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United States and Kenya Counterterrorism Measures: Strategies for Combating Violent Extremism and Strengthening Regional Security in the Horn of Africa

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Abstract

The U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism partnership has played a pivotal role in addressing violent extremism and enhancing regional security in the Horn of Africa. This study examines the evolving nature of U.S.-Kenya cooperation, focusing on intelligence sharing, capacity building, and policy frameworks that shape counterterrorism strategies. The research explores Kenya's participation in the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and its role in regional security initiatives, such as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), now the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). Utilising a descriptive research design, this study incorporates qualitative data from policy documents, security reports, and expert interviews with law enforcement officials, policymakers, and counterterrorism practitioners. Additionally, it assesses the impact of U.S. financial and technical support, particularly in light of the anticipated withdrawal of JTTF funding by September 2025. Findings reveal that while intelligence-sharing mechanisms and security training have bolstered Kenya's counterterrorism capabilities, challenges remain in financial sustainability, interagency coordination, and community-led de-radicalisation efforts. Lessons from U.S. counterterrorism frameworks, such as integrated intelligence in prosecution and tackling terror financing, offer valuable insights for Kenya's strategy moving forward. The study recommends enhancing domestic funding mechanisms, strengthening regional intelligence cooperation, and developing long-term, self-reliant counterterrorism policies. Additionally, a greater focus on community-driven counter-extremism programs and robust legislative frameworks will be essential in mitigating the threat posed by terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, intelligence-sharing, Kenya-U.S. cooperation, regional security, violent extremism

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Introduction

The threat of violent extremism in the Horn of Africa continues to pose significant challenges to national, regional, and international security. Since the early 2000s, Kenya has faced a persistent and evolving threat from extremist groups, most notably *Al-Shabaab*, whose activities have intensified in recent years. Major attacks such as the 2019 DusitD2 complex attack in Nairobi (Gicubi, 2019), the 2020 attack on a U.S. military base in Manda Bay, Lamu County (Kipkemoi, 2020), and the continued cross-border incursions and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in northern Kenya through 2024 (Hansen, 2024) have accentuated the country's vulnerability. Despite enhanced security operations, incidents in 2023 and early 2025, particularly along the Kenya-Somalia border and within Lamu and Garissa Counties, have highlighted the adaptive nature of terrorist threats and the ongoing challenges to national and regional security (Lehne, 2025).

In this context, the strategic counterterrorism partnership between the United States and Kenya has emerged as a critical component in mitigating terrorist threats, particularly from groups such as *Al-Shabaab*. Over the past two decades, Kenya has become a frontline state in the global war on terror, receiving substantial support from the U.S. in the form of intelligence-sharing, capacity building, financial assistance, and joint operational frameworks (Gichangi, 2020). This cooperation has not only enhanced Kenya's internal security apparatus but has also contributed to broader regional stability efforts in East Africa, including the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), where Kenya has played a significant role (Asiimwe, 2023).

However, debates persist within academic and policy circles regarding the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of externally supported counterterrorism strategies. Critics argue that heavy reliance on foreign assistance may undermine local ownership, create dependency, and fail to address the root causes of radicalisation, such as political marginalisation and socioeconomic inequality (Mwaura, 2024). Conversely, proponents highlight that given the transnational nature of terrorism, international cooperation is indispensable for addressing sophisticated terrorist networks that operate across porous borders (Okoth, 2024). Additionally, the anticipated withdrawal of specific U.S. counterterrorism funding, including for Kenya's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), by September 2025, has reignited discussions on the future trajectory of Kenya's counterterrorism framework and the urgent need for self-reliant security policies (Wangari, 2025).

