

Asymmetry and Power Disparity in East Africa: The Strength behind Interdependence and Cooperation in US-Kenya Counterterrorism

Sky Lukas Mkuti

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0710-8116>

School of Social Sciences, Department of Political Sciences, University of South Africa

School of Social Sciences, IIEMSA

Email: smkuti@yahoo.com

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Abstract: This study examined asymmetry and power disparity in US-Kenya bilateral relation to counterterrorism in East Africa. It employed a qualitative approach using a desktop approach. The study further employed secondary and primary data from incidents of terror attacks in East Africa since 9/11 period. The study is deemed significant because of notable persistent expansion of Al-Shabaab's terrorist cells in the East African Region. Although this threat remains a concern to US-Kenya interests, the expansion of terror activities in regions such as the Central Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is alarming and brings relevance to this study. The study employed asymmetry theory as a benchmark to explain how international relations amongst states with visible power disparity can yield normalcy in bilateral and multilateral relations when tackling mutual insecurity threats such as terrorism. The study findings indicate that asymmetric bilateral relations are likely to respond positively to challenges posed by terrorism through counterterror measures pursued by means of interdependence and cooperation as is the case of US-Kenya asymmetric relationship. The counterterror measures employed through joint efforts despite the visible US-Kenya asymmetric power disparity present valuable lessons to the Southern African Region. Hence, the study recommends policy makers in Southern Africa to consider counterterror strategies that are incrementally multidimensional to better address the rising regional insecurities.

Keywords: Asymmetry; interdependence; cooperation; bilateral relations; terrorism; counterterrorism; insecurity.

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Introduction

The post-9/11 era refers to a significant period that heralded a new dimension in US politics domestically and internationally as a result of the US terror attacks in September 11, 2001. The world witnessed a shift in the landscape of global politics. Hence, US' global counterterror measures that not only impacted the *status quo* but legitimized America's use of force abroad, immigration and surveillance policies (Carlisle, 2021). For this reason, the post-9/11 era contributed to an enhanced global effort to counter terrorism mostly led by the US. This effort was widely known as the 'global war' on

terror. It saw African countries such as Kenya becoming major US counterterror allies in the East African region. This move was essential for the US as partnering with African countries on counterterror measures such as PRACT (Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism) amongst others. This showed US' broader expansion in the fight against terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and its affiliates across the globe (United States White House, 2011a). Despite an evident power asymmetry between the two nations, one cannot overrule the power that mutual threats have in strengthening interdependence and cooperation to a common security threat – terrorism. The threat posed by

terrorism has gradually transcended beyond East Africa to the Southern African region. It has in fact become a reality that should be of concern to African policy makers within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These new regional insecurity developments must speed up the

organizational objectives in promoting peace and defending regional security not only on paper but in practice. Only then can interdependence and cooperation as a counterterror strategy yield desirable outcome in dismantling the expansion of terror threats posed by Al-Shabaab affiliates.

Table 1: An illustration of growing incidents of terror in Kenya: East Africa's major victim of terrorism in 2015

EAST AFRICA'S FATAL TERRORIST ATTACKS POST 9/11- 2015					
Date	Organization	Location	Fatalities		Description of the Event
			Death	Injuries	
28 November 2002	Al-Qaeda	Kikambala	15	80	Al-Qaeda operatives attacked the Paradise Hotel, an Israeli owned beachfront lodge in Kenya.
11 July 2010	Al-Shabaab	Uganda	85	12	Bombings in Kampala attributed to the newly emerged terrorist group in East Africa.
01 October 2011	Al-Shabaab	Kenya	48	200	17 attacks in multiple locations involving grenades or explosive devices in Kenya have led to deaths. Other deaths resulted from fatal kidnappings of foreign nationals (a British man kidnapped and killed at a coastal resort near the Kenya-Somali border and French woman kidnapped from Lamu Island on Kenya's north coast and subsequently killed in Somalia).
01 July 2012	Al-Shabaab	North Eastern Province	17	50	Terrorist attacks on civilians involving two simultaneous assaults on churches in Garissa.
21 September 2013	Al-Shabaab	Nairobi	67	50	Complex attack on the Westgate Mall in an upmarket quarter of the Kenyan capital Nairobi where Somali Al-Shabaab militants demanded Kenya's military to pull out of Somalia.
24 May 2014	Al-Shabaab	Djibouti	2	20	Al-Shabaab also struck a nightclub in Djibouti.
14 June 2014	Al-Shabaab	Mpeketoni	49	-	Al-Shabaab militants attack hotels and a police station in Mpeketoni, near the island resort of Lamu.
02 April 2015	Al-Shabaab	North Eastern Province	154	104	Al-Shabaab carry out a massacre at Garissa University College in northeast Kenya, killing at least 154 people.

