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Social Cohesion and Counter-Terrorism In The Case Of Kenya and Somalia

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Abstract

The commitment to extreme violence is what distinguishes a terrorist from other forms of extremists. Violent extremism refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious, social, or political views. Violent extremist views can be exhibited along a range of issues, including politics, religion, and gender relations. This process occurs over time and causes a fundamental change in how people view themselves and the world in which they live. The exact nature of this process is still poorly understood. In response, investments need to be made in technology, skills, research, analysis, and innovating new approaches to countering terrorism. This is aimed at a sharp increase in operational tempo, coordination, and equipment aimed at detecting, deterring, and disrupting the activities of terrorists. The twenty-first century signified both the end and the start of numerous global initiatives. Social cohesion has received considerable attention and has become a major issue in government policies and programs. In South Africa, for example, national cohesion is seen as a collective term for addressing the hurdles, stumbling blocks, and structural strains in achieving the quality of nationhood. Cohesion and integration do not necessarily mean the same thing. Cohesion ensures that different groups get along, while integration ensures that new or existing residents, settlers, and communities can adapt. Kenya, as a player in the international system, has experienced changes as a result of world events, especially in the last two decades. One of the notable changes is a variation in the definition of national security. Before the democratisation process in Kenya, national security had been limited to state security, and little thought was given to the well-being of the individuals. Attempts to ensure national security must have informed the changes that have been targeting the management of security in Kenya. When people change how they think about the link between national security and national cohesion, it changes what the states are responsible for and how they should do it.

Keywords: Terrorism, Cohesion, Social Capital, Democracy, Extremism

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges humans continue to face at the close of the twentieth century is the achievement of sustainable international peace and security. The extreme violence and terrorism that afflict communities in the world today are generally thought to be fuelled by radicalisation and violent extremist tendencies. Though it has no universal definition, terrorism is fundamentally considered a repudiation of values for tolerance, inclusion, and diversity that underpin modern human life in the twenty-first century.

Social cohesion is increasingly regarded as a vital component of effective counter-terrorism strategies, especially in regions marked by socio-political complexities like Kenya and Somalia. Social cohesion, defined as the strength of relationships and a sense of solidarity among individuals and groups within a society, has been shown to enhance resilience against radicalisation and extremist violence (Hickey, 2011). In East Africa, terrorist organisations such as Al Shabaab have exploited historical grievances, poverty, and ethnic

divisions to fuel recruitment and mobilisation (Chengmin, 2024). In this regard, the importance of fostering social cohesion becomes paramount, as cohesive societies are less susceptible to the divisive narratives propagated by extremist groups (Stigendal, 2019).

Research indicates that enhancing community engagement, economic development, and inclusive governance can significantly mitigate the vulnerabilities that allow extremism to flourish (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2021). For instance, in Kenya, marginalised communities in urban areas such as Nairobi and Mombasa have experienced heightened recruitment by Al-Shabaab due to socio-economic disparities and ethnic tensions (Speckhard & Shajkovi, 2019). In Somalia, the absence of a strong central authority and ongoing clan rivalries have created a fragmented social landscape, allowing militant groups to thrive in the absence of social unity (Lindley, 2020).

This paper posits that counter-terrorism policies in both Kenya and Somalia must prioritise enhancing social cohesion to effectively address the underlying factors contributing to radicalisation. By leveraging academic insights and case studies, we will explore how fostering unity among diverse societal groups can enhance community resilience and disrupt the cycles of violence that grip these nations.

1.1 Background of the Study

Africa's current security challenges are rather complex; some are predominantly governance-related or intra-state conflicts, while the continent's national borders remain a potent source of instability. According to Buzan, more than half of African countries have engaged in boundary-related conflicts, and border disputes remain a strong undercurrent, as evidenced by the crises in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa. Further illustration is evidenced in the case of the Kenya-Somalia border, where terrorist groups continue to illegally cross porous land borders to traffic small arms and light weapons, explosives and other illicit goods, and human beings, as well as deploy terrorist operatives to conduct attacks.