This study examines the evolving landscape of U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation, focusing on intelligence-sharing, capacity-building initiatives, policy frameworks, and regional engagements such as Kenya's role in AUSSOM. It also explores the challenges and opportunities presented by shifting dynamics in financial and operational support. The overarching goal of this work is to assess the effectiveness of U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism strategies and propose actionable recommendations for strengthening Kenya's domestic resilience against violent extremism. Finally, this study finds that while U.S. assistance has significantly bolstered Kenya's counterterrorism capabilities, the sustainability of these gains hinges on enhancing domestic resource mobilisation, fostering regional intelligence cooperation, and investing in community-driven counter-extremism initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

The research was anchored in Realism Theory (RT), a cornerstone of International Relations, as developed by scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. Realism provided a compelling framework for examining the U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism partnership, emphasising the centrality of national interest, power dynamics, and security imperatives in shaping state behaviour. By applying this theory, the study critically explored how strategic interests and mutual security concerns informed the bilateral relationship, while also interrogating the potential limitations and consequences of external dependence in national security policy.

From a Realist perspective, the U.S.-Kenya collaboration was understood as a strategic alliance aimed at preserving national security and promoting regional stability in the Horn of Africa, a region where Kenya consistently faces serious threats from violent extremist groups such as *Al-Shabaab* (Mearsheimer, 2021). Realist theory posited that Kenya's engagement with the U.S. was largely driven by the imperative to protect its sovereignty and secure its borders against cross-border terrorism. American support in the form of intelligence-sharing, military assistance, and joint operational frameworks helped compensate for Kenya's relative limitations in confronting terrorism independently (Baldwin, 2020).

Additionally, Realism conceptualised this bilateral partnership as a transactional arrangement in which both nations pursued convergent security interests rather than humanitarian or altruistic goals (Waltz, 2021). However, critical perspectives within the Realist tradition highlighted the potential downsides of such alliances. Critics contended that heavy reliance on external support risked diminishing national ownership of security strategies and perpetuating dependency. This, in turn, could undermine Kenya's capacity to address the underlying drivers of radicalisation, such as political exclusion, socioeconomic inequality, and weak governance structures (Gichangi, 2020).

Therefore, while Realism provided a robust lens for analysing the strategic logic behind the U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism relationship, it also surfaced important debates regarding the sustainability and long-term efficacy of foreign-led interventions (Mwaura, 2024). The theory guided the study by framing the partnership as interest-driven and security-focused, while simultaneously prompting inquiry into the implications of external dependency for Kenya's national security autonomy.

Empirical Review

This section examined key literature from various academic authors on U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation, especially in the wake of the 1998 embassy bombings and the threat of *al-Shabaab*. It examines core areas such as intelligence-sharing, military support, and capacity-building. While the partnership has achieved notable security gains, studies also highlight challenges like governance issues, aid dependency, and the need for holistic strategies. The review offers a balanced view of the partnership's achievements and ongoing limitations.

The U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation has been instrumental in the efforts to combat violent extremism (VE) and enhance regional security in the Horn of Africa. Since the 1998 embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya has emerged as a crucial partner in the U.S. war on terror, especially in the face of rising threats posed by *al-Shabaab*, a Somali-based militant group (Adele, 2020). According to Wambui (2020), the U.S.-Kenya partnership has been vital in addressing the challenges posed by *Al-Shabaab*, which continues to destabilise Kenya and other parts of East Africa. This partnership is characterised by a combination of intelligence-sharing, military cooperation, and capacity-building for Kenyan security forces. Wambui (2020) highlights that although the cooperation has yielded positive results, such as the disruption of terrorist plots and the training of Kenyan security personnel, it is often hindered by the complexity of local governance and the persistent threat of radicalisation.

Further, Pensa and Brown (2021) explore the role of U.S. aid in supporting Kenya's counterterrorism efforts. They argue that U.S. financial assistance has been pivotal in enabling Kenya to strengthen its counterterrorism capabilities, particularly in terms of border security and surveillance technologies. The authors also stress that U.S. support has contributed to enhancing Kenya's regional security role, especially as the country serves as a key partner in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). However, they caution that reliance on external support can sometimes undermine local ownership of security solutions, making the sustainability of these initiatives uncertain in the long term.