Sources: United States Embassy in the Republic of Kenya (2012); Al Jazeera (2013), United States Department of Justice (2015, p. 21); Human Rights Watch (2015), Global Terrorism Index (2016, p. 12), International Crisis Group (2018, p. 4) and BBC News (2020).

In East Africa, for instance, Al-Shabaab continues to exploit Somalia's state of non-governance to fuel regional insecurity. It has become critical for the US to engage in a multifaceted counterterrorism strategy to thwart terrorist jihadist ideals. The post-9/11 terror attacks created conditions for a strengthened capacity and enhancement of global partnerships to counter terrorism. The US-Africa counterterrorism partnerships strengthened Africa's ability to defend and protect US' interests on the continent. This has been made possible specifically through engagements such as the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) that oversees the military activities of the US on the African continent along the conflicting and porous borders. Programs such as the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund and the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership enable African partners to secure their national borders through military education and training as well as defense equipment (US Department of State, 2022). Furthermore, Byman (2015) suggested that the US-Africa counterterrorism coalition was instrumental in reducing the number of terror incidents in the US. Thus, the collective and multilateral effort pursued through the US-Africa partnership play a crucial role in counterterrorism. It has contributed towards denying the financing to terrorist groups and the establishment of safe havens in vulnerable regions on the continent (United States National Archives, 2003).

However, despite increased counterterrorism partnership initiatives between the US and African nations, terrorist activities are expanding on the continent. This can be attested by the number of terror incidents recorded during the 2001-2015 period. For instance, incidents of terror in Kenya increased dramatically in post-9/11 era although the regional Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PRACT) initiative has been in action since 2009. This regional US-led counterterrorism initiative aimed to aid governments in East Africa with capabilities to dismantle the spread of terror threat posed by Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab and other violent extremist organizations. Table 1 illustrates that despite these counterterrorism measures in place, Kenya's terror incidents have been on the rise since 9/11. The April 3, 2015 Garissa University College Massacre counts amongst the terror incidents that resulted in the highest number of casualties in the region since the 7th of August, 1998 attacks on the US Embassy in both Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya.

It is worth noting that Al-Shabaab and its affiliates have on many occasions taken responsibility for all major terror attacks in East Africa. They have unapologetically and deliberately stated that they have shifted the 'battleground' from their 'Somaliland' into other parts of East Africa, specifically to Kenya (Agbibo, 2013). There is also a considerable shift in Al-Shabaab's operative cells as their focal point of extremism has expanded beyond East African countries (Ebrahim, 2020). SADC countries such as Mozambique, which are historically war-torn and plagued by civil unrests have become a target of terror. Subsequently, Cabo Delgado, a northern province of Mozambique has become one of Al-Shabaab's new focal points of entry to pursue extremism in the SADC Region. SADC has been a relatively stable region with no significant incidents of violent extremism and terror attacks contrary to East Africa, which has experienced fatal terror attacks since the late 1990s. However, unguarded territorial borders and pre-existing fragile socio-economic and political conditions compound regional insecurity and transregional vulnerabilities.

