

## Intelligence brief | 14 November 2012

### Fatal ambush on police officers in Samburu district, Kenya

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On 10 November 2012, Turkana cattle raiders attacked a Samburu village in Baragoi division of Samburu district, Kenya, and made away with 800-1,000 head of cattle. In response, the Samburu mobilised alongside a combined force of about 100 officers from the Kenya Police Anti Stock Theft Unit, the paramilitary Administration Police and the Kenya Police Reserve and set out to pursue the attackers and recover the stolen livestock.

Usually in such situations, the pursued raiders will half-heartedly engage the pursuing police before abandoning their spoils and fleeing. However, on this occasion, the Turkana raiders laid an ambush and trapped the pursuing party in the Suguta Valley. Many of the police officers were killed instantly and the pursuit fell into disarray. Forty two bodies have been recovered so far and nine injured officers are still in hospital. None of the stolen cattle were recovered in the operation and only three of the attackers were reportedly killed.

The neighbouring Turkana and Samburu – both nomadic livestock-keeping tribes – have engaged in cattle rustling against each other for generations. What has changed in recent years is that the two tribes are now heavily armed with automatic weapons, which are readily available in Kenya due to the porous borders with conflict states such as Somalia and Ethiopia. The herdsmen openly brandish AK-47s, HK-G3s and other assault rifles and their supplies are readily replenished after every government clean-up operation.

There are many reasons being offered in Kenya as to why the raiders were able to overpower the large force of police officers but five factors stand out as directly relevant:

1. The raiders were well armed and, according to a local official, used sophisticated weaponry such as anti-personnel bombs and rocket-propelled grenades in the ambush.
2. The raiders had superior knowledge of the harsh terrain having lived there all their lives; this meant that they were able to command the high ground, leaving the police officers helpless once caught in the ambush.
3. The police operation seems to have been haphazardly planned and officers did not anticipate the ambush as they should have and therefore ended up rushing headlong into the killing ground.



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4. Police sources indicate that most of the officers involved in the operation were recent graduates of the police academy, with no field experience. (The officers recently ambushed and killed in the Tana Delta were also fresh out of the academy.)
5. The officers were poorly equipped and were not wearing bulletproof vests, combat helmets or other personal armour.

There has been an increase in incidence of fatal attacks on police officers in Kenya in recent years. In 2012 alone, high numbers of officers have been killed in attacks in Kisumu, Mombasa, the North Eastern Province, the Tana Delta and, now, Baragoi in Samburu district. The fact that poorly equipped and inexperienced police officers are being tasked with tracking and detaining increasingly well-armed cattle rustlers and other criminals suggests that this trend will likely continue, potentially necessitating the increased deployment of military and paramilitary units.

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