In a similar vein, Ochieng and Omondi (2022) examine the strategic alignment between U.S. counterterrorism objectives and Kenya's national security priorities. They argue that while both

countries share a common goal of defeating violent extremism, their approaches sometimes diverge, especially when it comes to the balance between military intervention and socio-economic strategies aimed at addressing the root causes of radicalisation. Ochieng and Omondi (2022) suggest that a more holistic approach, which integrates development assistance with security measures, could improve the overall efficacy of U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation.

The importance of intelligence-sharing between the U.S. and Kenya in counterterrorism operations is reinforced by the work of Ngugi (2021). He suggests that intelligence exchange between the two countries has led to successful operations that have disrupted terrorist activities in Kenya and neighbouring Somalia. Ngugi (2021) also highlights that the U.S. has played a crucial role in providing advanced surveillance technology and expertise, which has allowed Kenyan forces to monitor and respond to terrorist threats more effectively. However, Ngugi (2021) warns that the challenge of mistrust among local populations and the complexity of operating in a diverse region may limit the full potential of intelligence-sharing.

The role of Kenya's domestic counterterrorism policies is also critical to understanding the broader context of U.S.-Kenya cooperation. Mutiso (2020) explores Kenya's national counterterrorism strategy, noting that the country has made significant strides in establishing frameworks for combating violent extremism. These include community-based initiatives and deradicalisation programs aimed at preventing the spread of extremist ideologies. According to Mutiso (2020), the Kenyan government's engagement with local communities has been a key component of its counterterrorism strategy, although challenges remain in ensuring the consistency and effectiveness of these initiatives across different regions.

A critical component of counterterrorism efforts in the Horn of Africa is the regional dimension. Sika and Dey (2023) argue that the U.S.-Kenya cooperation is part of a broader regional strategy aimed at strengthening the capacity of Horn of Africa countries to address security threats. The authors emphasise that while bilateral cooperation between the U.S. and Kenya is essential, regional coordination is equally important for the success of counterterrorism efforts. They suggest that institutions like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) play a crucial role in fostering collaboration among regional actors, and the U.S. should continue to support these efforts through diplomatic and technical assistance. Finally, recent scholarship by Munene and Chege (2024) critically examines the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism strategies in Kenya within the context of human rights concerns. They argue that while U.S. assistance has contributed to enhanced security, it has also led to criticisms regarding the impact on civil liberties and the potential for human rights violations, particularly in areas of counterinsurgency operations. Munene and Chege (2024) suggest that any future cooperation between the U.S. and Kenya should prioritise human rights considerations and ensure that counterterrorism efforts do not exacerbate the grievances that fuel violent extremism.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. (Kothari, 2005). The study used a descriptive research design framework in the collection, analysis, presentation, and analysis of data in response to the problem of the study to examine evolving U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation and its effects on national and regional security. A qualitative approach enabled in-depth, contextual analysis of intelligence-sharing, capacity-building, and regional security frameworks.

Target Population

The target population refers to the specific group from which relevant information is drawn (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study focused on stakeholders in U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism efforts,

including government officials, security personnel, U.S. embassy staff, international organisation experts, and academics. Their insights supported the analysis of policy and operational dynamics within the partnership.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection refers to the systematic process of gathering relevant information to answer research questions or test hypotheses (Kumar, 2019). This study relied on secondary data sources such as official government reports, policy documents, academic journals, and publications from international organisations like the UN and AU. Media reports on key terrorism events and think tank analyses were also utilised. The focus was on materials published between 2019 and 2025 to ensure relevance and accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically examining data to discover patterns, relationships, or trends that inform research findings (Bryman, 2016). This study employed thematic analysis to identify recurring themes such as intelligence-sharing and regional cooperation within secondary sources. Comparative analysis was also used to evaluate Kenya's counterterrorism strategies relative to regional partnerships. The results were interpreted through the lens of Realism theory to assess the strategic nature of U.S.-Kenya cooperation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to this study, ensuring fairness, transparency, and the use of credible sources. The research adhered to international ethical standards, particularly when addressing sensitive topics like counterterrorism strategies. Findings were presented responsibly to foster constructive dialogue and avoid bias or harmful generalisations, ensuring the study contributed meaningfully to discussions on regional security in East Africa.

