Kenya-Somalia Gray Zone Dynamism: Are Response Mechanisms Equipped With Appropriate Doctrine?

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Abstract

Are response mechanisms to modern peace and security threats adequately equipped to tackle gray zone conflicts? Attempts to address this question entail both confronting the old pre–Cold War peace operation capstone doctrine (“holy trinity”) and constructing the characteristics of a new model capable of tackling the unique features of gray zone conflicts. This article analyzes the diplomatic relationship between Kenya and Somalia, which exemplifies the characteristics of gray zone threats. The article contends that the use of the “holy trinity” doctrine in treating such unconventional warfare tactics does not adequately discriminate between gray zone dynamism and conventional conflict typologies, and the results do not always allow certainty about relationships between states. Furthermore, the uncertainty of gray zone dynamism makes it difficult for analysts to conduct accurate conflict diagnostics using the current framework based on the “holy trinity” capstone doctrine. Using the Kenya-Somalia relationship as a case study, this article constructs a “doctrinal quadrality spectrum” (DQS) framework for conflict diagnosis in order to avoid the binary limitation of a black-or-white decision that often does not fit the gray zone dynamism of modern warfare.

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Introduction

Kenya-Somalia diplomatic relations today are vague and unpredictable, amid growing gray zone tactical activities.[1] This article tackles the gray zone conflict phenomenon at the centre of the constrained relationship between the two states. Here, gray zone conflict is defined as the use of unconventional war techniques such as malicious tactics and

cyberattacks to achieve military objectives. This investigation is motivated by the fact that in the recent past, the prevalence of gray zone activities has grown dramatically in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa. This trend has challenged existing interventional doctrines and response mechanisms because the existing response structures were set up to deal with interstate conflicts and not conflicts within states. In light of this, there is growing resentment against the use of conventional military intervention, with as many as 60 percent of citizens surveyed in Canada suggesting an end to military operations abroad.[2] This debate clearly demonstrates that the growth in complexity of intrastate conflicts with burgeoning features of gray zone tactics is increasingly challenging the current intervention mechanisms. Except for incidents of interstate wars such as the Russia-Ukraine confrontation that erupted in February 2022, most crises are highly complex, of low intensity, and have a high degree of operational covertness. This has rendered the pre–Cold War doctrine and response mechanisms obsolete, which means that *if states, national, regional, and international institutions are to be responsive to the contemporary security environment, they will need to rethink their structures, approaches, tools, and doctrine to effectively deal with gray zone dynamics*. The extent to which the obsoleteness of the doctrine affects the response efforts, and hence the diplomatic relationship between Kenya and Somalia, is not yet known. Thus, the question is, are response mechanisms to modern peace and security threats equipped with an appropriate doctrine able to tackle the emerging complex gray zone conflicts?

In this article, I explore this question by drawing from key gray zone activities since 2011, when the Kenya Defence Forces were first deployed in Somalia, and later on in 2012, under the African Union Mission in Somalia's regional peace enforcement arrangement. The choice of comparative analysis was deliberate, to demonstrate how each state adopted tactics of what I call "gray zone dynamism," persistently employing multilevel tactics with varied implications. The tactics included (1) putting economic or political pressures on the perceived adversary; (2) leveraging their own domestic and geostrategic power; (3) appealing to external parties and solidarity networks when faced with boundary disputes; and (4) threatening to withdraw soldiers and other diplomatic facilities from the other. At different junctures, these activities were either used as measures or countermeasures and triggered direct or indirect confrontations that over time left the response mechanisms and the doctrine ill-equipped to deal with the dynamism.

This study used the metadata technique of an integrated literature review (ILR). An ILR offers flexibility in developing new knowledge using representative literature on gray zone conflicts and is therefore ideal for formulating a conflict diagnostic and intervention framework as an alternative to the existing "holy trinity" doctrine of impartiality, consent, and non-use of force except in self-defence. The doctrine conceives peacekeeping as a military model of observing cease-fires in an interstate conflict situation. The ILR focused on both scholarly and targeted reports generated by leading research firms such as the RAND Corporation. More than 30 articles published after 2011 were analyzed to frame the study. The 2011-2022 periodization was arrived at based on the year 2011 when Kenya Defense Force troops were sent to Somalia in the fight against the Al Shabaab terrorist group. These articles and reports were available online, with access made possible through paywalls. All literature items within the scope of the study, including books, book chapters, journal articles, and conference papers, were carefully selected and included in the systematic review, while duplicates were avoided. Articles were coded according to five key themes in gray zone tactics applied by both Kenya and Somalia: (1) military intervention; (2) (dis) information and cyberattacks; (3) economic coercion; (4) political pressure; and (5) maritime disputes. The

information generated through various tools was coded as per the above themes. This study also used Cargo and Mercer's idea of direct collaboration with those affected by the issue being studied,[3] for the purpose of the action or change to understand the effect of doctrine on peacekeepers. Direct observation was conducted in the regional Peacekeeping Training Centres based in Nairobi, Kenya. As Geoffrey Sloan rightly puts it, training is the most effective way of propagating belief and the principles (doctrine) that guide an organization on how to respond to emerging peace and security threats.

The article is organized as follows: first, sets the stage by developing systems dynamic thinking framework for explaining the changing nature of the gray zone phenomenon. Second, applies the functions of discursive tools (social constructivism) to theorize the notion of "doctrinal quadrality" as a derivative of the "holy trinity" doctrine. Third, evaluates the systems dynamic thinking framework against the gray zone tactics in the relationship between Kenya and Somalia. Fourth, analyzes the plausibility of a new framework of conflict diagnostics ("doctrinal quadrality spectrum") as the main contribution of this work. Finally, the conclusion sheds light on the future of gray zone conflicts, arguing that the challenge for regional and international institutions is that Kenya and Somalia are not the only countries to engage in this form of conflict. It is likely to become the norm, hence the need to strengthen and broaden the doctrine spectrum in order to accommodate the ambiguities presented by gray zone dynamism.

Gray Zone Systems Dynamism

Given the ambiguity of gray zone conflicts,[4] constructing appropriate responses—especially in the absence of*casus belli*—becomes a difficult task. Yet a lack of appropriate response mechanisms based on a relevant doctrine merely emboldens the actors who utilize these tactics.[5] However, tactical preparedness is not the only challenge experienced in the gray zone dynamics. Within the gray zone environment, due to its high degree of covertness, the set of principles and methods based on the Cold War–era doctrine of the "holy trinity" are inadequate responses to this form of conflict. Although this three-part doctrine of impartiality, consent, and non-use of force except in self-defence has been widely accepted as a useful guideline for peacekeepers, the gray zone phenomenon ushers in a new set of conflict dynamics—economic and political pressures, covert military operations, and soft power tactics.[6] Optimists have, however, exuded confidence that existing responses to conflict, and particularly peace operations in Africa, are resilient and that the evolution of ideas and renewal of the doctrine is what is required.[7]

In this study, the notion of "dynamism" is considered to be a key defining element in conflictological and peace studies. It is evident that the gray zone phenomenon is never constant in shaping the peace and security landscape, hence the term "gray zone dynamism." The concept of dynamism is mainly used in human development studies to imply change.[8] The ancestry of the dynamism concept is traced to Leibniz,[9] and dynamism is derived from the Greek *dynamikos*, meaning powerful, power, might, or strength.[10] Leibniz relates dynamism to force, as the ability of something to do something, to act upon other things, or to be changed by another thing. In summary, dynamism implies change as a consequence of the forces caused by changes in space and time. Change, therefore, is a fundamental feature of all physical, biological, and psychological phenomena. Although change—henceforth dynamism—is mainly applied in developmental psychology as a

quintessential science of human dynamism, the notion is inextricably connected with the theory of social constructivism[11] and foreign policy behaviour that forms the basis of dynamism in the gray zone environment. State power and foreign policy behaviour evolve as individuals or institutions do. Both individuals and institutions construct realities in the dynamic world system. In short, nothing is stable, but everything is changing in the dynamic system, including the nature of conflicts and methods of resolving them.

