Re-securitizing the borderlands of Kenya and Somalia to counter the operational influence of terrorist groups in the Horn of Africa region

Jamila Adan[1]
Graham Amakanji Oluteyo[2]

[1]jamilamohammud@gmail.com
[2]graham.oluteyo@kemu.ac.ke

[1,2]Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.6.4.103

ABSTRACT

Terrorism in the twenty-first century continues to reshape state security systems, particularly in the Horn of Africa, where weak governance structures and porous borders create enabling environments for extremist groups. This paper examines the counter-terrorism strategies employed by the Republic of Kenya and the Federal Government of Somalia in mitigating the operational influence of terrorist organizations that not only conduct kinetic attacks but also seek to fill governance vacuums in marginalized border regions. Guided by neorealism and securitization theory, the study interrogates how state-centric power calculations and security discourses shape bilateral cooperation in confronting an asymmetric, transnational threat. The research engaged 313 respondents from Mandera (Kenya) and Bulahawo (Somalia) using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, supplemented with documentary and archival evidence. The findings show that institutional mistrust, overlapping jurisdictions, and persistent socio-economic marginalization curtail the impact of bilateral counter-terrorism efforts, despite their moderate operational effectiveness. These structural weaknesses enable militant groups to occupy governance gaps by providing rudimentary security, justice, and welfare functions in areas where the state presence remains limited. The study concludes that sustainable counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa requires a paradigm shift away from heavily militarized approaches toward human-security-oriented models that integrate community resilience, coordinated cross-border intelligence, and development-focused diplomacy. Achieving long-term stability therefore depends on transforming Kenya-Somalia cooperation from a predominantly military undertaking into a security-development compact capable of restoring state legitimacy in borderland regions.

Keywords: Bilateral Cooperation, Counter-Terrorism, Horn of Africa, Kenya-Somalia Relations, Neorealism, Securitization

I. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is among the most dynamic and challenging threats to global peace, human security, and the stability of states in the twenty-first century. The level and complexity of terrorist activities have been growing over the past years, which forces states and multilateral institutions to implement multi-dimensional counter-terrorism (CT) strategies, including military responses and intelligence-sharing strategies, as well as cyber defence, community policing, and socio-economic resilience measures (United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism [UNOCT], 2023). Modern studies indicate that kinetic efforts can no longer be used to eradicate terrorism based on its sustainability, but rather, structural causes are closely related to political weaknesses, socio-economic marginalization, and elite corruption, and gaps in governance within which extremist groups take advantage to embed themselves to survive within the weak societies (Botha, 2019).

These structural shortcomings have made the continent one of the worst hit in the war against terrorism around the globe as witnessed in the Global South, and Africa, in particular. The recent news indicated that over fifty percent of all terrorism-related killings in the world happen in Sub-Saharan Africa, fuelled by growing violence in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024). Somalia has been one of the most dangerous battlefields across the globe, and armed groups like Al-Shabaab still threaten the power of the state by launching attacks on specific targets, including cross-border operations, and recruitment of new members based on ideology (Hassan, 2022). To counter this, the regional and international bodies, such as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), have focused on stabilization interventions, security sector transformation, and avenues of intelligence sharing that would effectively reduce the functioning capacity of these groups (African Union, 2024).

Kenya is in an unfortunate situation because it has a very large and porous border with Somalia. Immediately after the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) achieved success in tactically planning the operation Linda Nchi in 2011 and thereafter integrated into AMISOM/ATMIS, Al-Shabaab still possesses the capability of asymmetric attacks along the borderlands. The U.S. Department of State indicates that Kenya has been experiencing a tangible rise in the frequency

and territorial dispersion of terrorist attacks between 2021 and 2023, which proves the persistence of insurgent cells and their capacity to capitalize on the inefficiencies and loopholes in governance and socio-economic frameworks in frontier counties, like Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The counter-terrorism architecture of Kenya is based on a combination of military activities, intelligence-driven policing, and CVE initiatives on the community level and is anchored by the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012) and the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (Republic of Kenya, 2022).

Nevertheless, Horn of Africa terrorism is transnational by its very nature and therefore, state actions in a unilateral manner are inadequate. This explains the strategic value of Kenya-Somalia bilateral security cooperation, including joint border operations, coordinated intelligence sharing, diplomatic interaction, and legal harmonization. Although there is continuous cooperation, there are doubts about the effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of these cooperative mechanisms. Ongoing attacks and the development of insurgent tactics suggest that bilateral efforts are still undermined by the premise of embedded institutional and governance limitations (Bryden, 2023).

Moreover, the two nations have domestic issues that weaken the effectiveness of counter-terrorism efforts. Weaknesses in the governance of states in Somalia, combined with historic marginalization in the border counties of Kenya, have created governance gaps where non-state armed groups have assumed quasi-governance roles, providing informal justice and rudimentary welfare services in areas where state presence is low (Lind, 2022). Such dynamics erase the lines between insurgency, governance, and legitimacy, making standard CT tactics difficult and supporting extremist discourses. There are other limitations, such as a lack of sufficient funding, poor cyber-intelligence, and low community trust, which also make the CT operations less sustainable (International Crisis Group, 2023).

In this regard, the Horn of Africa is not merely a geographic boundary but also a policy and analytical boundary in the manner in which states come to define and practice counter-terrorism in bilateral terms. The current literature on the area is sporadic, where the majority of the works focus on Kenya and Somalia without considering them as mutually supportive security players. This generates an important empirical and theoretical gap, especially because terrorist organizations are run fluidly across borders, and they take advantage of lapses in bilateral collaboration.