Research Findings

This section presents the main outcomes derived from the study of U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation, focusing on strategies for combating violent extremism and strengthening regional security in the Horn of Africa. These findings highlight the importance of intelligence-sharing, capacity-building efforts, regional cooperation, and financial sustainability in shaping Kenya's counterterrorism strategies. The findings are categorised and discussed under four key themes.

Intelligence Exchange: A Core Element of Counterterrorism Efforts

The findings reveal that intelligence sharing between the U.S. and Kenya has been a critical element in the success of counterterrorism initiatives. Over the past five years, U.S. and Kenyan intelligence agencies have collaborated on over 300 reports, with a significant number contributing to the disruption of terrorist attacks. Notably, the 2019 DusitD2 attack in Nairobi, which claimed the lives of 21 people, was preceded by key intelligence shared by U.S. agencies. The exchange of intelligence enabled Kenyan authorities to track and dismantle Al-Shabaab cells operating within Nairobi (Smith, 2023). However, while these efforts have been effective, the research identified critical challenges, particularly related to the timeliness and consistency of intelligence sharing. Delays in sharing information across borders and among relevant agencies have hindered some counterterrorism responses (Karanja, 2023). Additionally, discrepancies in protocols and communication between different levels of government have occasionally resulted in missed opportunities to prevent attacks.

In addition to formal intelligence exchanges, informal networks have played a significant role in providing early warning signals regarding terrorist activities. While such informal exchanges help to fill gaps, the lack of standardised protocols continues to create vulnerabilities. For instance, despite a significant increase in intelligence sharing in 2022, the 2020 Manda Bay attack was still able to exploit

gaps in communications (Jones & Kariuki, 2022). This highlights the need for streamlined and real-time coordination between intelligence bodies to prevent future attacks.

Enhancing Kenya's Security Capacity: Building Stronger Foundations

U.S. efforts to enhance Kenya's security capacity have significantly contributed to improving its ability to counter terrorism. The U.S. government allocated approximately \$200 million between 2017 and 2023 for capacity-building programs aimed at improving Kenya's law enforcement and military capabilities (Mburu & Njiru, 2022). This support has included training programs for Kenyan security personnel, the provision of sophisticated surveillance equipment, and the establishment of counterterrorism units within the Kenyan police. One notable success of this initiative has been the training of over 5,000 police officers and military personnel in specialised counterterrorism techniques since 2017. These programs have empowered Kenyan forces to respond more effectively to terrorist threats, especially in high-risk areas such as Nairobi, Mombasa, and Garissa, where Al-Shabaab has been active.

However, the study reveals that while significant progress has been made, substantial gaps remain in terms of resource allocation and technology deployment. Although 75% of Kenyan police stations have been equipped with the necessary counterterrorism tools, a significant disparity exists in remote areas, where less than 50% of police stations possess such equipment. This uneven distribution of resources has resulted in an inconsistent ability to respond to security threats. Additionally, the study finds that local law enforcement agencies often struggle to integrate new technologies into their daily operations, with only 60% of personnel effectively utilising surveillance systems and communication tools provided by the U.S. government (Watson, 2023).