In fact, according to Paul van Geert, the dynamic system operates under the rule of change and as such, a system can be defined as any whole or connected elements with certain durability. Diplomatic relations between country “A” and country “B” can be considered a system, and because this relationship constantly produces diplomatic trajectories in a state space, it is framed as a dynamic system. Elsewhere, my colleagues and I have defined a “system” as a combination or group of interdependent, interrelated, or interacting elements forming collective and dynamic entities, including but not limited to peace enforcement agents and peacekeeping missions as well as counterterrorism agencies.[12] Thus, the broader environment within which Kenya and Somalia are operating can be considered a dynamic system. For example, the blind application of the “holy trinity” doctrine by peacekeepers in the context of gray zone conflicts is like an opposition to change. By definition, then, dynamism assumes an opposition of forces which, in the cases examined in this study, involves state “A” (Kenya) acting in opposition to state “B” (Somalia) and at times, regional or international institutions. This does not discount the fact that either state may have viewed gray zone dynamism as a tactic rather than a strategy, embedding it in geopolitical competition. This competition produces a structural change in the state systems. While some critical conflict scholars have pointed out the limitations of structural constructivism in the context of gray zone dynamism,[13] the social constructivism approach is most consistent with comparative case studies. Seen in this light, the application of constructivism (beyond the “holy trinity” doctrine) underscores the persistent diplomatic dynamism and cross-border community identities that exist alongside the mutual cooperation between Kenya and Somalia.

Constructivism and the “Holy Trinity” Philosophy

The epistemological debates on the nature of state and conflict revolve around the question of how interests are socially constructed.[14] The ancestry of social constructivism (SC), though rooted mostly in individual and group identities, offers insights into state relations by emphasizing “how the sociopolitical world is constructed by human practice and interaction and how this construction constantly changes over time and space.” This is the mantra of social constructivism. In other words, ideas construct realities. On this note, SC scholars have demonstrated how people and institutions jointly construct their understandings of the world through language.[15] This brings to the fore the dynamic nature of not only social identities as embedded in conflict cycles but also how these identities evolve to define national and regional interests. Of particular interest to the current study is the work of Thomas Christiansen and his colleagues,[16] who view SC as the ideal approach for understanding the relationship between states through language and discourse, emphasizing the need to deploy interpretive tools in order to understand state relations. Christiansen and colleagues have demonstrated how constructivism could impact international relations studies through the development of paradigms, theories, frameworks of analysis, and meta-theorizing. The diagnostic framework (“quadratic doctrinal spectrum”), proposes strategies for

enhancing the effectiveness of response mechanisms is premised on the understanding that *if a comprehensive diagnostic framework is established, if conflict diagnostic tools and doctrine of intervention are effective in identifying the issues, then the burgeoning gray zone conflict dynamics in the Kenya-Somalia relations will be resolved*. While the work of most SC scholars focuses primarily on state relations as a function of regional integration in the European context,[17] the same phenomenon applies to the case under consideration here, in which Kenya-Somalia relations are constrained by the dynamics of gray zone tactics. The current study builds on two key concepts from SC studies: formations and functions, and social dynamism (in which case, gray zone conflict is considered a social phenomenon, hence the use of the notion "gray zone dynamism"). But before delving into the linkages, we have to understand how the concepts are formed and how they function through SC.

The literature on social constructivism tries to mediate realist and functionalist approaches. For the purpose of this article, it is important to recognize the various strands of knowledge in SC. International studies identify two categories of constructivism:[18] (1) sociological constructivism holds that reality cannot be limited to an individual's view, and therefore it is important to emphasize empirical work in the study of identities, interests, and behaviours; (2) Wittgensteinian constructivism seeks to understand the ways in which the world is constructed through tools such as language to (re) create meaning in specific contexts.[19] Although the Wittgensteinian approach seems more appealing to the formation and functions of concepts that are the essence of this study, both classifications are ideal for its overall thesis: *If the nature of conflict is changing, if states' interests and behaviour are dynamic, if the gray zone dynamic is central to the Kenya-Somalia foreign policy praxis, if gray zone dynamism overrides the "holy trinity" doctrine, then response mechanisms ought to be equipped with the appropriate doctrine*. This theoretical trajectory is in line with the pioneers of SC, who theorized the international system as a social construct (sociological) while at the same time seeking to (re) create meaning that fits with the current realities and context (Wittgensteinian). For example, would it be reasonable for response mechanisms to limit themselves to the Cold War–era doctrine—the "holy trinity"—when an appropriate response to the gray zone dynamism requires kinetic diplomacy and other political considerations, all of which violate the principles of impartiality and consent within the broader framework of the "holy trinity"? However, the evolution of the peacekeeping landscape, and particularly the proliferation of actors has made it difficult to ignore political support and other adaptive tactics. This has rendered the Holy Trinity in the Capstone Doctrine ineffective. In this scenario, it is inevitable to see how kinetic diplomacy, covert operation, and deterrence, become part of the conflict diagnostic framework. This conceptual framing of peacekeeping is likely to transform the Holy Trinity doctrine into a comprehensive-quadruple model of intervention.

In order to apply constructivism in its broadest sense to developing appropriate response mechanisms, this article asserts that the field of conflictology, particularly of gray zone conflicts, needs to take a discursive turn. In so doing, existing response mechanisms that are anchored to the "holy trinity" could be reconstructed to offer insights into how states and other formations need to respond to gray zone tactics. Thomas Diez emphasized that discourse itself is part of the reality.[20] In that sense, if the three principles (impartiality, consent, and non-use of force except in self-defence) of the "holy trinity" do not match the current gray zone dynamism, they can be rendered obsolete by a way of reconstructing an alternative reality based on a framework that fits the prevailing conflict situation. Wittgensteinian constructivism

emphasizes the role of intersubjectivity and the context of the dynamic nature of the interactions of states (Kenya-Somalia relations). As the relationships between the states become more constrained, gray zone dynamism increases, leading to the formation of new realities. The components of these the old “holy trinity” doctrine and the proposed “doctrinal quadrality spectrum” are outlined in Table 1. These ontologies differ in an important way in that they demonstrate how change influences how realities are framed within a dynamic system of states.

Table 1. Comparison between the “Holy Trinity” Doctrine and the Proposed “Doctrinal Quadrality Spectrum”

Ontologies	Dynamic Systems	Guiding Principles	Relations
Holy Trinity	Pyramidal scheme	Impartiality Consent Non-use of force	Collective interest Non-interference All parties in agreement
Doctrinal quadrality	Broad spectrum	Comparative advantage Proactivism Rapid response Risk tolerance	Kinetic diplomacy Force capabilities Covert operations

Source: Author’s construction, as determined from discursive tools of constructivism to compare the holy trinity model and the proposed doctrinal quadrality spectrum.

Table 1 shows that if the sociological context of gray zone dynamism is taken as the focus of the current study, then this approach can contribute to the formulation of a coherent framework diagnosing gray zone conflicts that consists of

1. studying formations and functions of discursive tools related to gray zone dynamism (doctrinal quadrality);
2. studying gray zone dynamisms that emerge as tactics in Kenya-Somalia relations (which require kinetic diplomacy to resolve); and
3. studying the relationship between the “holy trinity” and “doctrinal quadrality” as a consideration in developing a response mechanism.

In developing and applying this linguistic formation to gray zone conflictological studies, a new concept is introduced, the “doctrinal quadrality spectrum” (DQS). This phrase refers to the set of principles, norms, beliefs, and actions that articulate an appropriate intervention in gray zone conflicts. The phrase is used in much the same way as the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations has used the concept of a “capstone doctrine.”[21] The DQS is introduced to

address the conceptual and practical limitations of the capstone doctrine and other related doctrines such as the “holy trinity” and “robust” peacekeeping.[22] The construct of the DQS is deliberately developed to shape the reality of gray zone conflict that has overtaken the Cold War–era model (the “holy trinity”), leaving response mechanisms ill-equipped to effectively address modern gray zone threats. The “holy trinity” assumes that the parties in a conflict will comply with the agreement that provided the basis for a mission’s deployment, and thus the use of force is deemed necessary as long as consent has been granted. However, with political pressures, economic coercion, and cyberattacks characterizing the gray zone conflict ecosystem, the decision to use force is inevitable, yet it risks being perceived as partial, thereby undermining the parties’ consent to a mission.[23] As seen in Figure 1, the formulation and application of the “holy trinity” model were based on Cold War thinking that conflict activities occur in three stages: pre-conflict, active conflict, and post-conflict recovery and development.[24] However, the “new war” pathway that has emerged with gray zone dynamism taking precedence has led to what is coined in this article, “gray zone dilemma,” (see Figure 1).