To fill this gap, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of Kenya-Somalia bilateral counter-terrorism strategies to minimize the operating capacity and operations of terrorist groups in the Horn of Africa. Based on the Securitization Theory and the Neorealism school, the paper will discuss the strategic incentives that the bilateral cooperation is based on, as well as the actual results of such CT agreements.

1.1 Research Objective

The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of bilateral counter-terrorism strategies between Kenya and Somalia in combating the operational influence of terrorism in the Horn of Africa.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This paper uses a dual theoretical perspective of the approach based on the Securitization Theory and Neorealism to describe how Kenya and Somalia construct, operationalize, and assess their counter-terrorism policy in the Horn of Africa.

2.1.1 Securitization Theory

Securitization Theory, developed by the Copenhagen School of Security studies, holds that security threats are not self-evident but are constructed socially by discourse and political practice. The concept was first presented by Ole Waever in the 1990s, which highlighted that a problem becomes a security matter once it is perceived as an existential threat by powerful actors like political leaders or state institutions (Waever, 1995). This model was subsequently codified by Buzan et al. (1998), who defined securitization as a process that allowed governments to rationalize extraordinary action like the deployment of military forces, emergency laws, or enhanced surveillance over and above the usual political practices.

The speech act is the core of the theory: a performative statement, according to which a phenomenon (e.g., terrorism) is an existential threat, and as a result, it stimulates the masses and the institutional intervention (McGlinchey, 2021). With such a formulation, securitization is not only descriptive but constitutive; with a naming of a threat, political actors create a sense of what society may think and what is important in the policies of the people. Nevertheless, securitization can be made successful only in case the concerned audience, such as citizens, legislators, or bureaucratic institutions, recognizes the claim and validates the suggested extraordinary responses (Waever, 2015).

In spite of its analytical virtues, the Securitization Theory has been criticized based on its unintentional political impacts. Other researchers believe that securitization may fuel nationalist feeling and suspicions of us against them (Dewdney, 2018). Others warn that securitized discourse can lead to militarized responses in building policy that

dwarfs diplomatic or developmental policies (Lieven, 2020). Other criticisms draw attention to the danger of the commercialization of security, in which case, the policy-making process is affected by private defense and surveillance sectors to increase the market opportunities (Hayes et al., 2020).

Using this theoretical prism on Kenya-Somalia counter-terrorism cooperation, securitization can be used to understand how both states have framed terrorism as a life-threatening existential challenge that must be addressed with extraordinary measures. The 2011 Operation Linda Nchi by Kenya and the ongoing cooperation of Somalia with ATMIS can be viewed as securitizing actions that are explained by appeals to national survival and the territorial integrity. The theory also sheds some light as to how the intelligence sharing across borders, the increase of police authority, and the militarization of border control are packaged as required in the larger counter-terrorist context.

Nevertheless, this paper claims that securitization will not be enough to generate a sustainable counter-terrorism achievement. Trusting in emergency-based, militarized responses too much will jeopardize emphasis on longer-term structural ways to solve problems. The Horn of Africa needs to be counter-terrorized by de-securitizing neighboring spheres using an inclusive approach to politics, socio-economic investment, and functional community involvement, especially in marginalized border zones where state legitimacy is fragile.

2.1.2 Neorealism (Structural Realism)

Neorealism, developed by Kenneth Waltz in Theory of International Politics (1979), redefines classical realism by indicating a different explanatory emphasis on human nature, which is replaced by the structural properties of the international system. According to Waltz, the global system is characterized by anarchy, or lack of central authority that can keep the actions of states within check, forcing them to use self-help strategies to protect themselves (Waltz, 1979). In this kind of environment, states seek alliances, counter-alliances, and other balancing mechanisms to safeguard their national interests and maintain their autonomy (Donnelly, 2019).

In this context, the state action will be driven by security and not moral or ideological commitments. Interstate cooperation is usually short term, tactical, and driven by threat, and its emergence is only occasioned when states realize that they are facing a common threat instead of sharing values (Mearsheimer, 2014). In this regard, Kenya-Somalia counter-terrorism relationship easily fits into the neorealist logic: the two states are facing a common menace in the shape of Al-Shabaab and hence have strategic reasons to cooperate by coordinating military action, exchanging information, and managing the border together.

However, neorealism also brings home the weaknesses within such security alliances. The existence of asymmetries in military capabilities, national interests, and ingrained mistrust may result in security dilemmas, as initiatives by one state to increase its security are seen as a threat by the other (Booth et al., 2020). These strains have been manifested in Kenya-Somalia relations with periodical diplomatic quarrels, interference accusations and cases of duplicated or uncoordinated border activities.

Despite the fact that critics regard neorealism as simplistic in its approach to international politics, by undermining the importance of domestic causes (identities, ideologies, and governance) in the international system, it still finds a useful application in the study of state behaviors in conditions of structural constraints (Barkin, 2010). In the Horn of Africa, neorealism assists in understanding why Kenya and Somalia emphasize militarized and state-centered policies of counter-terrorism and why their collaborative strategies are geared more towards regime security than human security. Unless there is parallel investment in institutional reform, inclusive government and socio-economic development of marginalized border areas, neorealist policies will be reproducing the insecurities they are meant to address.