Loury found that with the end of the Cold War, threats to a country's security are internally generated, often borne of national in-cohesion and economic underdevelopment. This realisation makes it clear that our ideas about social cohesion and security in Africa need to be updated to reflect the way things are. One way is to include economic security in each country's social security system.

Berger-Schmitt argues that social cohesion is an elusive concept—easier to recognise in its absence than by any definition. Lack of social cohesion thus results in increased social tension, violent crimes, increased insecurity, targeting of minorities, human rights violations, and ultimately, violent conflicts that undermine the national cohesion. Social or national cohesion is therefore

about tolerance for and respect for diversity, both institutionally and individually. Fostering national cohesion is about striving for greater inclusiveness, enhanced civic participation, and sustained creation of opportunities for economic development.

According to Colletta and Cullen, social cohesion is built around three key values: social inclusion, social capital, and social mobility. Social inclusion refers to the degree to which all citizens can participate on equal footing in economic, social, and political life, including whether they are protected in times of need. Despite its importance for national development, national cohesion and integration remain a challenge for many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The transnational nature of terrorism and violent extremism underscores the vital importance of multilateral cooperation to detect and disrupt violent extremism. Terrorist organisations increased their activities, fuelling Kenya's military operations in Somalia; some of them include al-Shabaab, Islamic States (IS), and Al-Qaeda (AQL) in the Islamic Maghreb, which pose an increasing threat to sub-regional peace and security. Conversely, leading to a possible step-up in social cohesion and counter-terrorism in Kenya and Somalia, as strategic counter-terrorism is alternately referred to as new countering violent extremism (CVE). The counter-violent extremist programs in Lamu County, a major border point for both countries, are based on theories of change, which explain how an individual transitions from non-violence to violent extremism and vice versa.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

One of the major setbacks to economic development in Africa is insecurity. The types of intra-state conflicts witnessed today in the Great Lakes Region, for instance, divide the population of a state by undermining interpersonal and social trust and consequently destroy the social norms, values, and social institutions. Until recently, the explanations on the crawling pace of development in sub-Saharan Africa paid insignificant attention to the centrality of security to national development. A secure environment is evidently the underpinning for every meaningful development that could be achieved and sustained.

In the twenty-first century, threats to a country's security are now largely internally generated and often borne of lack of social cohesion and economic underdevelopment. This realisation thus emphasises the need to undertake a recalibration of a state's security in order to reflect current realities by ensuring that social cohesion is integrated into the national social security framework and counter-terrorism approaches.

Al-Shabaab has become a very serious terror threat to Kenya and Somalia. The group has seamlessly blended into the background, enabling thousands of Somali and Kenyan mechanised infantry units to

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penetrate deeper into its core territory. Kenya has been an island of peace in an otherwise unstable region. However, her national security is becoming more and more threatened by a wide range of terrorism and violent extremism threats, as well as a persistent lack of national cohesion that makes racial tensions and resource-related conflicts worse.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to examine social cohesion and counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa using the case of Kenya and Somalia. The specific objectives of the study will include;

- i. To assess the status of social cohesion and integration in Africa.
- ii. To determine social cohesion and counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa.
- iii. To establish main actors and strategies utilizing social cohesion for counter-terrorism in Kenya and Somalia.

1.4 Research Questions

The specific research questions will include;

- i. What is the status of social cohesion and integration in Africa?
- ii. To what extent is there a social cohesion and counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa?
- iii. Who are the main actors and strategies utilizing social cohesion for counter-terrorism in Kenya and Somalia?

1.5 Justification of the Study

It should be acknowledged from the onset that no state can consider itself immune from the threat of terrorism. The threat of terrorism is spreading and destabilising many regions of the world. The rise of violent extremism in Africa has created severe security threats, as this phenomenon has resulted in deaths, destruction, and instability. Hence, there now needs to be a renewed and sustained focus on violent extremism prevention.