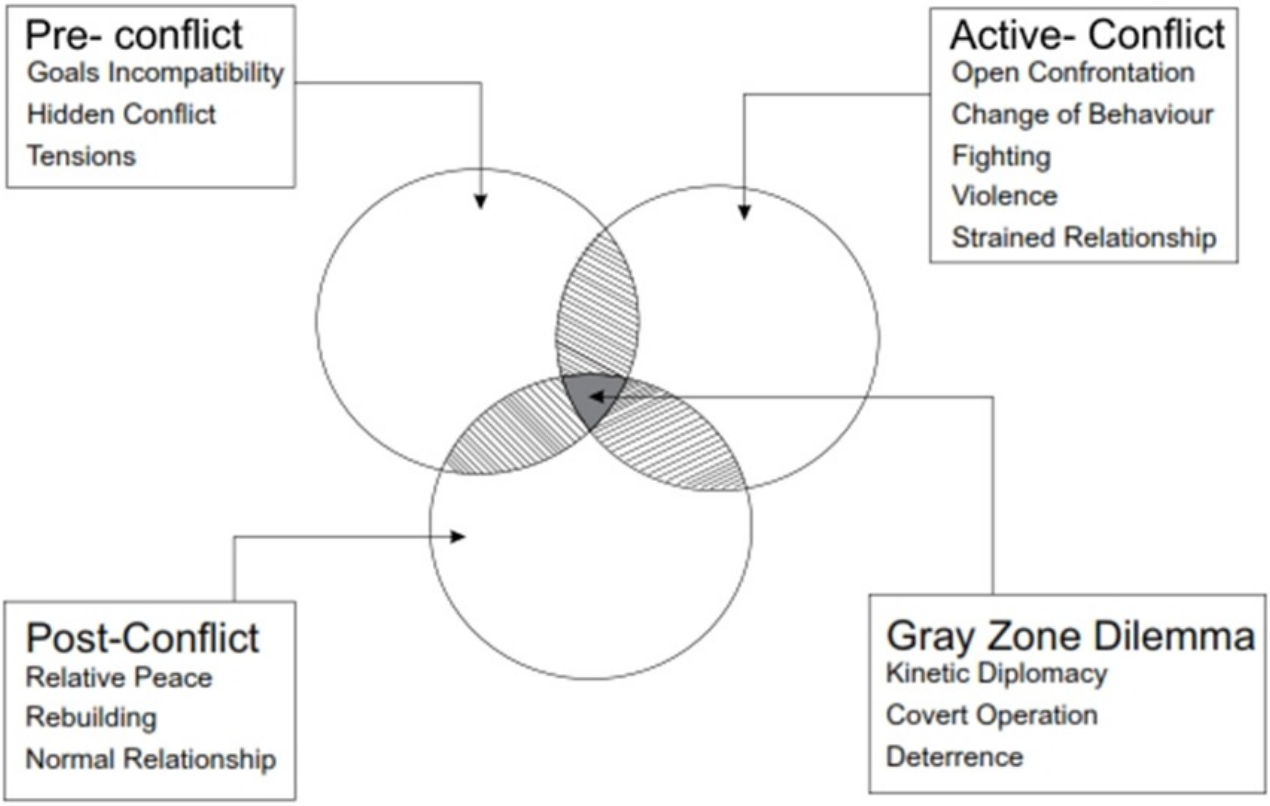

Figure 1. Locating the Gray Zone Dilemma in the Contemporary Conflict Spectrum

Source: Author’s construction of a diagrammatic sketch of the various typologies of conflict and the formation of the gray zone dilemma. This study introduces the gray zone dilemma in the conflict spectrum as a way of making the diagnosis of conflict and resolution thereof much easier.

With the growing gray zone space in Kenya-Somalia relations, as illustrated in Figure 1, rather than attempting to change the tactics that define the gray zone such as covert military operations, cyberattacks, and manipulation of boundaries, the development of a broad spectrum is necessary. In my view, gray zone tactics do not aid in foreign policy robustness; rather, they sustain the cyclic animosity between states. Within this dynamic environment, the type of framework that is relevant to the current study is systematic. The systems approach to conflict resolution, as I have argued elsewhere, shows that different parts of the conflict ecosystem interact to transform the inputs (grievances, poverty, institutional failure) into outcomes (violence, wars, disputes) with wider societal implications, particularly in conflict-prone geographies.[25] A transition from the "holy trinity" doctrine to a DQS would mean the interpretive analysis of the system is symbolic rather than being a physical description. Therefore, the DQS is a conflict diagnostic framework that highlights the relationship between the various aspects of the gray zone conflict ecosystem. Constructivism and power cycle theory may seem like opposite ends of a spectrum, but they are not mutually exclusive.

While constructivism was initially developed to understand how interests are constructed, it can also be applied to conflictological studies, particularly in understanding the factors that sustain gray zone dynamism between states. It brings into focus the underlying factors that drive the relations between states and how such interactions can shape the foreign policy behaviour of states. This is reflected in the dynamic relations between Kenya and Somalia. Insofar as this dynamism is attributed to gray zone conflict, states can be said to undergo gray zone dynamism in the international system. The following section elaborates on the five categories of gray zone tactics mediating the relationship between Kenya and Somalia and how they relate to the broader discipline of conflictology.[26]

Gray Zone Tactics in Kenya-Somalia Relations

In the last few years, since the 2011 deployment of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) in Somalia, the historical maritime boundary dispute between Kenya and Somalia has exacerbated the geopolitical gray zone dynamism. In this area, "hard bonds" (kinship relationships) seem to thrive over and above the official foreign policy praxis, mainly because, as with many other African borders, colonial border creation did not take into consideration transnational ethnic overlaps. Worse still, the post-colonial states imposed different identities on people in the borderlands. As such, the ill-conceived cartographical demarcation of the Kenya-Somali border has contributed to an endless geopolitical gray zone dynamism. Through the use of both tactical and strategic techniques, Kenya, for example, would like to maintain the status quo, while Somalia maintains the need to redraw its maritime and territorial borders with Kenya by integrating the former Northern Frontier Districts with the Greater Somali Republic. In gray zone dynamism, states tend to use quasi-revisionist tactics to alter the status quo of the international order through various methods—either coercive, military, or political—that eventually trigger a conventional military response.[27] Indeed, gray zone dynamism can include both operational and tactical methods used by states to advance their respective military objectives: covert militarism, disinformation and cyberattacks, economic coercion, political pressure, and maritime disputes. But as shown in the following discussion, the current doctrine seems inadequately equipped to tackle these five categories of tactics in Kenya-Somalia relations.

In what has been named as *Operation Linda Nchi* (Protect the Country), Kenya joined the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) from the southern part of Somalia beginning in 2012.[28] In what appears to be disinformation on the objectives of the KDF operation in Somalia, the Kenyan authority maintained that its troops had obtained authorization from the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG).[29] Although Kenya's Foreign Affairs Ministry asserted that the deployment of its troops into Somalia was at the request of the TFG, reports contradicting these assertions later emerged that indicated that the intervention was carried out in haste, in the absence of consultations with the TFG of Somalia. This strategic decision contravened the "holy trinity" doctrine, especially the principle of consent. When the KDF entered Somalia in 2011, this was seen by the regime of President Mwai Kibaki as a curative solution to the festering Al Shabaab attacks, both in Somalia and on Kenyan soil.

On the contrary, Kenya had become an easy target for Al Shabaab, as evidenced by a series of high-profile violent attacks on Kenyan soil orchestrated by the terrorist group. Some of the attacks include that of September 2013 at the high-end Westgate Mall in Nairobi, where over ninety people lost their lives, and the Al Shabaab–claimed attack on quarry workers killed over sixty people in the northeastern part of the country. In April 2015, Al Shabaab attacked the Garissa University College near the Kenya-Somalia border, killing 147 students and wounding seventy.[30] In January 2016, the militant terror group attacked the KDF camp in El-Adde, in Gedo, Somalia, killing an entire company of over 200 soldiers.[31] There was no gainsaying that the effects of Kenya's military interventions in Somalia from 2011 would take a long time to emerge or demerge. However, the continuous runaway Al Shabab attacks and the proliferation of militant groups in Somalia challenged conventional wisdom, which linked the Kenyan military operation in Somalia to strong regional cooperation for peace. Is the KDF's presence in Somalia premised on the need to safeguard Kenya's borders or is it a manifestation of gray zone tactics in pursuance of other hidden national interests? Are the national and regional military formations equipped with a doctrine to deal with these unusual operational tactics?