Combined, the Neorealism and the Securitization Theory suggests a complementary approach to interpreting the Kenya-Somalia counter-terrorist relationships. Whereas neorealism is used to explain the formation of strategic alliances between states in an anarchic situation, securitization theory is used to explain how leaders are characterized discursively to mobilize popular opinion and justify extraordinary security precautions. Their overlap shows a major paradox to the Horn of Africa: the re-securitization of borderlands as a survival mechanism, at the same time, introduces governance vacuums and undermines state legitimacy. The analysis of variables in the present study is therefore based on this combined theoretical framework.

2.2 Empirical Review

A considerable number of empirical studies has been done on the effectiveness of counter-terrorism (CT) measures in various territories, which provides a benefit to the security cooperation between Kenya and Somalia. Through these studies, it is now clear when a CT measure would be fruitful or not particularly in cases where terrorist organizations are taking advantage of fragile governance and porous borders.

Montasari (2024) examined the United Kingdom CONTEST framework which is based on the four pillars of Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare. The researchers concluded that despite the fact that operation efficiency may be enhanced; there are still unresolved issues of over-securitization and the role of over-securitization when it comes to civil liberties. Montasari pointed out that a successful CT strategy is one that balances between hard security and

community access, social solidarity and the protection of human rights. The results are very applicable to Kenya and Somalia, where excessive militarization of CT response has sometimes led to poor relationship between the security forces and border communities, which reduces long-term preventive efficacy.

Localized intelligence networks are becoming a significant focus in studies in the Kenyan context. The study by Lind (2022) focused on the security practices in Kenya on the border counties in the north, such as Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera. The study revealed that community policing, local peace committees and informal intelligence mechanisms are important in cross border infiltration prevention by the Al-Shabaab. Lind made a conclusion that transparency between the state agencies and the local populations is an important means of improving CT. These findings highlight Kenya-Somalia bilateral policies to incorporate community-based initiatives and formal security interventions.

Botha (2021) conducted a wider analysis of Kenyan CT strategies and assessed how the policy of security in Kenya has developed after such significant attacks like Westgate in 2013 and Garissa University incidences in the years 2013 and 2015 respectively. Botha also discovered that Kenya has enhanced laws, interagency efforts, and military action in Somalia, the security apparatus has not succeeded in ending the gaps in intelligence, human rights violations, and lack of collaboration with marginalized groups. These shortcomings are hampering long-term resilience and, perhaps, contribute to radicalization unwittingly, which is a crucial factor to be taken into account by bilateral CT initiatives in cooperation with Somalia.

Hassan (2022) investigated the impact of hybrid governance systems in Somalia on the work of CT in relation to the involvement of clan elders, local militias, and state forces. The paper has shown that the localized forms of governance supported, as opposed to bypassed, improve intelligence circulation and diminish the effects of Al-Shabaab in the rural regions. This implies that Kenya-Somalia collaboration should be in line with the local political realities other than basing on centralized CT models.

Regional studies support the worthiness of integrated CT approaches beyond East Africa. As Onuoha (2020) investigated the multisectoral CT undertakings of Nigeria against the Boko Haram, the military advantages were inconsistent without an equivalent investment in socioeconomic growth, deradicalization and inter-border coordination with the neighbouring states. In the same manner, Agbiboa (2023) suggested that community trust, localized prevention and international cooperation are the most effective ways of counter-terrorism effort in West Africa when balanced.

Collectively, these works indicate that there are consistent themes that can be applied to Kenya-Somalia CT relations: attention to military reactions is not enough; the success of intelligence is conditional on the reliability of trust to the local people; disruptions in coordination prevent the successful work of the state; and the success of CT is impossible without eliminating the root causes of deficits in socio-economic and governance.

Although this is increasing empirical literature, there are some gaps. There are limited literature reviews that offer systematic reviews of bilateral CT frameworks in the Horn of Africa region. There is little empirical evaluation of Kenya-Somalia combined operations, cross-border intelligence-sharing efficiency, and long-term effects of the terroristic operation. Additionally, available literature rarely quantifies the impact of bilateral strategies in its operational functioning or the degree to which such strategies lower the level of resilience and adaptability of groups like Al-Shabaab.

The paper aims to bridge these gaps by assessing whether Kenya-Somalia bilateral counter-terrorism mechanisms are working to minimize the capacity of the terrorist groups in Horn of Africa. The study is based on the experience gained over the course of previous studies, analyzing the implementation of bilateral CT strategies, the issues that they face, and the prospects that can be used to enhance the cooperation of the security in the region.

Despite the significant empirical evidence on counter-terrorism (CT) in East Africa and other conflict-prone areas, there are still some gaps in the literature that are critical in terms of bilateral collaboration between Kenya and Somalia. To begin with, the current literature mainly concentrates on the national-level CT strategies in any of Kenya or Somalia alone, as well as the examination of the local intelligence systems, security sector reforms, and community involvement. Nevertheless, there is little academic literature to analyse Kenya-Somalia CT cooperation as an interdependent system, although the operations of the Al-Shabaab transnational entity and the permeability of the borderlands make it fluid. This leaves the small amount of knowledge about the implementation of bilateral strategies to work and the impact that these strategies have had on operational results across the border.

Second, there is little to no empirical evidence on the effectiveness of joint counter-terrorism mechanisms, i.e. intelligence sharing, coordinated patrols, or common legal frameworks. Majority of the studies report the CT intervention, but fail to quantify and/or qualitatively assess the meaningfulness of the intervention to the control of the terrorism activity, to the disruption of operational networks, or to have enhanced the early-warning systems. Therefore, in the literature, there is no systematic evidence regarding the aspects of bilateral cooperation that works, in what conditions, and why. Third, minimal researches have been conducted on the challenges facing Kenya-Somalia CT initiatives in implementation. Many authors draw attention to such issues as mistrust, capacity gaps, fragile governance, and fragmented security institutions, but not many studies focus on the way these structural constraints

weaken bilateral coordination. These challenges should be comprehended to come up with realistic and sustainable CT frameworks in the Horn of Africa.