The insecurity vulnerabilities in Cabo Delgado created a newly found terror 'playground' to Al-Shabaab aspired extremist group, Ahlu Sunnah wa Jama'a (ASWJ). The latter terrorist group just like Al-Shabaab has been responsible for the death of over 3,300 people and it stimulated internal displacement of more than 800,000 persons in the terror infiltrated Mozambican region (Pirio et. al., 2021).

As it stands, since 2017, the ASWJ militant Islamist group has found a fertile ground for terrorism in Cabo Delgado. It strategically exploits the existing socio-economic and security weaknesses in the northern region of Mozambique that borders with Tanzania. Tanzania's hybrid regional membership forms a unique combination to both East Africa and SADC regions. As a member of the East African Community (EAC), it inherits the regional (in) security challenges which compels it to engage in initiatives that strengthen regional peace, security and institutional governance. It is also the "only member of SADC amongst the EAC Partner States" which facilitates economic as well as security integration in both regional communities (East African Community, 2022).

Despite Tanzania's interregional hybridity which facilitates its intra-Africa market liberalization,

Tanzania finds itself in a much dire insecurity dilemma, facing terror threats from within and from without. Its territorial linkage to the borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Mozambique makes it susceptible to “terrorist threats on three of its borders” (United States Department of State, 2021).

Tanzania, similarly to Kenya, is historically victim of terrorism. However, no major incidents of terror had been experienced in Tanzania since the 1998 US Embassy bombings until Mozambique’s first 2017 terrorist predicament. In 2020, Tanzania has reportedly experienced two terrorist attacks in the surrounding areas of Mtwara Region that borders with Mozambique. The border regions of Mtwara, Lindi and Rovuma are focal points of entry for transnational terrorism. United States Department of State (2021) maintains that most of the terror atrocities are largely instigated by ISIS-Mozambique linked terrorist groups. These groups commit terror atrocities that include looting and burning of property and infrastructure which have also led to several deaths.

The insecurity dynamics surrounding East African states that are in close proximity with Mozambique suggest that the national security of the entire SADC region is compromised. Evidently, the recent 26th October 2022 terror alert issued by the US Embassy to South Africa raises questions on the state of South Africa’s preparedness in dealing with any possible terror attack (Bhengu, 2022). Taking a gaze at the long strides of US-Kenya asymmetric bilateral relationship which yields interdependence and cooperation as a strategic force to counter terrorism in East Africa, one ponders the lessons that South Africa and the wider SADC region can draw. The counterterror experiences in East African region provide an overview of how terror vulnerable regions may be exposed to multidimensional insecurities should the warning signs be left unattended. To this end, this paper sought to bring an understanding that the successes drawn from the US-Kenya asymmetric relations to counterterror can yield desired outcomes in Southern African region as well, provided that proper and coordinated implementation of counterterror strategic plans are put in place and are subsequently implemented.

East African Counterterrorism in Post-9/11 Era

The post-9/11 counterterrorism heralded a new era of greater global interdependence and international cooperation amongst global powers, regional actors and the entire international community. The US-led

counterterror strategies became globalized and despite being heavily militaristic in its undertakings, they were perceived as an ‘effective’ approach in dismantling terrorist leading structures. For instance, the killing of several terrorist leaders such as Bin Laden played a major role in weakening the hierarchical structure of terror organizations (United States Homeland Security Digital Library, 2011b). As such, the targeted and military counterterror approach coupled with a multidimensional coalition managed to build counterterror confidence. This counterterror strategy is seen as effective in its ability to dismantle several operative cells of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates across Africa.