Disinformation operations and cyberattacks have been witnessed through the media propaganda employed by those sympathetic to the Somalia Federal Government. The height of disinformation attacks came during the El-Ade attacks when the entire company of KDF soldiers was massacred. An Al Shabaab sympathizer, Ahmed Imam, was depicted in a video celebrating the success of the attack while promising more attacks. There was also widespread Al Shabaab propaganda and pictures of dead KDF soldiers circulating on social media. Thereafter, a number of Kenyan bloggers, without the knowledge of the security implications of their actions, joined in and posted pictures and information about the El-Ade attacks and the bodies of the slayed soldiers. In fact, a famous Kenyan blogger named Yassin Juma was apprehended, taken into custody, and interrogated by the police. The arrest of the blogger was also widely broadcast on Kenyan media.[32] The interior Cabinet Secretary fiercely criticized the apprehended blogger for putting the government and security organizations at a disadvantage against Al Shabaab. In July 2014, the Kenyan administration suffered a number of attacks from a group of hackers linked to Al Shabaab in Somalia and calling themselves #anonymous@Anon_0*03.[33] The hackers targeted the KDF Twitter account and the accounts of senior military officials, including the KDF spokesperson.

The occurrence of cyberattacks and disinformation may have appeared random, but when examined against the gray

zone dynamism and power cycle theory, an astonishing relevance to Kenya-Somalia relations emerged: (1) Soliciting for public sympathy and shaping its opinion, the Somalia-based militant groups promoted controversial stories that stoked political and social dissent in Kenya, hoping that this would compel the Kenyan government to withdraw its troops from Somalia; (2) Information that portrayed negative relationships between Kenya and Somalia was amplified, hence manipulating online approval of the two nations' diplomatic relations; and (3) Alternative messages from institutions or individuals perceived as positively influencing public opinion on the KDF's achievements in Somalia were attacked or undermined. By propagating news messages that were anti-AMISOM or anti-KDF, the attacks created the disturbance of constrained ascendancy across the region, a condition that was especially challenging for statecraft in that it was irrationally unexpected and obdurate.

The economic coercion or disruption of relations between Kenya and Somalia has been achieved through trade, investment flows, and transport (especially air transport), as well as other key sectors of the economy such as energy. As part of the economic instruments, Somalia has been reluctant to lift the ban on *khat* (miraa) importation from Kenya, even after announcing the normalization of diplomatic ties with Kenya that had been suspended in December 2020.[34] *Khat* is a plant that is chewed for its stimulant effect. The Somali Civil Aviation Authority proclaimed that flights transporting *khat* from Kenya should remain suspended. As a result, there have been exchanges of punitive measures between the two states on both imports and exports. In some cases, Kenya has issued trade sanctions, for instance when it banned *mitumba* (second-hand cloth) importation from Somalia in 2012 under the pretext that the products were of poor quality. Kenya's assertiveness in trade dealings with Somalia appears designed to disregard the existing international order by acts of latent economic coercion. In both cases, the economic hostilities have led to a sharp decline in the balance of trade, as seen in Figure 2.

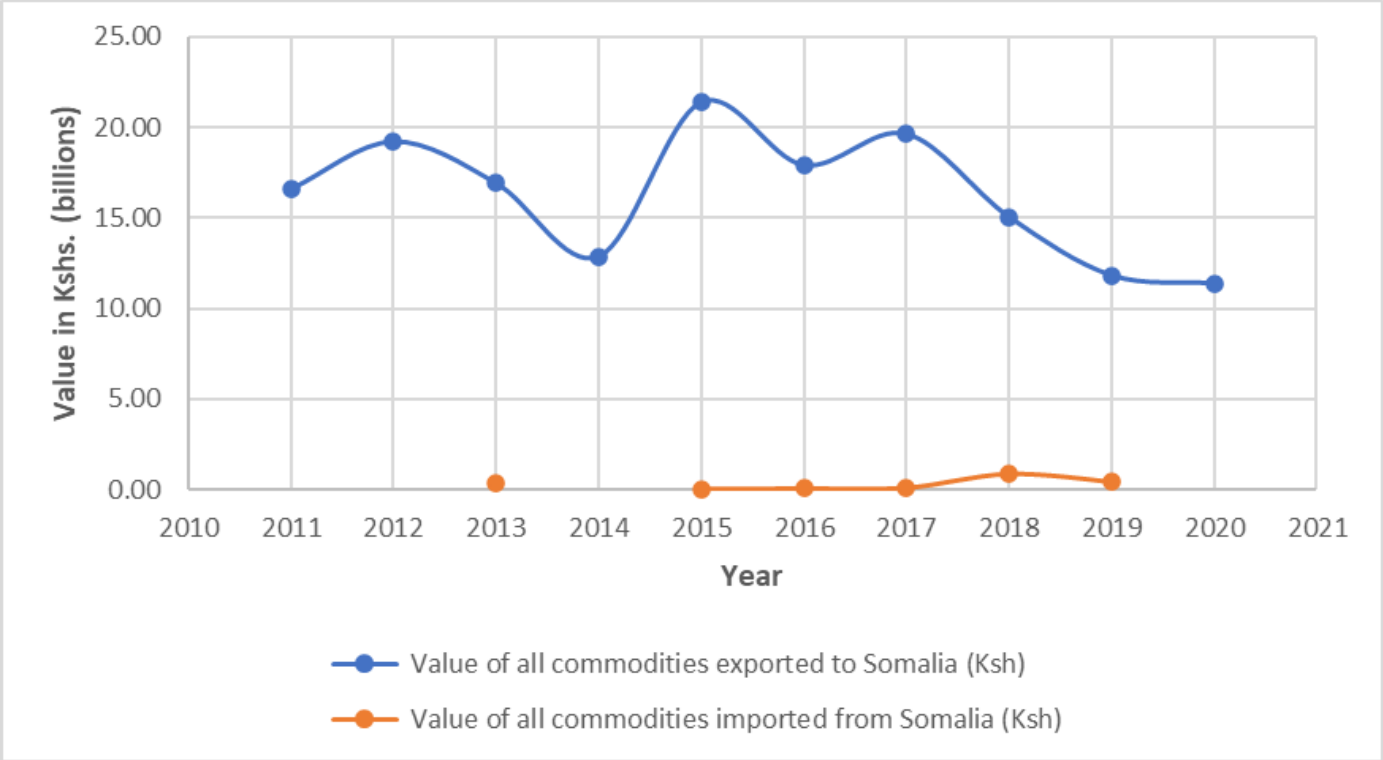

Figure 2. Changing Exports and Imports between Kenya and Somalia

Source: Field data compiled by data specialists team members of the Francis Onditi Conflictology lab: Conflict Observatory and Prediction Centre studying inter-tribal border markets as factories of conflict and infrastructure for peace.

The trends in Figure 2 are indicators of deeper economic hostilities existing between the two states. For instance, on 11 May 2021, Kenya suspended all commercial flights to Somalia except those assisting with medical and humanitarian needs, without officially informing Somalia.[35] Somalia's Minister for Air Transportation confirmed that he had learned of Kenya's decision through press reports. Flights were later opened up on 10 June 2021. In 2014, Kenya also banned the money transfer firms Amal, Taaj, and Dahabshil that had headquarters in the United Arab Emirates. Even though the firms were licensed by the Somalia Central Bank, they could no longer transact remittances in Kenya. Kenya accused the firms operating in the country of abetting money laundering and disbursing the money to individuals linked to terror groups. The biggest casualty was the Hawala system, an informal money transfer remittance system that involved the transfer of cash without records of the parties concerned in the transactions. These economic disruptions support this study's theoretical claim that gray zone dynamism is driven by unilateral economic actions with ramifications for both parties. The money transfer system is relied on heavily by the Somali community in Kenya and by Somali refugees in the Dadaab and Hagadera camps. The Kenyan intelligence report indicated that these refugee camps had mutated into major smuggling spots for sugar, rice, and electronic goods.

Kenya's decision to build a border fence along its border with Somalia and its threat to close the refugee camps in the northern part of the country cast a pessimistic shadow over relations between the two states. This observation applies to a variety of structural weaknesses. The condition was made worse particularly by the proliferation of militant groups, who

took advantage of ungoverned spaces to cause economic disruptions through terror activities. Kenya's tourist industry and the LAPSSET (Lamu Port and Lamu-Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport) project faced sabotage and were the target of extremist groups based in Somalia. The Al Shabaab group conducted several kidnapping activities. On 1 October 2011, Marie Dedieu, a disabled French woman, was kidnapped from her house near Manda Island, Lamu, by suspected Al Shabaab gunmen and died while in the custody of her assaulters. Two female aid workers from Spanish Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), working in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, were also kidnapped on 13 October 2011 and taken to Somalia.[36]

Two main sources of political tactics in the Kenya-Somalia gray zone dynamism can be identified. First, actors can be positioned by being directly or indirectly incited into political violence. The Mogadishu government has often accused Kenya of interfering in the electoral process of Jubaland, a region of Somalia that borders Kenya. As postulated in this study, in a politically polarized atmosphere and with an inclination to political belligerence, the chances of gray zone dynamism escalation increase sharply following each interval of ambiguity and political influence. The second main source of political pressure is the manipulation of population groups. States engaged in gray zone dynamism tend to stack tensions between population groups or regions against each other in an attempt to divide and create animosity. These tactics can target the ordinary population, political elites, or regions that are semi-autonomous. In December 2020, Nairobi hosted a visit from Muse Bihi Abdi, president of Somaliland, an autonomous region of Somalia that had not achieved international recognition. The actions by Kenya sparked a protest by the Somalia government, which cited external political interference from Kenya in their internal political processes. In turn, Somalia has exploited the weak migration institutions and endemic corruption levels in Kenya to gain leverage over political leadership and to influence the political debate on refugees and others that relate to the former's national interest.