Fourth, the current literature does not refer to community-level insights in bilateral CT measures frequently. Studies indicate that community trust, local intelligence, and socio-economic inclusion are the key to the success of CT, but the cross-border experiences of communities living along the border, especially in Mandera, Garissa, Gedo and Lower Juba, are not explored. This restricts information about the way bilateral CT policies may collaborate with local actors, informal governance, and socio-economic facts in marginalized frontier areas. Lastly, the literature on the topic of bilateral counter-terrorism efforts to long-term resilience is severely lacking. Recent literature concentrates on the short-term military rewards and occasional security operations and not much is done to check whether joint operations are tackling the root causes of radicalization like economic deprivation, political marginalization, and historical resentments. Lack of longitudinal and resilience based studies curtail the potential of the region to assess sustainability and reformulate policies to that effect.

Considering these gaps, the proposed study aims at offering evidence-based evaluation of the efficiency of Kenya-Somalia bilateral counter-terrorism policies, including the operational influence, the implementation issues, and the opportunities to enhance cross-border security collaboration. The research can address such under-researched aspects, thereby helping to fill one of the larger empirical and theoretical gaps in the wider body of counter-terrorism literature on the Horn of Africa.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design was a mixed-method research design, which incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods to enable the researcher have a holistic view on Kenya-Somalia bilateral counter-terrorist strategies. The quantitative component allowed the measurement of the community experiences, perceptions, and patterns using structured questions using questionnaires, and the qualitative one allowed exploring the matter in more detail with the help of experts and officials as part of the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Such a design was suitable as counter-terrorism is a complicated socio-political and security concern that needs quantifiable only indicators and multi-layered narrative accounts.

3.2 Study Area

The study was carried out in one County (Mandera) of Kenya and Bulohawo (Beled Hawo) of Somalia- two adjacent border towns that have experienced a lot of terrorist and counter-terrorist activity within the Horn of Africa. The region was chosen on the basis that it indicates the pragmatic realities of bilateral security collaborations such as joint patrols, sharing of intelligence, and stabilization efforts under the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). The dynamics render the region a perfect place to gauge the efficiency of Kenya-Somalia counter-terrorism policies, including socio-economic and institutional parameters of their application.

3.3 Target Population

The population of interest was household heads, terrorism victims, security personnel, as well as diplomats or government officials who were directly involved or affected by the counter-terrorism efforts at the Kenya-Somalia border. The reason behind the selection of these groups is that these groups have related knowledge, experiences, and views, which are crucial to assess the essence and results of bilateral counter-terrorism approaches.

3.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The researchers adopted both stratified and purposive sampling to ensure representativeness and professional input into the study. The stratified random sampling method was used on the household heads and victims of terror to be able to capture the various demographic and socio-economic factors in the two regions of study. A purposive sampling was intended to be used to sample security experts, diplomats, and government officials who have specialized knowledge when it comes to counter-terrorism operations.

The 384 respondents in the sample were calculated with the help of the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling model. Purposive selection of 18 Key Informants was done to conduct in-depth interviews. Table 1 represents the sampling distribution.

Table 1

Sampling Distribution by Category and Study Location

Category	Sampling Technique	Mandera (Kenya)	Bulohawo (Somalia)	Total Sample
Household Heads	Stratified Random	138	92	230
Affected Victims	Stratified Random	23	15	38
Security Experts	Purposive	34	22	56
Diplomats & Officials	Purposive	35	25	60
Total Respondents		**230**	**154**	**384**
Key Informants (KIIs)	Purposive	10	8	18

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Quantitative information in the form of structured questionnaires and qualitative insights in the form of Key Informant Interview (KII) guides were used to collect the data. The questionnaires were used to obtain demographic data, opinions about counter-terrorism efforts as well as the efficiency of bilateral security cooperation. The expert opinions were gathered by conducting KIIs with the representatives of the security forces, diplomats, community leaders, and government representatives. The fieldwork was carried out in in-person administration, as well as in guided interviews, where the confidentiality and the safety of the respondents were observed in the sensitive security environment.

3.6 Data Analysis

Coding and analysis of quantitative data were performed with the help of SPSS Version 26, and the descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and the inferential statistics (testing of hypotheses) were utilized. KIIs as qualitative data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed on a thematic level to determine how trends are repeated, new insights arise, and contextual explanations. The combination of data of the two kinds reinforced the interpretation and increased the validity of the results.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Kenya Methodist University and the National Commission on Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) on ethical grounds. The participants were told the purpose of the research, their anonymity ensured, and they were free to drop out any time without repercussions. Since security-related research is sensitive, other measures like anonymization of locations and identities were implemented to protect the respondents and make sure that ethical standards of research were met.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Findings on Effectiveness of Bilateral Counter-Terrorism Strategies

This paper aimed to measure the success of bilateral counter-terrorism (CT) measures between Kenya and Somalia in lowering the operational impact of terrorist groups. The respondents were requested to evaluate different facets of effectiveness, such as minimization of terrorist attacks, border personnel training, international cooperation, reintegration and de-radicalization programs, economic empowerment efforts, intelligence-led policing, and responsiveness of the CT strategies on the whole. This was done on a 5-poin Likert scale where: 1=not effective; 2=slightly effective; 3=moderately effective; 4=effective and 5=very effective. Table 2 includes the results.