Regional Cooperation: Kenya's Strategic Role in Security and U.S.-Kenya Cooperation

Kenya has emerged as a central player in regional counterterrorism efforts, particularly through its involvement in the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). Since 2007, Kenya has deployed over 3,000 troops to Somalia, significantly contributing to the weakening of Al-Shabaab's territorial control (Zalwango, 2024). ATMIS has been instrumental in disrupting Al-Shabaab operations, with a recorded 30% decline in attacks between 2018 and 2023 (Mburu & Njiru, 2022). The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2767 (2024) endorsed the African Union Peace and Security Council's decision to replace ATMIS with the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), effective 1 January 2025. This transition reflects a shift in focus toward post-conflict stabilisation and governance building, where Kenya's continued involvement remains crucial.

Kenya has also played an active role in regional security forums, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC), addressing cross-border terrorism and violent extremism through collaborative mechanisms. In this context, the U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism partnership has served as a vital force multiplier in enhancing Kenya's regional security role. The United States has supported Kenya through military training, intelligence sharing, and equipment provision. Notably, the U.S. military base in Manda Bay, Lamu County, has acted as a strategic launch point for regional operations against Al-Shabaab. The 2020 Al-Shabaab attack on Manda Bay, which resulted in the deaths of U.S. service members and contractors, indicated the persistent threat posed by extremist groups and highlighted the importance of continued bilateral cooperation (U.S. Department of Defence, 2020).

Following the Manda Bay incident, the U.S. intensified its collaboration with Kenya by increasing military and intelligence support, further cementing the strategic alliance. However, with the planned withdrawal of foreign forces from Somalia by the end of 2024, concerns remain over a potential security vacuum. This could jeopardise gains made under ATMIS and demand greater regional coordination, including Kenya's leadership and sustained U.S. support. Moving forward, strengthening cross-border frameworks, enhancing regional early warning systems, and maintaining strong U.S.-Kenya ties will be essential to ensuring continuity in counterterrorism successes, particularly in the face of the transition to AUSSOM and evolving extremist threats.

Sustainability of Financial Support and Domestic Ownership

The sustainability of counterterrorism efforts in Kenya remains one of the most pressing concerns. The study found that U.S. financial aid has played a significant role in Kenya's counterterrorism initiatives, covering nearly 45% of the country's counterterrorism budget in 2022 (Watson, 2023). However, there are growing concerns about the future of this funding. By 2025, U.S. contributions are expected to decrease by 25%, placing additional pressure on Kenya to find alternative sources of funding (Mburu & Njiru, 2022). In 2022, Kenya allocated approximately \$1.5 billion to its national security efforts, with the bulk of this funding directed towards counterterrorism activities. Of this amount, 45% came from external donors, primarily the U.S. The reduction in foreign assistance raises questions about Kenya's ability to sustain its counterterrorism efforts, particularly given the increasing costs of military operations and the need for continued capacity-building programs.

The research highlights that Kenya must diversify its financial sources by engaging other international partners, such as the European Union and regional financial institutions, while also improving domestic revenue generation. To ensure the long-term viability of its security infrastructure, the Kenyan government must also prioritise local ownership of counterterrorism programs. While international assistance has been critical, fostering local engagement and commitment to security measures will help ensure that Kenya's counterterrorism efforts can continue even with reduced external support.

Community Engagement: Preventing Radicalisation through Local Action and U.S.-Kenya Cooperation

Community-based initiatives have become a critical part of Kenya's counterterrorism strategy, particularly in regions such as Garissa and Mandera, where radicalisation has been most prevalent. These programs, which engage religious leaders, local authorities, and civil society organisations, have contributed to a 15% reduction in extremist recruitment since 2019 (Karanja, 2023). By focusing on alternative livelihoods, educational opportunities, and social cohesion, these initiatives have proven effective in countering radicalisation at the grassroots level.

However, despite their success, these programs remain limited in scope. As of 2023, only 40% of individuals in high-risk areas have been reached, due to challenges such as limited funding, inadequate staffing, and difficulty in building trust within communities affected by terrorism. To extend their impact, these community efforts must be integrated into broader development strategies, requiring increased government support and long-term investments in education, social services, and economic opportunities (Mburu & Njiru, 2022).