The manipulation of maritime and territorial borders is a key tactic used by states in gray zone conflicts. The border question is not unique to Kenya and Somalia. The geographical areas where both countries have focused their territorial and maritime gray zone tactics are outlined in Figure 3. Although the legal status of the borders was established through treaties, agreements, and exchanges of notes between various colonial powers for their own interests, the colonialists did not take into consideration the spatial distribution of African ethnicities before colonization. The post-colonial governments then adopted these borders, as evidenced by the many ethnic groups separated by national borders today, including Somali ethnic groups living on the Kenya-Somalia border. In this case, both Kenya and Somalia have failed to pursue ethnic continuity in their foreign policy expectations regarding cross-border conflict dynamics. This gap between "hard bonds" (foreign policy praxis) and "soft bonds" (ethnic affiliations) often resurfaces and ricochets through maritime and territorial boundary disputes, demanding resolution. The territory of the Kenyan-Somali borderlands is defined as the area between Juba and the Tana River, which is in the former Northern Frontier District on the Kenyan side, and Jubaland province on the Somalia side, as shown in Figure 3.

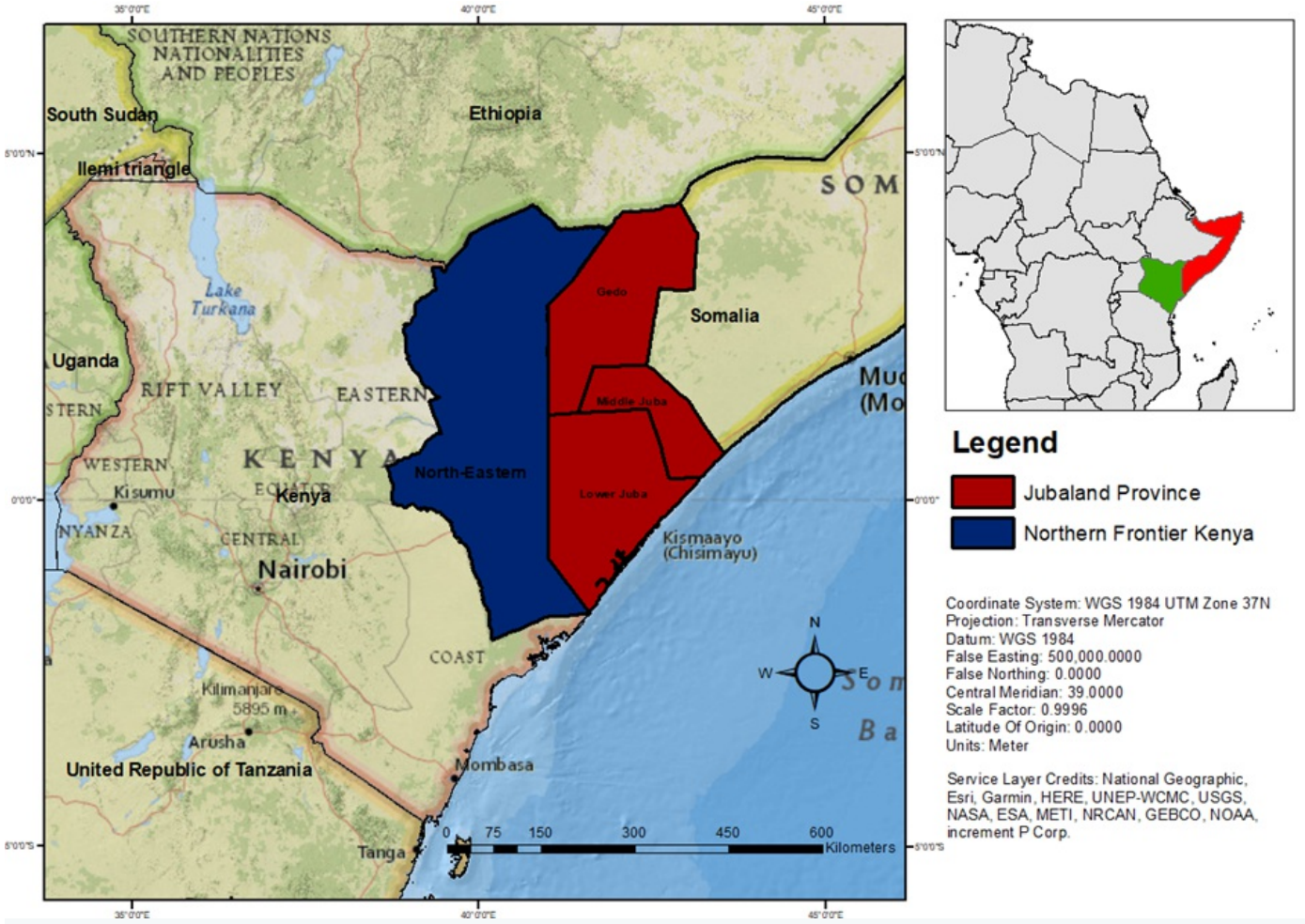

Figure 3. The Former Northern Frontier District and Jubaland Province (Somalia)

Source: National Geographic Esri, Garmin, HERE, UNEP, WCMC, USGS, NASA, ESA, METI, NRCAN, GEBCO, NOAA, increment p Corp, and GIS User Community.

The colonial masters left Somali ethnic groups scattered around the Horn of Africa, Somalia, Ethiopia (Ogaden region), Kenya (northeastern counties), and Djibouti. Consequently, there has been an endless struggle by the Somali population in Kenya's Northern Frontier District and in Somalia to be united under one country.[37] Somalia continues to agitate for a "Greater Somalia" by fighting to integrate all territories inhabited by people of Somali origin. This has been constitutionalized in Article VI, Section 4 of the Somalia Constitution, which states that "the Somali Republic shall promote by legal means and peaceful means the union of Somalia territories." As postulated by the power cycle theory, the struggle for the unification of the territory inhabited by Somali ethnic groups has created territorial cross-border violations by the Somalis as witnessed during the Shifta War in 1963,[38] refugee and extremist group crossovers to Kenya, and subjugation of the former northeastern province and the maritime claim by the Somalis in the Indian Ocean.

Legal and diplomatic measures have been undertaken by both Somalia and Kenya to gain leverage over the diplomatic wrangles that have persisted between the two countries. No wonder, then, that in August 2014, the Federal Government of Somalia formally asked the Hague-based International Court of Justice (ICJ) to determine, on the basis of international

law, the complete course of the maritime boundary dividing all maritime areas belonging to Somalia and to Kenya in the Indian Ocean.[39] On several occasions from 2019 onwards, Kenya summoned its ambassador to Somalia and expelled his Somali counterpart. Kenya later claimed that the Somali ambassador was not expelled but sent back to consult with his government.[40] In what seemed to be the height of gray zone dynamism, the Somali government attempted to auction oil and gas exploration blocks that were at the centre of the two countries' maritime boundary dispute in the Indian Ocean.[41]

In July 2019, Somalia launched a protest against the Kenyan government for referring to self-declared Somaliland as a "country."[42] On 15 December 2020, Somalia cut diplomatic ties with Kenya and wrote to the regional bloc of eight members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), demanding the establishment of an independent task force to verify claims that Kenya was arming and training militia to fight the Somalia National Army forces stationed in Gedo near their common border. Somalia also blocked Kenyan imports, including khat, even though this commodity was an important part of bilateral trade between the two countries.

The foregoing discussion highlights several tactics deployed by both Kenya and Somalia in the context of gray zone dynamism. Considering that the two countries engaged in gray zone dynamism used the Cold War–era doctrine of the "holy trinity" to tackle such complex conflict scenarios, this raises the important question of whether the states' response mechanisms were adequately equipped with a doctrine to precisely respond to these unconventional security threats. Thus, in the following section, I deploy the DQS lens to demonstrate why the "holy trinity" doctrine is inadequate to tackle the gray zone conflict dynamism in Kenya-Somalia relations.

