

Beat: News

All Nairobi mall attackers were killed during siege, FBI says

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USPA News - The al-Shabaab gunmen who attacked an upscale shopping mall in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi in September were all killed, an official with the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said on Friday, adding that it is unlikely any of the attackers were able to escape. FBI agents and investigators were at the scene of the attack from day one to facilitate and assist Kenyan authorities in their response to the crisis, which claimed nearly 70 lives.

More than 80 FBI employees were working at the scene at the height of the investigation, including an Evidence Response Team (ERT), an FBI structural engineer and hazardous materials experts. Much confusion has surrounded the actual sequence of events, the number of casualties and the number of attackers. But Dennis Brady, the FBI's legal attaché in Nairobi, said Friday that the agency believes all four attackers were killed and that it is "unlikely" any one of them would have been able to escape. "We believe, as do the Kenyan authorities, that the four gunmen inside the mall were killed. Our ERT made significant finds, and there is no evidence that any of the attackers escaped from the area where they made their last stand," Brady said. "The Kenyans were on the scene that first day and set up a very secure crime scene perimeter, making an escape unlikely." Brady also noted that, if any of the attackers had managed to escape, it would have been used by al-Shabaab for propaganda purposes. But he noted that other people who were involved in the planning of the attack remain at-large, which is why the investigation is continuing. "Nobody is under the impression that we have fully identified the entire network in this attack," he said. Four Somali men were arrested in November and charged with the commission of acts of terrorism that resulted in death, aiding a terror group, and being in Kenya illegally. Prosecutors accuse them men - who are aged between 20 and 25 - of allowing some of the mall attackers to take shelter at their houses in Eastleigh, a suburb of Nairobi that is sometimes called "Little Mogadishu" because it is predominantly inhabited by Somali immigrants. The attack began at around noon on September 21 when suspected al-Shabaab gunmen stormed the popular Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, opening fire with assault rifles and throwing grenades at terrified shoppers. An unknown number of people were held hostage as the gunmen engaged in gun battles with security forces, leading to a four-day-long siege. After the siege finally came to an end, investigators faced a difficult scene. "Westgate was a large mall, four stories, with underground parking and an attached parking structure," Brady said. "In the process of fighting the attackers, there were explosions and a fire. The area where the attackers were had home furnishings that caught fire. The fire spread and continued to burn, causing that part of the structure to collapse into a pit that smoldered for weeks." Brady added: "It was a very difficult place to work. While ERT was doing its work, every now and then a propane tank would explode or vehicles on the edge of the collapse would fall in and catch fire. But there was a lot of attention paid to the soundness of the structure and where we could reasonably collect evidence." Al-Shabaab previously claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was in retribution for Kenya's military deployment in Somalia. Of the 61 civilians who died during the siege, nineteen were foreigners, including six Britons and Ghanaian poet and diplomat Kofi Awoonor. Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta's nephew Mbugua Mwangi and his fiancée were also killed.

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