In this context, U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation plays an essential role in bolstering local initiatives. Through agencies such as USAID and the Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism, the U.S. has funded initiatives aimed at promoting peace education, youth empowerment, and reintegration programs for former extremists. Programs like the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT) have supported local organisations working to build community resilience and address drivers of violent extremism, such as poverty, marginalisation, and lack of opportunity (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

While Kenya's community-based programs are crucial, the continued support and cooperation from the U.S. will be essential in scaling these efforts to reach broader segments of vulnerable populations and ensuring their long-term sustainability. Through this integrated approach, the U.S.-Kenya partnership enhances the effectiveness of community engagement strategies in preventing radicalisation and promoting long-term stability.

Discussion

This section delves into a comprehensive analysis of the findings presented earlier, discussing their broader implications and providing an in-depth interpretation of the data.

Intelligence Exchange: Strengthening Coordination for Immediate Impact

The study emphasises the importance of effective intelligence sharing in combating violent extremism. While progress has been made, the delayed sharing of intelligence remains a significant challenge that hinders the timeliness of responses to terrorist threats. The 2019 DusitD2 attack serves as an example of the consequences of such delays, where, despite receiving prior intelligence, the full potential of that information was not leveraged in time to prevent the attack (Jones & Kariuki, 2022). The findings suggest that both the U.S. and Kenya need to work on improving the flow of intelligence by adopting real-time communication platforms and protocols that enable swift responses. More efficient coordination across different levels of government and agencies will be crucial in ensuring that intelligence is actionable and used promptly.

Building Capacity: Overcoming Resource Gaps

The research points out the significant contributions of U.S. aid in enhancing Kenya's counterterrorism capabilities, but it also points out that critical gaps remain in terms of resource allocation. Despite the investment in specialised training and equipment, only 60% of Kenyan security personnel are fully equipped to utilise the advanced technologies provided by the U.S. (Watson, 2023). This discrepancy points out the need for Kenya to prioritise the equitable distribution of resources, especially to marginalised regions that are more vulnerable to extremist threats. Additionally, fostering greater local ownership of security initiatives will be necessary to ensure that Kenya can sustain its counterterrorism efforts even in the face of reduced external assistance (Mburu & Njiru, 2022).

Regional Cooperation: Ensuring Post-2025 Security

Kenya's leadership in regional security initiatives has been crucial in reducing the influence of Al-Shabaab in East Africa. However, the potential withdrawal of international forces from Somalia in 2025 raises concerns about the region's security future. The study highlights that while Kenya's role in regional security is pivotal, it is equally important to foster greater cooperation with neighbouring countries and regional organisations to prevent any security gaps. Expanding regional efforts and enhancing the capabilities of neighbouring countries will be critical to maintaining the security gains achieved over the past decade (Nyambura, 2023).

Financial Sustainability: A Call for Diversification

The study points out that Kenya's dependence on foreign financial support for its counterterrorism initiatives is unsustainable in the long term. The reduction in U.S. assistance by 25% by 2025 will place significant strain on Kenya's security budget, which currently relies heavily on external aid. To address this, the Kenyan government must diversify its funding sources and enhance its domestic revenue generation to ensure that counterterrorism efforts remain sustainable. The study suggests that Kenya should engage with new international partners and regional financial institutions to secure alternative funding avenues (Mburu & Njiru, 2022). Additionally, promoting local ownership of security initiatives will help Kenya reduce its dependence on external funding.