Thinking Beyond the Doctrine of the "Holy Trinity"

At first glance, many of the gray zone tactics described above might seem reasonable and relatively easy to tackle. When reflecting upon the Kenya-Somalia relations, however, the various response mechanisms on the ground are still stuck in the Cold War–era doctrine of the "holy trinity." This section draws on empirical examples to highlight persistent gray zone dynamism. It also explores the plausibility of the DQS as a new framework for conflict diagnosis and intervention.

First, existing response mechanisms anchored in the "holy trinity" doctrine seek to reconcile the protection of civilians with the long-standing norms of consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence. However, evidence from the Kenya-Somalia gray zone dynamism shows that in practice, this approach does not offer full-spectrum diagnostics to allow for effective intervention in unconventional conflict situations. Specifically, as Charles Doran observes, the aim of the gray zone aggressors is to scale their actions to fall just short, or in some cases well short, of established triggers for military action. Their goal is to avoid major clashes, unambiguous or attributable violations of international law and norms, or outright conflict. This characteristic confirms the theoretical claim that the choice of specific actions, such as attributable cyber-harassment or creating a de facto maritime area, are designed to deny a defender precisely the sort of clarity on violation of rules that is typically important in effectuating a deterrent threat. From an observer's point of view, Somalia, acting as a gray zone aggressor, tried to auction Kenya's oil and gas blocks in the Indian Ocean maritime waters at a Somalia oil and gas conference held on 7 February 2019 in London.[43] Amid this simmering diplomatic tension

between the two countries, Kenya summoned its ambassador to Somalia, Lucas Tumbo, while at the same time expelling the Somalia envoy, Mohamoud Ahmed Nur, alias Tarzan. These forms of threat obviously did not fall within the “holy trinity” framework; rather, they would have required a broader spectrum in order to allow for the institutionalization of both kinetic and non-kinetic operations.

Second, gray zone activities unfold gradually over time rather than involving official diplomatic communication and ties. This uncertainty in the gray zone conflict environment is in tension with the “holy trinity” doctrine, particularly the norm of consent. Stretching aggressive moves over years or even decades provide limited opportunities for consent. With respect to decisive responses and the ability to make unambiguous deterrents to threats in advance, the DQS framework could effectively identify and respond to elements of gray zone dynamism and low-intensity hybrid conflict. Kenya’s invasion of Somalia in 2011 was ostensibly to protect its territorial integrity and root out Al Shabaab terrorist groups that had been conducting frequent kidnappings and killings across its border. However, it emerged that the invasion was a convenient excuse used by Kenya at the time to pursue deeper national interests.[44] This raises the question of how threats emanating from national interests could possibly be addressed through the “holy trinity” principles of impartiality and consent. In the recent discovery of oil fields in Eastern Africa, Kenya is one of the countries in the region with potential oil deposits. The oil explorations on the Kenyan Coast also found some oil fields located in waters within Somali maritime territory. This suggests that Kenya’s military advances into Somalia in 2011 might have been aimed at securing these sites to ensure that the country could explore oil resources uninterrupted.[45] It is therefore becoming inevitable that both countries need to create a broader spectrum framework for an effective response to these unique forms of conflict. For a response mechanism to be effective in addressing gray zone conflicts, they will a framework encompassing diagnostic tools for cyberattacks, economic coercion, political pressures, and border manipulation, akin to the proposed DQS shown in Figure 4.

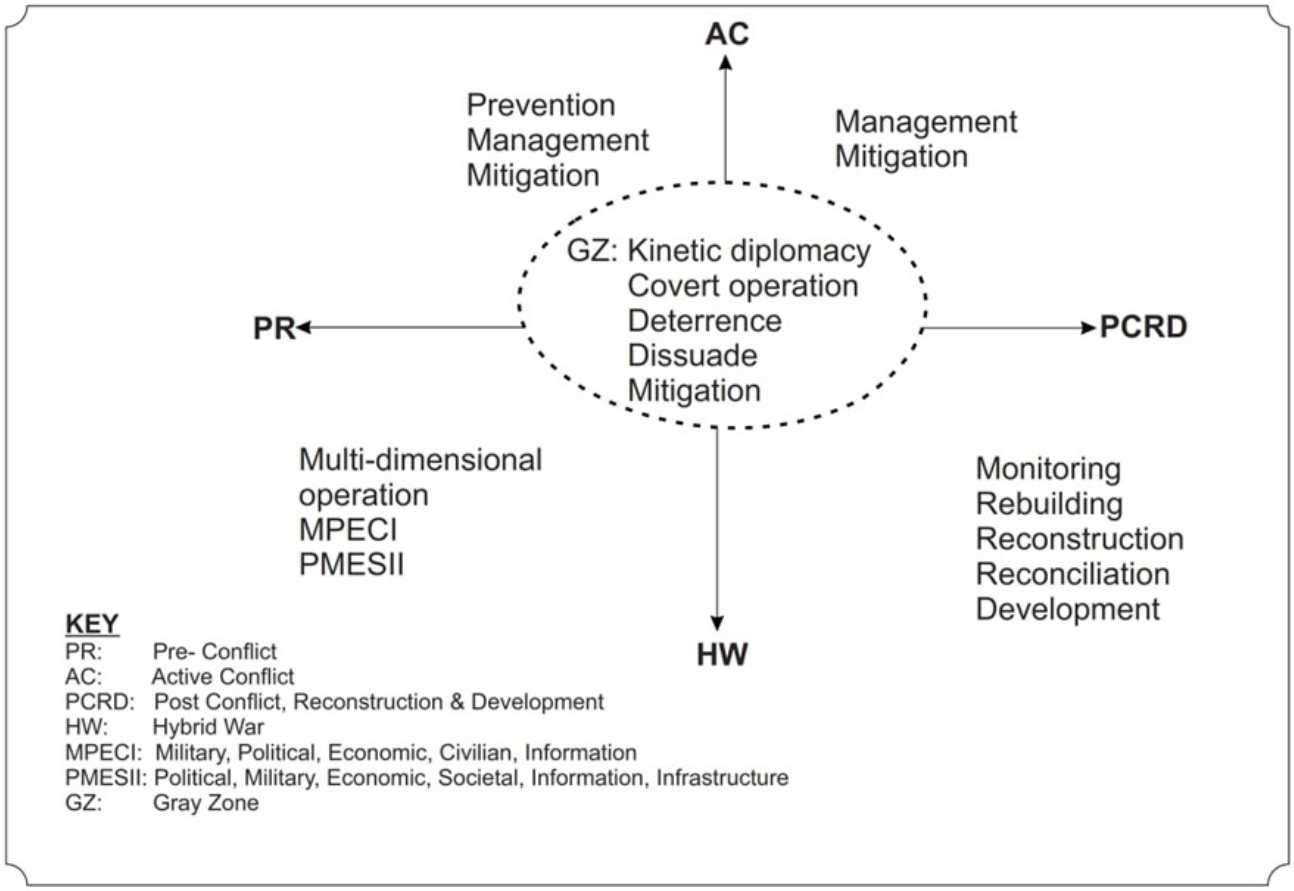

Figure 4. DQS as a Conflict Diagnostic and Intervention Framework for Gray Zone Dynamism

Source: Author's construction of a diagrammatic sketch of the framework of intervention in a gray zone conflict environment. This study proposes the 'doctrinal quadrality spectrum' (DQS) framework as a tool for analysing gray zone conflict.

While Figure 4, representing the proposed DQS, is conceived to diagnose gray zone conflict response, it can also be applied to other forms of conflict. It illuminates the type of responses required in a gray zone environment, how gray zone dynamics interact with other forms of conflict, and the indicators of each stage of conflict.

The third limitation of the "holy trinity" doctrine is the attributability of the gray zone dynamism. According to this study's theoretical framework, most gray zone campaigns involve actions in which the aggressor aims to disguise its role vis-à-vis the competitor. In the Kenya-Somalia gray zone dynamism, both countries tend to deflect responses and obstruct the potential for a successful deterrence by deploying cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, or proxy forces. These tactics allow gray zone aggressors to deny that they are responsible. The state's behaviour thus compromises the "holy trinity" principle of consent. However, the maritime dispute between the two countries was largely attributable, characterized by the use of extensive legal and political justifications, often grounded in historical claims.[46] This characteristic confirms the theoretical claim that states undertaking gray zone campaigns make strong efforts to justify their actions under

international law. Indeed, in the Hague ICJ maritime case, Somalia solicited support for its point of view from mainly Arab League countries, even though the legal standing of its claims at the ICJ was tenuous. These tactics complicate the task of generating an effective response within the existing framework of the “holy trinity,” thus calling for a broader spectrum framework (DQS) embedded in hybrid techniques.