National cohesion and integration is the process and result of making sure that all citizens feel like they are part of the same community, working together on a common project and facing the same challenges and opportunities. With this in mind, the study intends to help practitioners and policymakers enhance their understanding of national cohesion and national security issues and design appropriate responses to better support communities in their quest for security and cohesion.

The awareness of the status of national cohesion and of the factors that improve or undermine it is important for nation-building. The study therefore aims to contribute to

the body of knowledge to determine the national cohesion and national security nexus, particularly in Kenya, which will strengthen national development. There are many actors involved in national cohesion and integration activities in the country. These include the state, non-government organisations, faith-based organisations, the media, non-formal sectors, communities, community-based groups, and individuals.

Kuwali (2015) posits that terror is borderless in its effects; thus, almost all states consult and work continuously to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalisation and stifle them from maturing into terrorism. The moment violent extremism and terrorism are on the increase, many states, institutions, societies, households, and individuals have experienced some form or different types and levels of threats associated with transnational terrorism.

The governments face the multifaceted challenge of mitigating the factors that lead to violent extremism, detecting and preventing homegrown attacks, and managing the terror returnees from conflict zones. At the Counterterrorism Conference in Bratislava, a plenary session focused on the importance of dedicated multiagency and multi-stakeholder policies and strategies to prevent violent extremism and radicalism that lead to terrorism (VERLT).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Joseph Nye first introduced the Soft Power Theory in 1990, which was the time just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time scholars of international relations were searching for new models to explain the ongoing processes as the existing ones were not able to give all the answers. Nye (2014) explains "culture" as one of the three sources of a nation's soft power.

Nye (2014) identifies three sources of a nation's soft power as its culture, political values, and foreign policies with internationally consented credibility and moral authority. "Soft Power is Culture Power" suggests, in pragmatic terms, that the three ways in which the soft power advantage of a country is measured are when culture and ideas match prevailing global norms, when a nation has greater access to multiple communication channels that can influence how issues are framed in global news media, and when a country's credibility is enhanced by domestic and international behaviour.

Social cohesion can be best used as a deterrent if there is any intelligence that a terror strike is imminent. It makes for people to be "their brother's keeper," which increases the vigilance in any community, and this is a cheap and effective method of discouraging would-be terrorists from executing any dubious plans. Therefore, a 'soft' approach to counter-terrorism is the better way to turn away the youth from dangerous, seductive ideas that

could radicalise them, as it offers options of support from the government so that the youth can be productive members of society. It is impossible to kill all enemy combatants, and so some have to be persuaded using soft power to see the error in their ways. The 'soft' approach aims to neutralise terror groups by debunking their ideology.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The concept study will adopt an exploratory research design. This is where a researcher has an idea or has observed something and seeks to understand more about it. An exploratory research approach is an attempt to lay the groundwork that will lead to future studies or to determine if what is being observed might be explained by a currently existing theory.

The study will be undertaken in Africa using the case of devolved governments in Kenya. The research will mostly look at the counties that have been most affected by terrorist activities and those that have enhanced the latest counterterrorism measures. Since over the years, Kenya has conveyed an idyllic public image of a peaceful society in a region of conflict-ridden states. A much more contested narrative of a violent past still exists.

The main target population will be key terrorism stakeholders and practitioners involved in countering violent extremism in Africa (Kenya), such as government agencies, civil societies, intelligence agents, terrorist victims, anti-terrorism police units, the United States Agency for International Development, United Nations agencies, the Kenya Defence Forces, and other security experts. The target sample frame will be based on the available (participants) population at the time of the study, and the study will strive to make them a true representative of the target group.

The research study intends to employ both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The study will critically review the soft power approach to counter terrorism using a case study of Kenya. Primary data collection will be done using the qualitative research approach. Primary data will be collected using key informant and questionnaire interviews. Secondary data will be collected through books, journals, articles, and periodicals. A questionnaire technique will be used to collect primary data. A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from the participants.

The collected data will be sorted and analysed using document analysis and thematic analysis techniques, based on the emerging issues under study. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which

documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data. The results obtained will be presented in the form of frequency tables, narratives, bar graphs, and pie charts.