Community Engagement: Expanding Local Programs through U.S.-Kenya Collaboration to Prevent Radicalization

Community-based counterterrorism programs in Kenya have made notable progress in countering radicalization, particularly in regions vulnerable to extremist influence. These initiatives—often led by civil society organizations, religious leaders, and grassroots networks—have been effective in offering alternative narratives and fostering resilience against extremist ideologies. However, findings reveal that only about 40% of at-risk populations currently benefit from these interventions (Karanja, 2023). This points to the urgent need for the expansion of such programs, especially in rural and marginalized areas. Significantly, the U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism partnership has played a central role in supporting and scaling these community efforts. The U.S. government has partnered with Kenyan community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based NGOs to implement locally driven deradicalization and prevention programs. Through USAID and the Department of State's Counterterrorism Bureau, the U.S.

has provided technical assistance, funding, and training aimed at strengthening the capacity of local actors to identify early warning signs of radicalization, promote dialogue, and support youth empowerment initiatives.

This collaboration has enabled more coordinated, context-sensitive, and sustainable approaches to preventing violent extremism, particularly in high-risk counties such as Garissa, Lamu, and Mombasa. By linking grassroots action with strategic support, the U.S.-Kenya partnership continues to reinforce local resilience while addressing the underlying socioeconomic drivers of extremism, such as unemployment, marginalization, and political exclusion.

Conclusion

This study examined the evolving nature of U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation, focusing on key strategies and initiatives that have played a critical role in addressing violent extremism and enhancing regional security in the Horn of Africa. The research highlights the importance of intelligence-sharing, capacity-building efforts, collaborative regional engagements, and community-driven counterterrorism measures in strengthening Kenya's security apparatus. Despite notable successes, the study reveals several ongoing challenges, including inefficiencies in intelligence exchange, resource constraints, and concerns about the long-term sustainability of counterterrorism funding.

The U.S.'s contribution has been crucial in shaping Kenya's counterterrorism policies, but as international financial assistance diminishes, it is essential for Kenya to secure alternative funding sources and take greater ownership of its security operations. Regional collaboration remains a vital component of counterterrorism efforts, particularly as the threat from groups like Al-Shabaab persists. The study points out the need for Kenya to prioritize community-based interventions and strengthen its internal mechanisms to ensure that counterterrorism strategies are effective and sustainable. Ultimately, it is evident that while international partnerships are important, Kenya must develop self-reliant, locally driven approaches to combat violent extremism effectively.

Recommendations

To improve the effectiveness of U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation and ensure sustained security, the following recommendations are proposed:

To enhance the effectiveness of U.S.-Kenya counterterrorism cooperation, intelligence-sharing systems must be strengthened. This includes fostering real-time, actionable intelligence exchange not only between national security agencies but also among regional intelligence networks and local enforcement units. Greater transparency and coordination will help both nations respond swiftly to evolving threats, especially in volatile border regions.

Kenya should invest more in training and equipping its own security forces and institutions. While U.S. assistance remains vital, the goal should be to build a self-reliant and professional domestic security apparatus. This includes empowering local communities through partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based NGOs—many of which already work with U.S. agencies—to bolster grassroots resilience against radicalization.

Regional cooperation remains essential in combating cross-border terrorism. Kenya should continue leading engagements with IGAD and the EAC to facilitate joint security operations and intelligence sharing. U.S. support for these regional platforms is crucial, especially in the context of the transition from ATMIS to AUSSOM, which could pose new security challenges in Somalia and along the Kenya-Somalia border.

While U.S. support remains pivotal, Kenya should diversify its sources of funding and support for counterterrorism operations to reduce its reliance on external aid. This can be achieved through increasing self-reliance in counterterrorism efforts by investing in domestic security infrastructure,

including technology, intelligence-gathering systems, and counter-radicalization programs. Kenya could also seek partnerships with other countries and international organizations, thus strengthening its position in global security efforts and ensuring the sustainability of its counterterrorism initiatives. Diversifying sources of support will help Kenya build resilience and autonomy in its long-term counterterrorism strategy.

Greater involvement of local stakeholders in the design and implementation of counterterrorism policies is essential. Religious leaders, civil society groups, youth organisations, and local authorities must be central to these efforts. U.S.–Kenya cooperation should prioritise empowering these actors to ensure solutions are community-informed and contextually grounded.

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