance of the attack cannot be overstated. 'What makes it extraordinary is that it was the first time that al-Shabab has launched an attack on the Kenyan coast on a Kenyan navy and US special forces camp,' said Rashid Abdi, an independent analyst and expert on the politics of the Horn of Africa. Abdi said the attack was designed to send a message to the US. 'I think the signal is "we are here, we are much stronger than you think we are".' Murithi Mutiga, the International Crisis Group's Horn of Africa director, says al-Shabab will remain a major threat 'as long as the fundamental factors that give it strength remain in place, which is the total deficit of governance in most of Somalia'.

Al-Shabab says the act was carried out with 'guidance' from the head of al-Qaeda. Its spokesman Sheikh Ali Mohamud Rage made the comments in an audio message released by its media arm. [BBC News](#) reports that al-Shabab's affiliation to al-Qaeda is well documented, but **the statement is a reminder of its influence and presence in East Africa through the Somali militant group.** So far this year, it has attacked a military base, a bus and school in Kenya, killing at least 10 people.