However, the militaristic nature of US counterterror attracted substantial criticism. Critics such as Solomon (2013) and Botha (2014) argued that most of US-led counterterror initiatives have contributed to the escalation of incidents of extreme violence domestically as those that occurred in Kenya. The 2007 post-election violence which resulted from a multiplicity of factors mostly between contending Kikuyus and Kalenjins’ ethnic groups is an example of how internal conflicts can become drivers of extremism and propel terrorism. The report made by the Center for Preventive Action suggest that the existence of a “polarized electorate” and the enduring political cleavages have a negative impact on the implementation of US-led regional counterterror strategies. There were two major counterterror strategies being advanced through the US-East Africa Foreign Policy when the interethnic post-election violent outbreaks occurred. Firstly, the prevention of Somalia from becoming an East African terrorist safe haven. Finally, the need to nurture interstate peace between the Sudan and the world’s newest independent African country - South Sudan (Center for Preventive Action, 2013). It was vital to achieve peace and stability amid this political crisis given that any form of instability with potential to fuel resistance against the implementation of US-led regional counterterror strategies could be detrimental to the advancement of US-Kenya counterterrorism.

According to Solomon (2013) and Botha (2014), intra-state violence instigates extremist sentiments that can be attributed to ethnicity and religion cleavages. As indicated earlier, these are often major factors that have divided Kenyans politically and socially. In the far North part of Africa, specifically in the Maghreb Region, Libya

experienced a similar riot incident that resulted into an intrastate political resistance which occurred in 2011. To a certain extent, the US humanitarian intervention in Libya, for instance, indirectly influenced national instability with the rise of Islamist militants and other militias that attacked the Benghazi US consulate in September 2012. This national security deterioration occurred despite the 2011 ousting and ultimate killing of Muammar Gaddafi. The prolonged state of insecurity deteriorated as a result of the political instability surrounding Libya's trans-religious, tribal, regional and political composition (Center for Preventive Action, 2022). For this reason, critics are against the militaristic nature of US-led counterterror missions and contest the effectiveness of US-led counterterrorism in alleviating the drivers of political instability which influence terrorism on the continent. The widespread of regional political instability exacerbate insecurity conditions on the continent (Solomon, 2015).

In Kenya for instance, militaristic counterterror strategies applied in the early years after the implementation of the Suppression of Terrorism Act in 2003 fueled up an 'Anti-American' sentiment amongst Muslim residents who felt victimized by the aggressive interrogations to suspected terrorists. There were consequential political strains domestically as the majority of Kenyan Muslims form part of a larger group of residents dwelling along the Indian Ocean Coast. This is a critical region as individuals residing along this area have in-built affinities to the neighboring Somalia. The state of instability in this East African nation lays down conditions for Al-Shabaab's persistence in propagating radical extremism and resilience in ceasing control of inhabited areas for recruitment purposes. Hence, the heavily reliance on the military as a counterterror strategy has the potential to propagate alienation of ethnic groups (Cochrane, 2013). This can compound the state of insecurity by leading the populace straight into the camp of terrorists, specifically if they are of the same creed and or share a cultural background.

Terrorists are often keen to increase their recruitment base. They exploit circumstances that drive resentment amongst the populace to their advantage. They build relationships with disgruntled militants to accelerate their recruitment within their region of interest such as the Southern Tanzania and Northern Mozambique (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Despite the growing criticism in the militaristic nature of the US-led counterterror engagements in East Africa, there are positive outcomes. In some instances, tackling terror threats militarily has not only enabled policy makers to dismantle Al-Qaeda's cells but has also weakened their organizational structure. These counterterror efforts have expanded capacity for a multidimensional counterterror coalition with African counterparts as is the case of US-Kenya asymmetric bilateral relation. By 2020, about 4,400 US Military troops were stationed across the East African region specifically in AMISOM's major troop-contributing countries, notably Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya and Uganda. In Djibouti, the US Military base has been significant in advising regional counterterrorism efforts against the Somalia-based Al-Shabaab terrorist group (Detsch & Grammar, 2020). It has been through a coordinated and collective counterterror operation that these countries have been instrumental in liberating several areas which were under the control of Al-Shabaab, in Somalia.