This study will be undertaken within Kenya in a time scope between July 2019 and December 2020. In addition, the geographical scope will be Garrisa, Mandera, Mombasa, Wajir, and Nairobi County. In seeking to understand the possible limitations of the study, it is important to note that this research may face the limitation of finding vast subject matter experts, owing to the sensitive and technical nature of the research study. This will be mitigated by focusing on the key departments dealing with the research area.

4. FINDINGS

This section found that acts of terrorism can scar a community or even a nation in many ways for long periods of time. Acts of terrorism are usually criminal and unethical, not to mention immoral, as they disregard basic human decency. It then behoves the social cohesion supporters to be professional in their approach to security matters to uphold local and international law and take action against terror groups and on anyone that may give them assistance in any way.

This paper notes that the composition of characteristics in any terrorist group is a distillation of years of historical, political, ethnic, cultural, and religious factors. These are issues that need to be considered through social cohesion and may well inform governments on how to proceed with a soft power approach, which may be preemptive and thus spare a lot of lives in the process.

This paper found that the national awareness of the values of social cohesion, according to most respondents, is existential in word and a zero-sum game in deed. It is assumed that social cohesion naturally takes place, but the public demonstrates ignorance of social cohesion, especially considering the fact that social cohesion is a sense of belonging, a feeling of mutual respect, and a level of supportive energy and commitment from others. There is little awareness of the value of social cohesion as a result of the fact that ethnic group affiliation continues to function as a primary form of identity within both urban and rural environments in Kenya, especially during periods of turmoil.

The status of the social index, most respondents agreed, is at its lowest, whereas a small fraction attributed the situation to the fact that the social cohesion index and cohesion indices are relatively new within the African context. The measurement of social cohesion remains on an upward trajectory, but the persistence of ethnic polarity, gender inequality, marginalisation, and corruption, among others, is a manifestation of how much effort is required to promote it.

This article found that Kenya faces various challenges that can be associated with a lack of social cohesion. Some of the challenges seen as the causes of in-cohesion range from weakness in political institutions to governance, social injustices including unresolved land issues, poverty, inequality, and economic imbalances, among others. Politics was singled out as a major catalyst for increasing trends in ethnicism, a factor that continues to erode the sense of belonging, nationhood, and public trust. Waldman (2019) affirms the positive move towards devolution, but expresses scepticism that, if poorly managed, it could intensify conflict and potentially undermine other processes, such as democratisation and the prospects of Vision 2030.

Kenya has not lacked approaches to building social cohesion, as it was one of the key components of independent Kenya. Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 championed a nationwide reduction of poverty, disease, and ignorance. But because it focused on public investments in areas with a lot of potential for growth and didn't do a good job of enforcing policies that would help everyone, the inequality that existed before the colonial era got worse. Even so, several efforts have been directed towards reversing the negative outcomes that have hitherto predisposed the country to conflict. Recent efforts include the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation and the Kenya Vision 2030.

This paper finds that violent extremism often spreads through localised conflict, in which extremist groups manipulate local grievances to gain positions and traction. Both the international community and national governments have long had difficulty working in such small-scale and diverse contexts because of how rapidly conflict dynamics, cultural factors, and scale and sustainability issues change. Mitigating and preventing extremist violence effectively may require new approaches, such as resilience practices that emphasise community adaptation and collective action. Understanding how communities undermine and regulate violent extremist groups contributes to a more accurate assessment of local risk and vulnerability and improved, targeted support. Core skills and successful strategies found in many communities could be used as proof for prevention programs to work in Kenya, Somalia, and other places as well.

