

At least 15 believed killed as jihadist group seizes hotel in Somali capital

From the [Guardian](#) and the [Telegraph](#)

Security forces in Mogadishu are still fighting Islamic extremist gunmen who seized a hotel in the Somali capital on Friday evening in one of the most deadly and high-profile attacks in recent years. At least 15 people are believed to have been killed and 40 wounded during the attack, which has been claimed by the al-Qaida-linked group al-Shabaab.

Detonations sent huge plumes of smoke over Mogadishu, and gunfire reverberated around the city. Large sections of the hotel were destroyed by the fighting, witnesses said.

"The security forces continued to neutralise terrorists who have been cordoned inside a room in the hotel building," Mohamed Abdikadir, security commander at the scene, said. "We ... rescued dozens of civilians, including children who were trapped in the building, safely."

A complex rescue mission is taking place amid gunfire and explosions, but the safety of those imprisoned is unclear.

Children have been pulled from the building and at least 40 people are receiving urgent treatment in the capital's main trauma hospital.

In a brief statement on a pro-Shabaab website, the group claimed that their attackers had "forcibly entered Hotel Hayat in Mogadishu" and were "carrying out random shooting inside the hotel".

Its spokesman Abdiaziz Abu-Musab told the group's Andalus radio Saturday that its forces were still in control of the

building and that they had “inflicted heavy casualties”.

Witnesses had reported at least two powerful explosions on Friday, the first of which officials said was caused by a suicide bomber. A second blast occurred just a few minutes later, inflicting more casualties as rescuers, security forces and civilians rushed to the scene.

Al-Shabaab has targeted hotels for many years. Some establishments are attacked as symbols of practices seen as unIslamic or simply because they are vulnerable. Others fail to pay off the group which raises millions of dollars through “taxes” on businesses across Somalia.

Dozens of people have been gathering outside the Hayat hotel, a popular spot frequented by government officials and ordinary Somalis, hoping to discover the fate of loved ones caught up inside. It comes alongside a mortar strike in the seafront neighbourhood of Hamar Jajab.

“Among those critically wounded are a newlywed bride and her groom and a family of three children, a mother and their father,” district commissioner Mucawiye Muddey said.