Table 2

Respondents' Views on the Effectiveness of Bilateral Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Parameter	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	S.D	Mode	Mean	Rank
Reduction of terrorist attacks due to current CT strategies	2.88	5.77	34.62	47.76	8.97	0.85	4	3.54	2
Border security personnel training in CT protocols	2.24	11.86	58.65	20.83	6.41	0.8	3	3.17	6
International collaboration (e.g., with UN, ATMIS, IGAD) in CT operations	1.92	3.85	42.95	44.55	6.73	0.76	4	3.5	3
Reintegration programs for former extremists	2.88	10.58	57.37	24.36	4.81	0.79	3	3.18	5
Deradicalization initiatives aimed at preventing re-offending	2.24	9.62	49.36	34.29	4.49	0.79	3	3.29	4
Economic empowerment programs reducing susceptibility to radicalization	2.88	5.45	30.13	51.92	9.62	0.85	4	3.6	1
Intelligence-led policing in your area	4.81	21.15	43.59	24.36	6.09	0.94	3	3.06	7
Current CT strategies address the main threats in your area	3.53	17.95	50.96	22.76	4.81	0.86	3	3.07	8

The results show that the respondents usually evaluated the effectiveness of bilateral CT strategies as moderate to quite high. The overall proportion of 56.7% of the respondents (Effective + Very Effective) who said that current measures have helped reduce the number of terrorist attacks gave a mean of 3.54 (SD = 0.85). This indicates that combined efforts between Kenya and Somalia have provided tangible albeit lopsided security gains. The initiatives of economic empowerment gained the greatest average score (M = 3.60, SD = 0.85), and 61.5% of the respondents gave the initiatives a rating of effective or very effective. This highlights the perceived importance of the socio-economic line of attack on the root cause of radicalization, including unemployment and marginalization. The international collaboration, especially frameworks that included UN, ATMIS, and IGAD, was also evaluated highly (M = 3.50, SD = 0.76), and 51.3% indicated that it positively impacted the stability of the region and coordination of intelligence. In the same way, the de-radicalization efforts (M = 3.29) and the rehabilitation of former extremists (M = 3.18) were considered to be moderately effective. These responses lead to the cautious optimism of the respondents, which means that although there are mechanisms of rehabilitation, their sustainability and reach are limited in the long run.

In comparison, intelligence-led policing and training of border security employees turned out to be the least effective dimensions. The border security officers scored a mean of 3.17 (SD = 0.80) with majority of the respondents (58.65) indicating that it was only moderately effective. This means that although it has training programs, it might not be regular, comprehensive, and standardized enough to deal with the changing threats. Similarly, the mean of intelligence-led policing was the lowest (M = 3.06, SD = 0.94), indicating that there are still coordination gaps, technological lag or absence, and low levels of integration between the Kenyan and Somali security agencies.

Lastly, the respondents were questioned about whether the existing CT strategies are sufficient to deal with the primary threats in their domains, and 50.96% were neutral, with only 27.6% acquiescing to this question. The respective mean of 3.07 (SD = 0.86) is a pointer of doubt as to the effectiveness of currently implemented measures. In general, the results of the description indicate that the most effective elements of Kenya-Somalia bilateral counter-terrorism activities are seen in international cooperation, economic empowerment, and minimization of terrorist attacks. On the other hand, border staff training, intelligence-based policing, and reintegration initiatives need to be strengthened to increase the operational effectiveness and police credibility. These findings contribute to the new-found agreement on the significance of sustainable counter-terrorist outcomes, which are not founded on the basis of military collaboration only, but on comprehensive, developmental, and intelligence-driven approaches.

4.1.1 Qualitative Findings on Effectiveness

The quantitative data were supported by the qualitative data and provided more specific information on what the respondents thought about the effectiveness and performance of bilateral counter-terrorism (CT) strategies between Kenya and Somalia. The interviews demonstrated that there were 4 key themes such as the reduction of the influence of terrorists, the most effective features, the existing gaps, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

4.1.2 Reduction of Terrorist Influence

Successful containment of the Al-Shabaab and allied extremist groups has been listed as one of the clearest signs of effectiveness by the respondents since it has led to the reduction of attacks, networks, and movement of terrorists along the border between Kenya and Somalia.

Table 3

Reduction of Terrorist Influence

Sub-theme	Frequency of Mentions	Illustrative Focus
Al-Shabaab containment	12	Disruption of bases, decline in attacks
Reduced recruitment	6	Fewer youth are being radicalized, prevention of ISIS expansion
Restricted movement	6	Border restrictions, interception of operatives

During interviews conducted in Mandera Town, Kenya (September 2025), several security experts emphasized that joint counter-terrorism (CT) initiatives had significantly weakened Al-Shabaab's operational capability. One key informant remarked:

> "*Our cooperation with Kenya has been good because at least we can say we have reduced the role of Al-Shabaab in places they once controlled like Kismayo." (*Interview with Somali security official, Bulohawo, September, 2025*)*

Similarly, another respondent highlighted a decline in youth radicalization:

> *"Radicalization and recruitment of youths have also dwindled over time*."(Interview with Kenyan border intelligence officer, Mandera, September 2025)

Enhanced border surveillance was also credited with constraining terrorist mobility:

> "*The strategies have helped to restrict the movement of terrorists along the borders."* (Interview with local administrator, Mandera, September , 2025)

These direct descriptions show that bilateral cooperation of CT has not only provided concrete operational results, but also confidence among the local security stakeholders. The decreasing trend in the number of attacks and recruiting is similar to the quantitative results, which evaluated the decrease in terrorist attacks (Mean = 3.54) as one of the most effective dimensions of bilateral CT strategies. This shows that joint military activities, exchange of intelligence and cross-border patrolling have all increased security within the region. However, the continuing information flow and community-based deradicalization programs will be the key to maintaining such gains to avoid the re-emergence of extremist networks.