Essentially, to establish a meaningful counterterror approach even if it is accomplished through a multilateral dimension, the militaristic aspect in its undertakings cannot be fully detached from law enforcement, intelligence and joint military operational effort. Hence, a combination of counterterror strategies is essential to thwart the rapid spread of transnational terror posing a threat to human security. As Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, specifically Al-Shabaab, remain steadfast in diversifying their rules of engagement when conducting attacks, states must take into consideration mechanisms that viably strengthen their counterterror coalitions. For instance, states that are already embattled in intrastate conflicts often aggravate the existing state fragility that further generates an unstable security environment. The East African region presents such a precarious scenario, where homegrown terrorist groups in Somalia are perpetual proponents of regional instability which is undesirably proliferating towards the SADC region. This state of insecurity calls for an accelerated and strengthened partnerships between the global North and the global South to enhance regional counterterror initiatives capable of building security for the establishment of workable multidimensional counterterror strategies. These strategies should entail counterterror measures that do not only equip a regional power with the defensive capacity to fight the militias and restore stability in conflicting areas. It is essential that all

regional community members take lead in regional counterterror affairs by coordinating military operations through practical collective actions. These actions may entail sustainable coalitions that result in stable and unified governing institutions capable of effectively responding to the drivers of socio-political and economic conditions that prolong regional instability.

The significance of US-Kenya Asymmetry in attaining a multidimensional counterterror

Asymmetry generally means a state of unevenness or unequal standard. However, in international relations, it presents a distinct explanation from the popular view. It brings to light the sense of interdependence and cooperation between two relatively distinct states with different global roles. Hence, states can draw significant benefits from their asymmetric relations. The US-Kenya asymmetric bilateral relationship gives evidence that asymmetric relations are not always dominated by a hegemonic power particularly when the attainment of common security goal is concerned.

Counterterror coalitions disregard power competitiveness and are more favorable than unilateral counterterror engagements. Counterterrorism is highly enforced globally as states seek to implement measures that enforce national, regional and international security. However, there is neither specific nor prescriptive counterterror strategic approach that can effectively respond to threats posed by terrorism. The concept of terrorism lacks a universal definition apart from being a complex term which is devoid of an all-encompassing counter strategic action plan. Nonetheless, terrorism is a concept commonly associated with brutal acts of violence against unarmed civilians with the intention of making an extremist radical political statement. And because these acts are frequently grounded on a series of misconstrued interpretation of the *Shari'a* law principles that justify the promulgation of extremist violence towards other religious groups, specifically Christians, it makes counterterrorism a tremendously challenging exercise.

Therefore, it has been a challenging exercise to fully eradicate the vestiges of terrorism in Africa, as is in any other part of the world. However, what remains striking in counterterrorism is the problematization of factors that instigate terrorism which are critical to ascribe accurate and workable solutions to this complex security problem. Furthermore, since there

are different manifestations of terrorism, their interpretation varies. Hence, policy makers have the responsibility to implement counterterror strategies that are deemed necessary to address threats at hand, be it coercive or not. This, therefore, makes counterterrorism a critical and intricate national security component applied by states to address any perceived national security threat. Subsequently, counterterrorism can best be understood as an all-encompassing doctrine that prevents, deters, pre-empts and responds to threats of a nation's domestic and international power (Karlsson, 2016). Consequently, whenever governments perceive a threat by non-state actors, individuals or groups who consciously use or threaten to use random violence against innocents for political means" (Haken, 2019), they are at the liberty to apply any responsive defensive strategy to secure and protect national, regional and global security interest.

In East Africa for instance, the US-Kenya counterterror partnership has yielded benefits as Kenya became part of the global coalition against Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. The extensive US financing towards counterterror initiatives such as the Partnership for Regional East Africa counterterrorism (PRACT) as well as the implementation of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) have been instrumental in addressing insecurity vulnerabilities stemming from the neighboring Somalia. It is no secret that Kenya's primordial links with Somalia's chronic state of instability have led to severe national and regional insecurity conditions due to continual state of socio-economic and political instability. These conditions permeate the rise in terrorist 'cell-breeding' that have over the years fomented attacks against US interest on the continent.

