
Kenya's Collectivist Security Approach in the Stabilization of Somalia

By Francis Onditi¹ and James Yuko²

¹ Riara University; fonditi@riarauniversity.ac.ke

² Riara University; jyuko@riarauniversity.ac.ke

1. INTRODUCTION

Concerns about international security and stability of states are at the top of the development agenda for the community of nations, and particularly, in Africa. Due to the nature of international system, the problem of collective responsibility vis-à-vis conflicting national interests remains a major challenge for states and the international community to resolve.

Nowhere in the world, is the question of collective responsibility versus individual state interest more pronounced than in Africa.

This approach to global issues is mainly utilized in peacekeeping operations. As of September 2023, the United Nations peace operations has deployed more than 50,000 troops in Africa (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). In addition, African regional organizations and mechanisms have deployed several other peacekeepers in areas ravaged by civil wars and extremist groups.

International effort through peace enforcement led by the US has been interpreted by the Al-Shabaab extremist group as an attempt to subjugate the Horn of Africa and Somalia. Whilst the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) was deployed in Somalia at the pretext of securing her borders in 2011 (Miyandazi, 2012), the ingenuity of the Al-Shabaab has seen it exploit the deep-seated socio-economic and political grievances in Kenya, that is harbored by citizens, mainly in Eastleigh-Nairobi, North Eastern, and Coast parts, who decry the marginalization by the Kenyan State. Moreover, the Counter-terrorism strategy employed by the state in Kenya has often left al-Shabaab with sympathizers, hence it can recruit easily beyond the Somali ethnic group. Therefore, the actions of the Kenyan state and the corruption of her security agencies have made al-Shabaab endure even when it could have disintegrated through intricacies of Somalia politics backed by international intervention. As a result of this global

security entanglement in the Horn of Africa, the spike in the number of attacks from 2011 up to date can be explained in the ability of the group to spread into the Kenyan society to recruit members beyond the traditional Muslim ethnic Somali (Menkhaus 2014). This is in stark contrast to countries in the neighborhood such as Tanzania, that practice the principle of neutrality focusing on domestic security, where the likelihood of Al-Shabaab attack is bare minimum. The Kenyan incursion into Somalia is worrisome because the very resources that should provide a fortified defense are deployed in Somalia under the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) (formerly AMISOM). This collective responsibility shouldered by Kenya exposes it to threats of Al-Shabaab.

This policy brief seeks to provide insights into the development of international peace and security interventional policies and strategies which promote a balance between collective responsibility of states and domestic interest.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This policy brief is part of a broader research project looking into the dichotomy of '*individualism*' vs. '*collectivism*' (I-C) as an explanatory tool for behavioral variation among organizations and states (Chen & Unal, 2023). The I-C framework is ideal for

studying the choices and strategic decisions made by states on important global issues such as peace and security, because, on one hand, the individualist states emphasize self-identity, state agency and values that tend to prioritize individual states as opposed to collection of states. On the other hand, collectivist states emphasize collective identity (e.g., as a regional bloc), regional agency.

The case study design enabled us to specifically focus on the Al-Shabaab formation and the actors (Priya, 2021), hence delving into the intricate details of processes, enabling the development of richer and more inclusive descriptions that fully account for the complexities surrounding the Horn of Africa and international actors. The systematic literature review was concisely undertaken for the purpose of producing a study that contributes to the enhancement of a balance between international obligation and national interest of Kenya. In this regard, secondary data on the evolution of actors in the Horn of Africa's most intractable conflict was obtained from a plethora of journal articles by various sources (scholars, government records, nongovernmental organization reports).

3. KEY INSIGHTS

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that Kenya is entangled in the regional peace and security complex punctuated by its international obligation: Can the country achieve a balance between international responsibility and national interest? To address this question, this section develops the policy debates that will go into shaping the future of intervention in the Horn. For the purpose of this brief, we have identified and classified the debate into two major categories: a) Kenya, the nation and b) Kenya, the actor in the international system.

A. Whose War is Kenya Fighting in Somalia?

The enduring debate in the Kenya's decision to adopt the CSS has been the question as to why Kenya intervened militarily in Somalia (Regens et al., 2016), and whose war is being fought in Somalia (Cannon & Pkalya, 2017). Two views have emerged – the national and the extra-national. The national view argues that the reasons for Kenya's intervention are centered on issues of national security concerns. This view presupposes that intervention followed considerable developments of security instability in the country as a result of the anarchic nature of Somalia and the growing threats of Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa. The chronic volatile security situation in

Somalia has had direct impact on Kenya's national security. It is argued that, for Kenya to extricate itself from the external threat due to insecurity in Somalia, the government decided to join AMISOM in ensuring the safety of her citizens. However, the nature of asymmetric warfare exemplified by the Al Shabaab group dictates that the KDF fights the threat of terrorism from within Somalia. On this view point, Anderson and McKnight (2015) asserted that Kenya's security against terrorist attacks need to be extended beyond the nation's borders; into Somalia-the epicenter of terrorism. It was therefore, conceivable that the KDF intervention in Somalia was undertaken on the basis that the country provided a launching pad for terrorist attacks in Kenya (Olsen, 2018).

Though not the case since Kenya repatriated Somalia refugees, it is important to note that the Al Shabaab have been using the refugee status to wage a series of retaliatory attacks on Kenyan soil. It was on the basis of this security threats that the Kenyan government decision to undertake a military intervention in Somalia was premised on. This approach to regional security has been codified as, '*fight Al Shabaab from within Somalia to safeguard Kenya's national security*', hence, the KDF's doctrinal motto in Somalia was dubbed, '*Operation Linda Inchi*' (operation safeguard

the country). As will be seen in the next section, there is however, blurred line between the Kenya's international responsibility and national interest, particularly when viewed in the context of the global fight against terrorism.