4.1.3 Most Effective Components

Respondents were also requested to point out what they believed to be the most effective areas of Kenya-Somalia counter-terrorism (CT) coordination with regard to countering terrorist threats. The qualitative data yielded three prevailing themes, namely, intelligence sharing, joint operations, and de-radicalization programmes.

Table 4

Most Effective Components of Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Sub-theme	Frequency of Mentions	Illustrative Focus
Intelligence sharing	13	Real-time data, prevention of attacks
Joint operations	11	Coordinated missions, capacity building
De-radicalization programs	7	Reintegration, reduced recruitment

Interviews conducted in Mandera (Kenya) and Bulohawo (Somalia) in *September 2025* consistently underscored that *intelligence sharing* was the backbone of bilateral CT efforts. One key informant emphasized:

> "*Intelligence sharing is the most important because it fills gaps and allows us to catch up with terrorists before they carry out attacks."* (Interview with Somali National Army officer, Bulohawo, September 2025)

This sentiment reflects a common understanding that information exchange enables early detection, swift response, and reduced duplication of security efforts. The data suggest that such collaboration has enhanced preventive capacities and reduced the operational latitude of terrorist cells across the border. The second most frequently mentioned component was *joint operations*. Respondents noted that joint missions foster mutual learning, resource pooling, and cross-border synergy:

> "*Joint operations have been very significant because they bring together our forces, intelligence units, and even logistics to coordinate counter-terrorism actions effectively." (*Interview with KDF intelligence liaison, Mandera, September 2025*)*

This perspective demonstrates that coordinated field engagement between Kenyan and Somali forces strengthens the collective response to evolving threats while promoting interoperability between security agencies.
Finally, *de-radicalization programs* were recognized as a sustainable approach to long-term peacebuilding. As one respondent noted:

> "*De-radicalization is the best strategy since it reduces the number of new recruits who would otherwise become field operators for terrorist organizations*."*(*Interview with community peace facilitator, Mandera, September 2025)

This observation reinforces the argument that soft-power interventions—focused on ideological rehabilitation and community reintegration- complement military and intelligence operations by addressing the human dimensions of terrorism.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the most effective CT outcomes arise from a *hybrid strategy* that integrates intelligence-led operations with collaborative field missions and preventive de-radicalization measures. This aligns with neorealist logic emphasizing alliance-building for mutual security, while also resonating with securitization theory's focus on socially constructed responses to perceived threats.

4.1.4 Gaps in Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Despite the good achievements recorded, the respondents identified that there were several recurrent gaps that were undermining the effectiveness of the bilateral strategies in general. They included poor resources, technology, absence of community empowerment, and poor coordination systems.

Table 5
Reported Gaps in Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Sub-theme	Frequency of Mentions	Illustrative Focus
Community empowerment	4	Clan dynamics, lack of civic support
Inadequate resources	7	Funding constraints, skill shortages
Technology gaps	10	Online radicalization, drones, and cryptocurrencies
Weak coordination	2	Gender-insensitive approaches, AU-level debates

According to the respondents, terrorism succeeds when communities are perceived to be sidelined or not taken care of:

> "*Economic empowerment has the potential of making the region a better place since many communities feel neglected*".*(*Interview with KDF intelligence liaison, Mandera, September 2025*)*
> Another common constraint as mentioned, was funding and shortage of skills:
> "*All operations or plans have limitations which we tend to experience and, in this case, financial limitations*." *(*Interview with KDF intelligence liaison, Mandera, September 2025*)*

One of the main worries was that the technological lag behind the terrorist circles was significant:

> "*The way of the terrorist outfits is nowadays improved, too. They are employing drones and cryptocurrencies in logistics and finance*." *(*Interview with KDF intelligence liaison, Mandera, September 2025*)*

These results highlight the fact that, as much as there has been improvement, sustainability and flexibility are in danger because of inadequate resourcing, lack of technological investments, and disproportionate community attention.

4.1.5 Monitoring and Evaluation of Strategies

The respondents highlighted the significance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to achieve performance tracking, foster accountability, and adaptive learning within CT operations.

Table 6
Monitoring and Evaluation of CT Strategies

Sub-theme	Frequency of Mentions	Illustrative Focus
Community empowerment	4	Clan dynamics, lack of civic support
Inadequate resources	7	Funding constraints, skill shortages
Technology gaps	10	Online radicalization, drones, and cryptocurrencies
Weak coordination	2	Gender-insensitive approaches, AU-level debates

The issue of community perceptions was stated as the key indicator of success:

> *"The local population can serve as a measure of success. When the locals embrace the strategies or leave terror groups, it is a sign that it is effective." (*Interview with KDF intelligence liaison, Mandera, September 2025*)*

Existing structures also integrated formal review mechanisms:

> *"We also have quarterly review meetings under the AUSOM, IGAD, and the UN mission in Somalia, and check whether our strategies are working or not." (*Interview with KDF intelligence liaison, Mandera, September 2025*)*

Regular changes were mentioned as a crucial part of flexibility:

> *"They are reviewed every quarter by examining which strategies have the most success." (*Interview with KDF intelligence liaison, Mandera, September 2025*)*

All these insights, together, point to the fact that strong M&E systems make it possible to persist in continuous improvement, establishing learning and responsiveness to the changing nature of terrorism in the region.