The early manifestation of terror threats on African soil became eminent in the 90s with the magnitude of the 1998 twin bombing attacks targeted against the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania which gave an indication of the pervasive nature of terrorism in East Africa. These terror attacks propelled a new pattern of US-Kenya bilateral relationship specifically due to the rise in terror incidents which places Kenya as the world's top three most fragile East African states. This creates opportunities for continuous creation and acceptance of global procedures, rules as well as the institutionalization of adaptable US-led counterterror coalition. As terror organizations continue to shift their *modus operandi* and become

persistent in expanding their reach on the African soil, policy makers must remain vigilant as they pursue a holistic and multidimensional strategic approach to counter a common threat in international security.

Tackling a Common Foe through Asymmetry

Despite visible relational disparities between states from the Global North and the Global South, the security vulnerabilities posed by terrorism influence the attainment of common ground driven by mutual interests. In East Africa for instance, Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility of most terror attacks waged in the region. However, it is cynical that since the institutionalization of the US-Kenya counterterror coalition in post-9/11 era, Kenya became the most affected East African state to an extent that terror attacks occurred yearly. Furthermore, terror attacks in East Africa became more pronounced when Kenya became a troop contributor to the African Union (AU) Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), in 2011. This joint coordinated military operation formed part of the AU Peacekeeping force and the US. It intended to dismantle Al-Shabaab's persistent aspirations to conquer Somali governing structures and rule the governance-frayed Somalia. But in retaliation to Kenya's ascending regional counterterror capability, Al-Shabaab fashioned a series of counter attacks. The most affected areas, for instance, became amongst others selected leisure places which are highly crowded venues. For example, Al-Shabaab retaliated against Kenya's AMISOM counterterror strategy and launched a clear targeted terror attacks specifically against Americans and Christian Kenyans who were in Westgate Mall in 2013.

This terror attack gained global coverage for being considered one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in Kenyan history in comparison to the 1998 terror attacks. In the former, scores of innocent civilians lost their lives in the unprecedented terrorist attack that lasted for an excruciating four days in 2013.

Drawing an analysis on the state of Al-Shabaab's operational trends, it is conclusive that the state of transnational terrorism in Africa is reaching a state of 'full-blown' regional expansion. The uncertainty brought by well-crafted terror attacks targeted against US interests and its allies on the continent calls for an urgent multidimensional countermeasure to tackle terror threats.

To this end, a collective regional integration that advances an interagency counterterror cooperation by means of joint operations is required to build

capacity of all regional member states. Although in East Africa, Kenya remains the core regional link for counterterror strategies, the urgency for a collective engagement to tackle a common foe remains. The sustained US-Kenya asymmetric bilateral relations have in many respects influenced the development and implementation of appropriate counterterror strategies that inculcate interdependence and cooperation to address any arising global crisis posing insecurity transnationally such as terrorism. The conceptualization of what constitutes a crisis within an African context can be daunting. However, Womack (2016) stresses that crises cover a broad spectrum of events from ones seen as system threatening to ones that are merely newsworthy. Terrorism covers both spectrums and has become a more pressing global security crisis affecting African states the most. The strain it places on African states' human security is immeasurable as it hampers the most needed sustainable growth by proliferating an endless cycle insecurity crisis. These insecurity conditions are in turn exploited by terrorists to further intensify discord and instability regionally and continentally.

Opportunities and Lessons for SADC

Despite an incremental state of terror incidents that scaled turmoil in East Africa over the past two decades, there are considerable counterterror milestones to be celebrated. Firstly, the realization that terrorism is a transnational threat which knows no boundaries nor respects the sovereignty of states is a major step to forge sustainable international coalitions. Through these coalitions, a collective action creates opportunities to assess national and regional security risks that inform the strategic path which enhances interdependence and collective cooperation. Secondly, the reinforcement of counterterror measures and their implementation through bilateral and regional engagements have proven to strengthen the capacity of states' abilities to deal with unprecedented acts of terror. The inter-state engagement on counter terror missions under the aegis of the AU and US African Command (AFRICOM) present a multidimensional counterterror integration that has crippled the hierarchy of terrorist groups. Decentralized nature of terrorist organizations calls for fervent commitment and enhancement of partnerships that build the required capacity within state's military, law enforcement institutions and the wider civil society across the continent. Finally, the negotiated agreements remain the basis for collective action

against terrorism. Despite visible power imbalances amongst international actors in counterterrorism, the attainment of mutual interests drives the course of successful counterterror strategies. It is therefore imperative to repel any perception of dominance and imposed rules of engagement when leading counterterror states lead joint operations as this can lead to regional tensions. Subsequently, this can further derail the envisioned collective security goal.