Kenya also has its share of the blame as a gray zone aggressor. As part of the country’s evidence to the ICJ, the government assembled legal documents dating back to 1979 in its maritime territorial conflict with Somalia in the Indian Ocean. The country relied on historical documents to lay claim to the territorial waters under dispute. Thus, using historiographical evidence, Kenya maintained that for a long time before the crystallization of the present dispute, Somalia had acquiesced to Kenya’s claim of a maritime boundary along the parallel latitude.[47] Kenya explained that between the 1970s and 1990s, because of the improved bilateral relations between the two countries, Somalia continued to acquiesce to Kenya’s claim to the territorial waters in the Indian Ocean. From 1991 to 2012, because Somalia was benefiting from Kenya’s support, it prolonged its acceptance of Kenya’s claim. However, Kenya submitted that it was upon the discovery of offshore oil in the Indian Ocean territorial waters by a private entity, Soma Oil and Gas, that the Somalia government’s interest in the territory was awakened in the period 2012 to 2013. Indeed, between February 2014 and August 2014, Somalia protested against Kenya’s claim for the first time while at the same time engaging in activities to benefit its national interests. In its dispute with Kenya over the sea border filed with the ICJ, Somalia wanted the maritime border to continue along the line of the land border to the southeast, while Kenya wanted the sea border to go in a straight line east, parallel to the latitude, as shown in Figure 5.

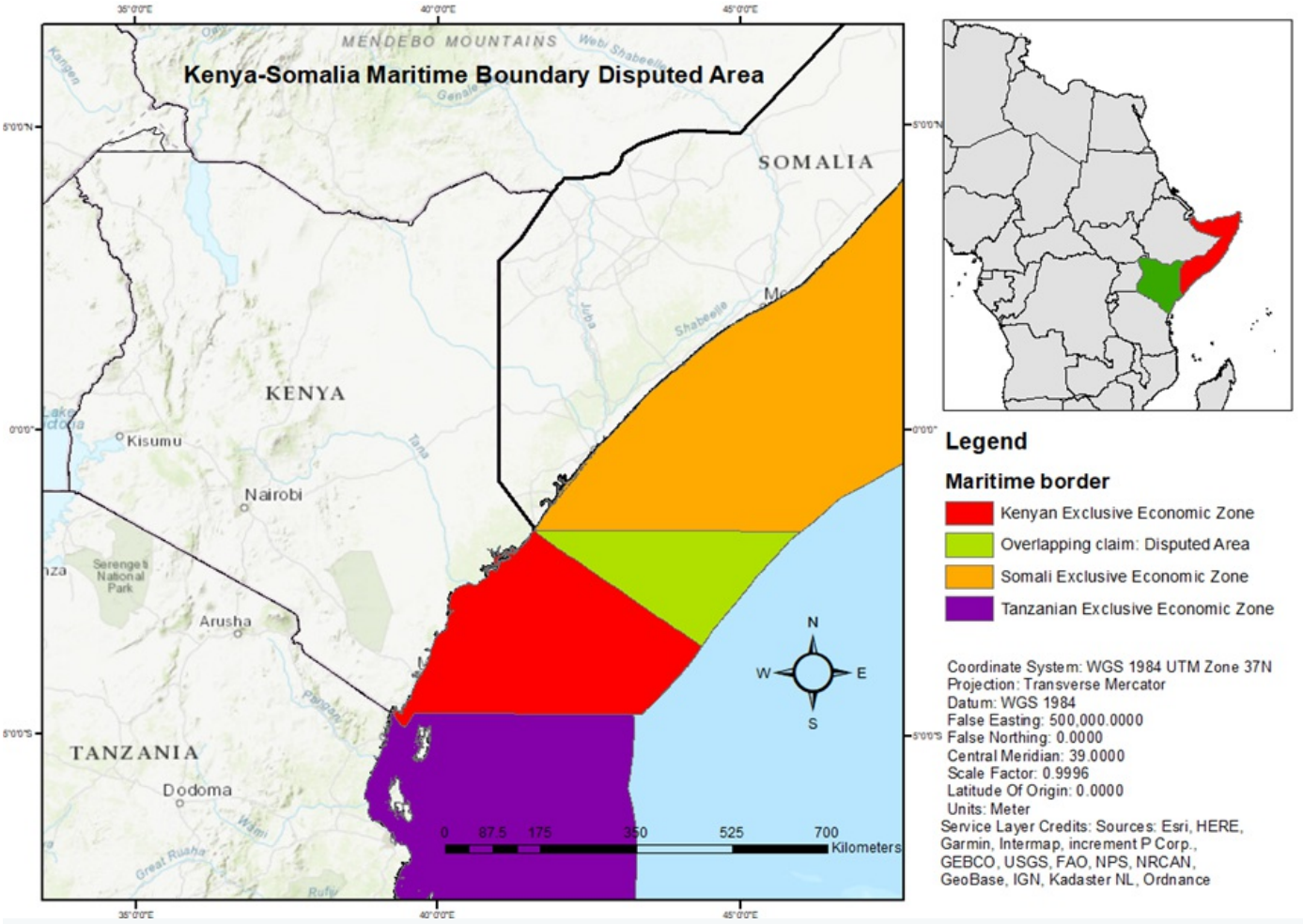

Figure 5. Map of the Kenya-Somalia Maritime Boundary Disputed Area

Source: National Geographic Esri, Garmin, HERE, UNEP, WCMC, USGS, NASA, ESA, METI, NRCAN, GEBCO, NOAA, increment p Corp, and GIS User Community.

In gray zone dynamism, aggressors typically stop short of threatening the defender's vital, strategic, or existential interests, and tend to avoid decisive responses. By declining to challenge vital interests on the part of the defender, especially a defender practising extended deterrence, as in the case of Somalia currently, gray zone dynamism significantly limits the application of the principle of consent as encapsulated in the "holy trinity" doctrine. For instance, Somalia's President Farmaajo has been increasingly at odds with Kenya, to the extent of almost threatening the vital interests of Kenya. He has endeavoured to put candidates in political office in Somalia's regional states, including Jubaland, where Kenya has an interest. He has also been willing to draw on Ethiopian forces as well as the Somali national army in his quest to consolidate power. This has pitted Kenya against Ethiopia and created tension in the Horn of Africa.

In violation of the principle of consent, the Somali government has been increasingly willing to use military force against the regional state of Jubaland, which is led by a Kenyan ally in the region, Ahmed Madobe. In an escalation of the Jubaland policy by the Kenyan government, 2,500 to 3,000 Somali youth from Somalia and northeastern counties of

Kenya, including youth from the Dadaab and Garissa camps, were recruited and trained by the Kenyan government to be sent to Jubaland. The recruits were trained in Isiolo in Kenya, and in the Kenya Wildlife Service camp in the Manyani coastal region. As part of their recruitment and training, the youth recruits were given false promises of financial rewards. Many of them were recruited while still underage, which led to divisions within clans, resulting in the failure of the Jubaland policy.[48] Meanwhile, the Kenyan government policymakers, while explicitly hinting at the risk of more violent military actions that would provide escalation leverage to them, maintained that it was just a security strategy, not meant to harm its neighbour. Hence, these events confirm the theoretical claim that states engaged in gray zone dynamism are likely to violate the principles of consent and impartiality within the framework of the “holy trinity” doctrine. This relationship led many observers to conclude that gray zone dynamism marks a clear departure from what the “holy trinity” doctrine can cover, and the inevitability of searching for a broad spectrum (DQS) framework that can accommodate such ambiguities.