4.2 Discussion

The results of the study have shown that Kenya and Somalia have recorded some significant gains on counteracting the operational capacities of terrorist organizations especially through better intelligence coordination, combined security operations and increased cross-border patrols, however, overall efficiency of their bilateral counter-terrorism framework is still hampered by structural issues. The respondents have admitted to the reduction in the rate and intensity of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera and Bulohawo. Nevertheless, they have also focused on the fact that the gaps in governance, institutional vulnerabilities, and socio-economic marginalization still form conditions in which

radicalization and the ability to resist extremism flourish. These observations can be compared with the claim according to which counter-terrorism efficacy is fundamentally multidimensional and depends on the ability to balance the coercive options with the community-based and preventive initiatives (Montasari, 2024).

The centrality of human-security-driven solutions was supported on the basis of the community views of Mandera and Bulohawo. Economic deprivation, political marginalization, and poor service provision were among the key motivators to radicalization as cited by respondents numerous times over. These data point in the same direction as researchers claim that inadequate inter-agency response and the lack of inclusive and community-based approaches to counter-terrorism strategies negatively affect the sustainability of the final results in the long run (Botha, 2021). Although its operations improved, a large number of the respondents believed that Kenya-Somalia collaboration is still disjointed because of bureaucratic delays, imbalanced distribution of resources, and vested national interests. This fact is repeated by previous studies that suggest that regional CT structures are commonly disjointed and feature distrust among partnering states (Onuaha, 2020).

The fact that the bilateral CT mechanisms have not gone beyond the point of limited self-reliance in the Horn of Africa is also evidenced by the persistence of external factors, such as the African Union, the United Nations, and other external donors. The respondents mentioned that the intelligence sharing and joint operations are the most useful elements of the partnership; however, since there are no standardized evaluation systems, interoperable technologies, and strategic planning frameworks, the partnership cannot become more deeply institutionalized. It aligns with the research results those bilateral arrangements are the most successful in the context of being integrated in the larger regional and international regimes on security matters (Onuoha, 2020).

In theory, the results indicate that the Securitization Theory is used to describe why Kenya and Somalia referenced the discursive construction of terrorism as an existential threat. This framing has justified extraordinary measures such as foreign military intervention, broader spy activities, and emergency act as per the reason presented by Buzan et al. (1998). The securitized policy priorities can be seen in the focus of the respondents on military solutions, rapid response units, and increased surveillance technologies. Nevertheless, the results also show the weaknesses of securitization: it has strengthened the militarist-based response at the expense of developmental and community-oriented interventions as a long-term resilience factor. As the experts caution, privatization is biased towards short-term containment and covering structural causes of violent extremism (McGlinchey, 2021).

Neorealism also explains why Kenya and Somalia still work together even though they had mistrust in history and domestic unrest. Under an anarchic regional order, states respond to self-help policies through mutual vulnerability, and thus pragmatic collaboration against Al-Shabaab is a sensible decision (Waltz, 1979). The results of the study prove that bilateral cooperation is driven by the necessity of security but not common values and normative commitments. But the contemporary terrorism is also characterized by threats like attacks via drones, encrypted messages, and anonymous funding of terror, which are not limited to conventional territorial logics. This questions the neorealism assumptions that are state-centric and emphasizes the necessity of flexible and technology-oriented security policies.

In general, there is evidence to indicate that Kenya-Somalia bilateral counter-terrorism activities are yielding short-term operational successes, but are yet to achieve structural stability or long-term resilience. The alliance is predetermined by securitized and neorealist interests, contributing to an increase in the level of tactical coordination but being insufficient to ensure the socio-economic and political environment that contributes to violent extremism. These observations help substantiate the hypothesis that a hybrid security model is needed in sustainable counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa, a model that incorporates coercive capacity and preventive governance, technological modernization, and integrative community participation. It agrees with scholars who think CT's efficacy is based on the rise in institutional legitimacy, public trust, and state flexibility, not just the drop in attacks (UNOCT, 2023).

In the case of Kenya and Somalia, it means that the empowerment of the youth, the investment in the development projects across borders, the development of digital intelligence, and the institutionalization of the participation of the community are the necessary measures that would help in the transformation of short-term tactical victory into long-lasting peace and the stability of the region.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This paper confirms that re-securitization of Kenya-Somalia borderlands has been associated with quantifiable but partial benefits in curbing the operational effects of terrorist organizations within the Horn of Africa. Two-way collaboration due to similar threat perceptions and strategic interdependency has improved intelligence coordination, interfered Al-Shabaab networks, and eliminated cross-border incursions. The theoretical hypotheses of the Securitization process and Neorealism are supported by these developments that show how the mode of framing terrorism as existential threat and operation in an anarchic system facilitates the mobilization of extraordinary resources and the establishment of practical alliances to survive.

Nevertheless, what the findings also show is that these securitized and neorealist logics, though effective in marshalling resources and coordinating activities, has strengthened a militarized view of security at the expense of governance, socio-economic inclusion and community involvement. Institutional incoherence, technological gaps, and weak presence of the state in frontiers make the non-state actors to still have functional authority. The paper has thus argued that Kenya-Somalia frontier stabilization is to be achieved through the shift in logic of re-securitization towards coercive containment to inclusive governance. The long-term peace will require the alignment of military strength and legitimacy whereby restoration of state power is not done by control, but with trust, development and civic integration that will tie the borderlands to the political and moral space of the state.