The case of the Kenya-Somalia maritime triangle dispute which began in 2012 and ended up with the adjudication of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) severed the Kenya-Somalia bilateral relations. As a major regional counterterror partner in East Africa, the strained Kenya-Somalia bilateral relations compromised Kenya's leading role as an enabler of regional security and peacekeeper. The short period of romped Kenya-Somalia bilateral relations created unstable conditions that went beyond Kenya-Somalia maritime territorial dispute. Neighboring states were drawn into the existing tensions as Kenya-Somalia mutually recalled their respective Ambassadors and Somalia accused Djibouti of siding with Kenya. It becomes a delicate state of affairs when neighboring states are placed at loggerheads with each other. Demissie (2021) points out that this condition has already "strained relations between Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti." Expediently, this has potential to further cripple regional integration in the Horn of Africa and within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) community where Somalia threatened to withdraw its membership. Furthermore, this scenario did not only tarnish Kenya's foreign policy towards Somalia but also stood against the regional aspirations in advancing good neighborliness, peaceful co-existence, amicable means of solving disputes, economic cooperation, shared prosperity and regional solidarity (The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, 2021).

A weakened regional integration and cooperation has negative impact on the regional and continental efforts pursued bilaterally and multilaterally to ensure that robust joint operations address insecurity issues such as terrorism in fragile regions such as East Africa. It would therefore be unwise to let such state of insecurity persist unabated for it would compound the existing regional vulnerabilities which Al-Shabaab terrorist groups meddle on. Although the US-Kenya counterterror strategies in East Africa have to a larger extent enabled Kenya to take leading regional security

roles, a slight loophole in its regional integration strength is sufficient to expose prospects for Al-Shabaab terrorist groups and its affiliates to exploit the insecurity conditions. By so doing, terrorists promote instability in the region and devise schemes to expand their reach in other susceptible regions such as SADC.

Therefore, it is evident that US-Kenya counterterror efforts in East Africa have weakened Al-Shabaab's ability to retain and expand its battlefields within the region. Hence, Al-Shabaab has gradually found insecure territories to re-establish itself in other regions because for generation terrorist groups' greatest ambition has been the desire to gain territorial control. In fact, this has been terrorists' greatest *raison d'être* for gained territory would give them opportunity to control and rule over the population, attract and recruit new fighters and secure finance through illicit activities (Jones, et. al., 2016).

The 2017 terror incidents in Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado created security instability in Southern Africa. As a relatively stable region, the SADC region became such a destabilized environment due to the emerging presence of extremist groups affiliated to Al-Shabaab. These terrorist groups managed to set safe havens in most security vulnerable parts of Cabo Delgado. Subsequently, South Africa had to take a leading role in the deployment of SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) because it serves as "the chair of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation, respectively" (Amani Africa, 2022). This development means that South Africa just like Kenya is a front-liner regional power. Kenya has demonstrated strength in its military capability by continuously engaging in regional and continental joint operations in partnerships with stronger international partners. The interagency cooperation and interdependence have deemed to be appropriate counterterror approaches to secure and protect US-Kenya's national and regional interests in East Africa. Kenya's improved defense capabilities have enabled it to own responsibility in the challenges posed by inter-state and intra-state disputes. However, Kenya's insecurity dilemma is equally staggering due to the security risks that emerge from the unstable socio-political and economic conditions plaguing Kenya's neighboring countries. Nonetheless, the changing dynamics in Kenya's approach to counterterrorism has seen a

collective engagement in regional security affairs of the East African countries.