Finally, tensions also exist between economic warfare and the need to protect vulnerable groups. Gray zone dynamism targets specific vulnerabilities, political polarization, and social cleavages, including the existence of ethnic populations sympathetic to the gray zone aggressor. In essence, gray zone aggressors aim to put the defenders in situations where strong responses appear to be ruled out or counterproductive for strategic and domestic political reasons. To achieve this, aggressors deliberately establish an economic dependency syndrome that creates implicit leverage or threatens escalation. For instance, under the watch of the Kenyan government, the Mujahidin have taken advantage of the coastal region being predominantly Muslim to support proxy conflicts with the national government. Historically, the majority of coastal communities have been landless and many have suffered marginalization, leading to widespread historical grievances from the communities against the central government in Nairobi. Besides, the slow realization of devolution in the country had prompted the rebirth of a secessionist political organization, the MRC (Mombasa Republican Council) under the slogan *Pwani si Kenya* (The coast is not part of Kenya).[49] During the 2013 general elections, the MRC asked the coastal people to boycott the general election. The political temperature on the coast worked to the advantage of Mujahidin. The boycott of the election was also proclaimed by the Mujahidin leader Ahmed Iman Ali. Population manipulation through methods such as boycotts was intended to create confusion among the policymakers in Nairobi and encourage a change in policy direction as far as the military operation against Al Shabaab was concerned. Some of these ambiguous aspects of gray zone dynamism have strengthened solidarity between the MRC and Al Shabaab, rooted in a shared identity and involving detaching land and people from one state in order to re-incorporate them into another, as illustrated in Figure 6.

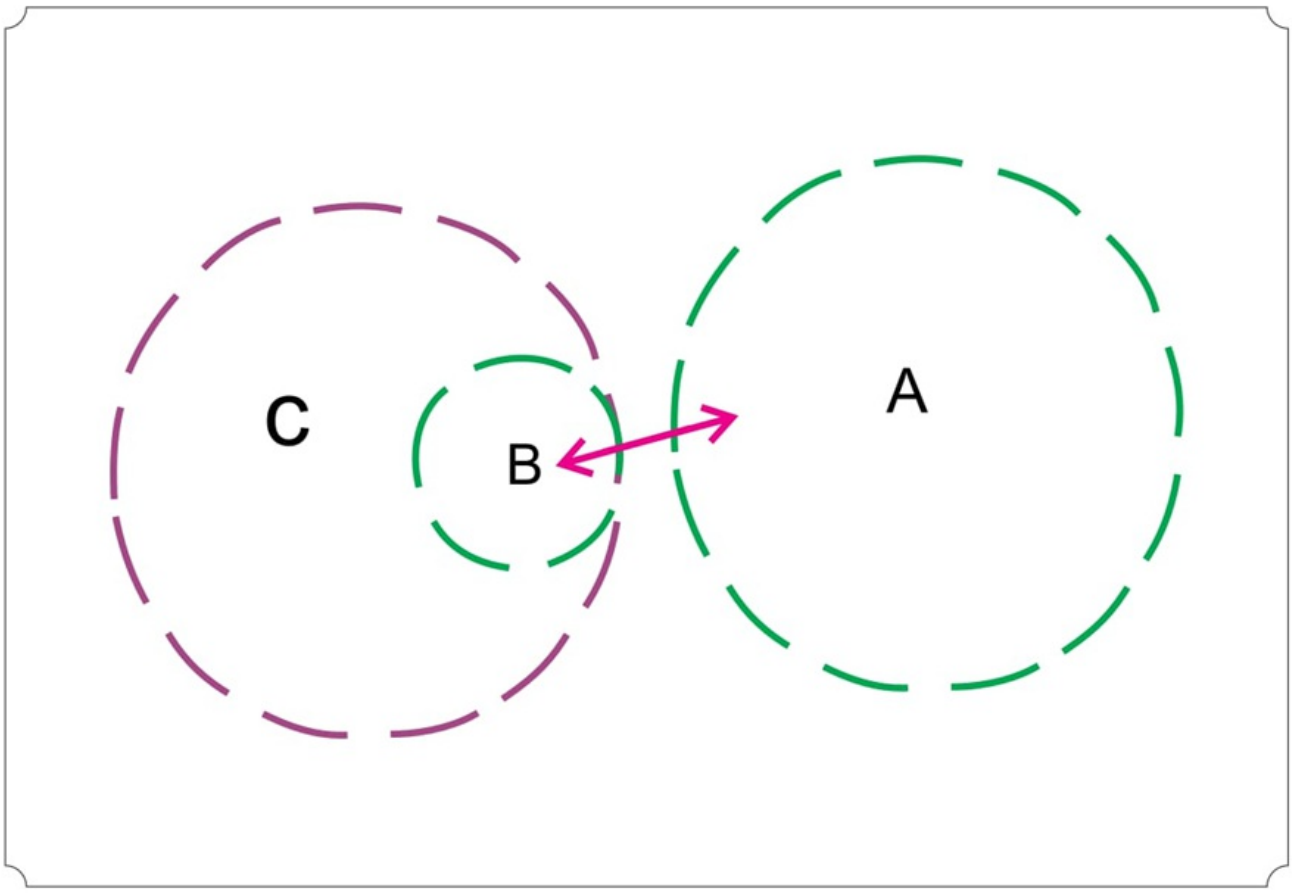

Figure 6. Typical Irredentism Based on Gray Zone Tactics

Source: Author's construction imaging the statist's relationship between Kenya and Somalia as each of the states seeks to retain or acquire the contested maritime space in the Indian Ocean. Since the 1960s, Somalia has exhibited irredentist behavior, as the country's appetite for expansionism sort to annex neighbouring territories in the Horn of Africa on the basis of ethnicity, kinship, cultural, historical, and territorial ties.

As illustrated in Figure 6, the requirements for irredentism simply involve a parent state "A" and its trans-border ethnic kin "B," which is placed in a neighbouring host state "C." Based on this model, Somalia is the parent state and Somali people form the trans-border ethnic group, while Kenya is the host state. In line with the theoretical framework of this study, the irredentism strategy of Somalia as the parent state has aimed at taking advantage of the similarity in the identity of the Somali people on both sides of the border to build an ethnic-regional identity. The irredentist behaviour of Somalia has also overlapped with the cardinal overarching characteristic of the gray zone dynamism, which takes advantage of strategic ambiguity to achieve gradual gains.[50]

Likewise, Kenya has been backing the formation of an autonomous region called Jubaland to create a buffer zone between Kenya and "Greater Somalia" and is alleged to have been providing resources and supplies to an injudiciously crafted local governing authority led by the former defence minister for Somalia. Similar tactics by the Kenyan government

were witnessed in 2021, when the country decided to withdraw from the maritime boundary dispute case filed by Somalia at the ICJ and presented its complaints to the UN Security Council, of which it is currently a non-permanent member. Based on international maritime law, it was widely expected that the ICJ court would rule in favour of Somalia, and it was argued that Kenya strategically withdrew from the case for fear it would lose to Somalia. But according to the power cycle theory, the gray zone dynamism is likely to escalate, despite this tactical move by Kenya.[51] At some time in the unforeseeable future, the question of the maritime boundary between the two states will return. When this happens, the need to manage gray zone conflicts will become inevitable.

Conclusion

The discussion in this article reveals that tensions and ambiguities in the application of the “holy trinity” doctrine in managing contemporary conflicts are reflected not only in its practical application but also in its conceptual formulation. For instance, reservations about the host state’s consent for operations in which Kenya suffered under the yoke of Al Shabaab were often linked to the UN’s peace operation doctrine. Together, these contradictions made it difficult to resolve tensions using the “holy trinity” framework. Gray zone dynamisms are ambiguous and complicated conflict scenarios and reflect the emerging nature of conflicts. This implies that principles and doctrines guiding response mechanisms need to be bound up with the shifting nature of conflicts. For instance, at the time of Kenya’s intervention in Somalia, only Uganda and Burundi had peacekeepers in Somalia. Inasmuch as the KDF formed part of AMISOM, albeit belatedly, there was a dilemma as to their mandate within the regional arrangement. The AMISOM obligation was to conduct peace support operations to stabilize the situation in Somalia in order to create surroundings conducive to the implementation of humanitarian activities and an immediate takeover by the UN. This mandate did not include what KDF sought to achieve through its invasion, which was to root out Al Shabaab and create a buffer zone between Kenya and Somalia in Jubaland.

Critics argued that in intervening, Kenya was deploying kinetic diplomacy at the strategic/operational level, thereby overstepping the limits of the “holy trinity” doctrine as well as the robust peacekeeping principles outlined in the UN’s capstone doctrine. Furthermore, under the UN’s stated commitment to penalizing the “infractions,” the “holy trinity” doctrine prohibits countries that are contributing troops from “working” with governments to achieve their military objective against certain armed groups. This provision, however, makes it difficult for troops or military establishments to respond swiftly to threats in gray zone dynamism. It suggests, therefore, that the success of a future response mechanism is contingent upon the creation of a broad spectrum (DQS) framework that would create clarity when the “holy trinity” principles become limited in their application, and would allow for a mechanism that is responsive to the gray zone conflict scenarios.

Footnotes

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