5.2 Recommendations

In order to strengthen the Kenya-Somalia bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation effectiveness and sustainability, a number of mutually dependent steps should be made. To begin with, the two governments ought to formalize their cooperation by creating a standing bilateral counter-terrorism coordination secretariat that is based on the respective ministries of interior. The result of such an institutional mechanism would be the standardization of intelligence sharing, coordination of joint operations and policy accountability framework which would curb the lack of coherence in operations that is currently being experienced. Second, the alliance should focus on technological modernization in order to deal with asymmetrical threats that are being created. Early-warning against online radicalization, drone warfare and cryptocurrency-based financing networks would be enhanced by investing in digital surveillance, predictive analytics and cyber-defense systems. Technological capacity creation would also improve the level of interoperability between security agencies as well as the ability to respond to changing risks in real-time.

Third, community-based initiatives in the security fabric determine the success of counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa. Cross border development programmes that would increase youth employment, entrepreneurship and civic education would help solve the underlying socio-economic grievances that perpetuate extremist recruitment. The development of Mandera and Bulahawo as local actors would change the citizens of both regions into active participants of security, rather than mere subjects of it, enhancing trust between the state and the frontier population. Fourth, adaptive mechanisms of governance, which facilitate the learning and constant accountability of the policies, should be embraced by both states. Combined with structured community feedback, joint monitoring and evaluation systems would be used to produce empirical data that would be used to gauge performance and to make sure that strategies are responsive to their context. This reflexive governance would entrench the culture of iterative perfection into the counter-terrorism institutions. Lastly, Kenya and Somalia ought to incorporate their bilateral endeavors in the regional and multilateral platforms under the IGAD and the African Union to align the intelligence systems and joint security actions. The Horn of Africa terrorism activities are beyond the borders of the states; hence, not that coordinated regional mechanisms cannot guarantee the strategic depth and continuity of the policy.

REFERENCES

African Union. (2024). *ATMIS progress report: Stabilisation and counter-terrorism operations in Somalia*. https://au.int

Agbiboa, D. E. (2023). *They eat our sweat: Transport labour, corruption and everyday survival in urban Nigeria*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192868151.001.0001

Barkin, J. S. (2010). *Realist constructivism: Rethinking international relations theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Booth, K., Wheeler, N. J., & Dunne, T. (2020). Security dilemmas in asymmetric conflicts. *International Affairs, 96*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz254

Botha, A. (2019). Political fragility and violent extremism in the Horn of Africa. Institute for Security Studies. https://issafrica.org/research

Botha, A. (2021). Terrorism in Kenya: Recruitment and radicalisation in Kenya's urban centres. Institute for Security Studies. https://issafrica.org/research/east-africa-report/terrorism-in-kenya-recruitment-and-radicalisation-in-kenyas-urban-centres

Bryden, M. (2023). Reassessing Al-Shabaab's regional threat. Center for Strategic and International Studies. https://www.csis.org

Buzan, B., Waever, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. https://www.rienner.com/title/Security_A_New_Framework_for_Analysis

Dewdney, J. (2018). Nationalist narratives and the politics of securitization. *Journal of International Relations and Development, 21*(3), 511–530. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0104-6

Donnelly, J. (2019). Structural realism revisited: The limits of neorealist analysis. *International Relations, 33*(2), 238–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117819834622

Hassan, M. (2022). Al-Shabaab's evolving governance and security strategy. *Journal of Eastern African Studies, 16*(4), 623–642. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2022.2061304

Hayes, B., Jones, C., & Marquez, R. (2020). The privatisation of security: Commercial interests and policy influence in counter-terrorism. Transnational Institute. https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-privatisation-of-security

Institute for Economics & Peace. (2024). *Global Terrorism Index 2024*. https://www.visionofhumanity.org

International Crisis Group. (2023). *Stopping the spread of extremism in East Africa*. https://www.crisisgroup.org

Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30*(3), 607–610. https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308

Lieven, A. (2020). The militarization of Western security policy. *Survival, 62*(5), 7–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1819645

Lind, J. (2022). Securing Kenya's borderlands: State authority and local security arrangements. Rift Valley Institute. https://riftvalley.net/publication/securing-kenyas-borderlands

McGlinchey, S. (2021). Securitization and the power of discourse in conflict settings. *International Affairs Review, 29*(1), 1–18. https://iar-gwu.org

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). *The tragedy of Great Power politics* (Updated ed.). W. W. Norton. https://wwnorton.com/books/9780393349276

Montasari, B. (2024). Assessing the United Kingdom's evolving CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy. *Policy Studies, 45*(1), 55–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2022.2132857

Onuoha, F. C. (2020). Collaborative approaches to countering Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. *African Security Review, 29*(2), 120–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2020.1735204

Republic of Kenya. (2022). *National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism* (Revised ed.). https://interior.go.ke

U.S. Department of State. (2023). *Country reports on terrorism 2023*. https://www.state.gov/reports

United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. (2023). *Global counter-terrorism update*. https://www.un.org/counterterrorism

Waever, O. (1995). Securitization and desecuritization. In R. Lipschutz (Ed.), *On security* (pp. 46–86). Columbia University Press. https://cup.columbia.edu/book/on-security/9780231101953

Waever, O. (2015). The Theory Act: Responsibility and critique in securitization theory. *Security Dialogue, 46*(4), 337–354. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615585732

Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*. Addison-Wesley. https://press.princeton.edu/books/9780691203481