Not only is Kenya sending its Army Force to troubled neighboring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo it is also collaborating with the entire East African Community. This shows that cooperation and interdependence create room for a regional integration which is a significant counterterrorism approach. The joint operation between Kenyan troops under the aegis of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Congo (FARDC) counterparts stabilized normalcy in the troubled Eastern part of DRC. This is an indicative that conflict resolution for peace existence is a collective responsibility (Kenyan Ministry of Defense, 2022). It is undeniable the fact that a holistic approach to counterterrorism is desirable. The absence of security measures that sustain peaceful environments create favorable conditions for untenable development and socio-economic instability.

For this reason, lessons that the Southern Africa region can draw from the newly *status quo* where extremist militias have sought to create an unsafe regional environment is the need for an integrated, interregional, interdependent and cooperative approach. Only then can a holistic counterterrorism strategy seek to end the expanding interregional conflicts although each African region's socio-political and economic challenges remain multidimensional and multifaceted. Essentially, it is critical to avoid the escalation of terror incidents beyond Cabo Delgado. Counterterrorism measures must be enforced to ensure that South Africa doesn't become another unstable ground where terror activities "spill over" into other territories within the SADC region (Zeuthen, 2022). The effects of a widespread political instability will be devastating as South Africa's socio-economic and political landscape remains fragile due to its external and internal challenging conditions. Externally, South Africa shares borders with six SADC countries, notably Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Eswathini and Lesotho. The territorial landscape of South Africa presents "numerous land, sea, and air ports of entry for international travelers" which are considered "stovepiped" as a result of the inadequate border controls (US Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2020: South Africa, 2021b). To compound matters further, South Africa just like Kenya, is surrounded

by some states that are socio-economically and politically weak countries as is the case of Lesotho. This politically unstable land-locked Southern African country has been battling to "pass constitutional reforms meant to end years of political instability" (News24, 2022). In many occasions, South Africa has been prompted to engage collectively through conflict mediation processes and military troop support to mediate regional conflicts such as those in Lesotho. South Africa is an anchor of deeper regional and continental integration. It plays a crucial role in advancing sustainable peace and development. However, the internal socio-economic and political conditions which are affected by the sporadic outbreaks of violence such as xenophobia amongst others invite regional instability. Internally, the levels of economic inequality in South Africa have also become major sources of violent protests and social cohesion intolerance. All these external and internal dynamics may trigger regional insecurity if left unchecked. Hence, it is vital that an enforced coordination and deeper regional integration are solidified to avert any possible inter-state disputes. Any disintegrated cooperation has the potential to quell solidarity and interdependence amongst the visibly asymmetric neighboring states in the face of a much lethal and emerging security threat such as terrorism.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Learning from past experiences and challenges brings corrective measures that may avert failure on counterterrorism action plans. As a relatively peaceful region, SADC can draw many lessons from East Africa's insecurity plight befalling Kenya which is surrounded by terror-prone countries such as Somalia and Tanzania. In addition, as a regional power, South Africa has the responsibility to steer the region towards the attainment of an envisioned sustainable peace and development. However, the unsettling terror incidents in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique and the 26th October, 2022 terror alert in Sandton – an economic hub in South Africa, suggest regional insecurity and susceptibility to threats that cannot be taken lightly. Although, South Africa has deployed its military to support the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) to play a role in neutralizing terrorist threat and restoring security (Amani Africa, 2022), acts of violent extremism continue to rage, in Cabo Delgado. The prolongation of these conditions can aggravate insecurity in the region.

It is, therefore, vital to retain the collective momentum of SADC troop contributors in SAMIM in promoting regional peace. The involvement of East African Community members such as Tanzania and Rwanda in deploying their military troops to support SAMIM through an inter-regional integration is admirable. Evidently, building regional integration through interdependence and cooperation shows collective endurance in enhancing counterterrorism missions. It promises a much better chance for success in regional security advanced through a profound Pan-African inter-regional integration.

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