This study found that many experts and governments alike argue that terrorism should be recognised as a major threat to national and international security in contrast to the past, when it was a second-order security issue. Some argue that the 9/11 events established a new form of terrorism, "hyper-terrorism" or "super-terrorism," capable of significantly disturbing international security and severely wounding even the most powerful states by inflicting potentially massive damage on civilian targets. Finally, the human security approach emphasises that terrorism, whether in its "hyper" or "super" form, and the impact of wars or malnutrition, which can affect millions of

people, should be the primary challenges to international security. This is so because terrorism targets innocent civilians and produces an escalated level of public anxiety and fear.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

National cohesion has been identified as one of the enablers for socio-economic development and is well factored into education programs in Vision 2030. It is also the basis for devolution, which aims to decentralise governance to increase access to services, enhance productivity, create jobs, promote inclusivity, and, among other things, spur development at the grassroots level.

The 2010 Constitution has a number of provisions that touch specifically on national cohesion and integration. Article 10 of the Constitution emphasises the national values and principles of governance, including national unity, social justice, inclusiveness, and equity. However, there was a general feeling that institutions created to foster national cohesion while advancing the provisions of the constitution are lethargic and visible only during a crisis. The roadmap to a cohesive society, according to this paper, lies in reforms of the existing strategies and renewed focus on national unity.

In the end of this paper, it is said that some policies on national cohesion and national security connect the main problems that stop people from living together and becoming one country to three main areas: institutions, fairness, and different points of view. This paper talks about some of the specific things that make it hard for countries to work together and be united. These include too many executive powers; weak institutions and weak respect for the rule of law; (iii) widespread violations of human rights; (iv) crime, including the sale of illegal weapons and cattle rustling; (v) elections that aren't open and accountable; (vi) unfair distribution of opportunities and public resources; (vii) bad management of natural resources like land; and (viii) setting ethnic identity above national identity and citizenship.

National power potentials are indicative of national strength that helps in formulating policies and strategies to mitigate the domestic as well as foreign threats to its core values. These components are closely interlinked, and even if one of them is weak, national security and national cohesion as a whole will be correspondingly weakened. Kenya currently deals with a host of challenges, both external and internal. While its external challenges are real and visible, its internal threats are interchangeable and dynamic in nature. Kenya's national security does possess the potential to mitigate both internal and external challenges, but currently their strength is incompatible vis-a-vis the threats.

5.2 Recommendations

There are many things in the region that make it hard for social cohesion, national security, and political stability. These include bad institutional and political governance, the illegal spread of small arms and light weapons, flagrant violations of human rights, unfair competition and exploitation of resources, illegal armed groups, economic inequality, and violent conflicts, even pastoral ones. This paper recommends that in order to tackle these problems, a broader, comprehensive regional peace and security framework needs to take shape and gain momentum in the region.

So, this paper says that the region needs to create a well-informed framework that makes it possible for long-lasting, focused strategies to improve its ability to prevent, manage, and settle conflicts. This is even more important if the region wants to deal with current and potential conflicts, build on the progress made in the peace processes in Sudan and Somalia, and deal with new threats to human security. The region lacks credible deterrent and emergency preparedness capabilities at a time when it is most vulnerable to external destabilisation and climatic shocks, making it increasingly susceptible to terrorist incursions, irregular migration, food insecurity, and environmental emergencies.

This study acknowledges that the ability to project legitimate power, preserve territorial integrity, and assure the welfare of the people is the cornerstone of any sovereign state, and the United Nations (2022) rightly places primary responsibility for peace and security with member states. In the developing world of incomplete state formation, weak institutions, and competing demands between regime and human security, the state has often failed in this cardinal responsibility.

This paper recommends that social cohesion policies and measures worldwide are based on theories from industrialised countries, as reviewed in previous sections. However, developing a social cohesion measure for the Horn of Africa warrants some consideration of related concepts in the regional context. Social cohesion is understood as social capital and assets, referring to the value of being connected to others. People who believe in social capital say that good relationships are like money and fixed assets when it comes to social wealth. They also say that these relationships are what make all kinds of areas grow.

This section acknowledges that a cohesive society has been defined as one that works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and biases along marginal lines, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity for upward mobility. Kenya and Somalia face a myriad of security threats that cannot be mitigated unless the continent, jointly under the African Union, demonstrates the will for integration to fight the scourges from a common ground.

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