B. Kenya and the Global Fight Against Terrorism

The extra-national view argues that the KDF intervention in Somalia serves the interest of the regional and international community in the global fight against terrorism. But again, it sounds like the "chicken-egg" scenario because, what would be the gain of maintaining international security order, at the expense of civilian casualties from the Al Shabaab attacks. Is it not negating its national obligation? Non-government organizations contribute to this debate, arguing that the KDF involvement in Somalia does not proffer in any way national security for the Kenyans (De Guevara, 2014). However, there is compelling evidence showing how Kenya is using KDF to boost the country's widely reported but publicly undeclared plan to establish a semi-autonomous region in southern Somalia. KDF has been involved in creating a buffer zone known as Juba land and Azania; a region which is made up of the Gedo, Lower and Middle Juba regions, with Kismayu as its capital (Klobucista, et al, 2022). The rationale

behind establishing the buffer zone has been given to regulate the influx of Somali refugees in Kenya. However, Kenya's quest for geopolitical power in the Horn of Africa and repatriation of Somalian refugees negates the prospects of attaining a balance between her international responsibility and national interest. The United Nations Agency for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that Kenya is a host to over half a million of Somalian refugees who live in Dadaab Refugee Camp (Burns, 2017). The implication of KDF's incursion in Somalia purely based on the extra-national interest risks discriminating and alienating Kenyan Somalis from other Kenyans (Walker & Arif, 2014).

Frederic Pearson (1974) observes that, any military intervention is an attempt by a given state to try and change the internal structures of a target state through coercive methods. These coercive methods are meant to affect the modus operandi of the political, military and socio-economic structures of the target state. On this question of geopolitics, Holsti and Rosenau (1990), have highlighted two reasons as to why military intervention may take duties beyond its borders:

- 1) When the intervening state set aside the existing relations with the target state and put all its efforts towards changing the

political structure and authority of that target state.

2) Intervention may also take place when the intervening state seeks to preserve the existing political structure and authority of the target state.

However, this principle may not apply to an asymmetric environment where Kenya's target is not the state but the non-state actor Al Shabaab.

One way of evaluating the recurring threats of Kenya's military pursuit of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa is by evaluating the merits and demerits of collectivist approach (i.e., favored by national view) and individualist approach (i.e., favored by extra-national view) to peace and security interventions. The collectivist suggests that KDF should continue with its operation in Somalia (Halden, 2008; Kelsen, 1948). It can be argued that collectivists seem not to take cognizance of the fact that military intervention without complimentary domestic political efforts and the rule of law in Somalia will not guarantee Kenya's national security. In other words, the two are inseparable. On the other hand, the individualists are of the view that Kenya should use a political route to find a solution to the Somalian crisis. However, it

has been observed that individualists fail to realize that the need for political efforts in Somalia cannot be realized without sending the military to the source of the problem. Kenyan government is therefore obliged to deploy KDF in Somalia in order to prevent the spread of Al Shabaab across the porous borders (Olsen, 2018).

The collectivists criticize the anti-military intervention view of the individualists to be lacking consideration of the level of armed threat that Kenya as country has been encountering. On the other hand, the individualists criticize the collectivist for not understanding that before committing troops in Somalia, the Kenyan government failed to understand the realpolitik of Somalia: Somalia is termed as failed state. On this, Haldén (2008) observes that since 1991, the Somalian civil war destroyed the judiciary system, leaving the country to be anarchical and unwilling to provide the essential human needs of its citizens such as human security. As a result, it led into formation of organized criminal groups to protect themselves using all means including terrorism (Hammond, 2023).

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

What should Kenya and other actors do in order to strike a balance between international responsibility and national interest? Our policy recommendations are

aligned with the respective questions in the previous section.

Ensuring Kenya's National Interest

Deep socio-economic and political factors have divided Kenyans to the extent that they seek external help from groups such as al-Shabaab. The aggrieved population looks for revenge against the state which they claim is responsible for its plight.

It is emerging that the Kenyan national security architecture is emboldened in the socio-economic and political fabrics of society. But also a lesson for the Kenyan government and other states involved in carrying out international responsibilities is that before engaging in any international norms, assess the likely effects of such engagement on the safety and security of civilians. On the question of domestic politics and governance, state legitimacy in Kenya remains relatively low after a period of contested elections which are believed to be won unfairly. Therefore, as part of its efforts to clinch on power and avoid further challenges, the state has left the security forces in the hands of senior officers who first pursue their interests before national security. The state capture of security functions exposes the country to the threat of terrorism. The response to terror attacks and crime has always been uncoordinated and at times deliberately slow. This gives al-

Shabaab the urge to attack as the chances of being successful are higher in Kenya than other neighboring countries. It is therefore crucial that Kenya and other states in similar situation strengthen their domestic governance structures and take advantage of “windows of opportunity” provided for by electoral processes to build legitimacy.

Global Fight Against Terrorism

The collective security system is a product of international security cooperative engagements at a certain stage of development characterized by the presence of *necessary evils* and an *unnecessary entanglement*. Whereas Kenya is bound by the international principles of collectivism as encapsulated in Article 51, Chapter II of the UN Charter, the Al Shabaab group is an outlawed terror group that is not bound by the UN Charter. However, if we consider the entanglement a necessary evil, then it is crucial that Article 51 be reformed to accommodate dialogue and negotiation with extremist groups with the aim of achieving the greater goal of securing not only borders of a country but also protection of civilians who often become victims of this terror attacks.

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84 Bato, Regent, Freetown
Sierra Leone
Email: irpia@irpia.org
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