How to Discern the Spread of Al-Shabaab Networks from 'Ungoverned Spaces' using the Ink Blot Logic of Diffusion

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Abstract

The current military counterterrorism strategies in the Horn of Africa are state-centric, being configured based on the African Union's model of anti-terrorism laws. However, this strategy is incongruent with the typical behaviours of terrorist groups, as such groups often establish kinship networks across borders, along with maintaining a local presence embedded within communities. Hence, predicting the movement and spatial distribution of complex organized terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab directly can prove difficult. However, indirectly plotting the occurrence of 'ungoverned spaces' (both physical and non-physical ones) can improve predictability—thus improving counter-terrorism (CT) strategies against the group. To provide empirical support for this hypothesis, this article utilized a combination of analytical techniques – including the '*ink blot*' logic technique – to identify the role of 'loose bonds' and 'hard bonds' in the distribution of terrorists' activities ranging from the group's epicenter in Somalia to neighboring Kenya. This article argues that the 'loose bonds' established between states through official foreign policy praxis seem comparatively less likely to reinforce CT measures. Rather, the 'hard bonds' created among ethnic groups across borders lie at the heart of an effective transnational CT strategy.

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Introduction

Kenya's concerns over security threats rekindled by 'ungoverned spaces' in Somalia – and especially its concern over the threat of terror-related activities generated from within this volatile region – remain a top priority of its security initiatives in the Horn of Africa. This is not surprising, given that there has been a substantial increase in the number of actors carrying

out one-sided violence in Africa since 2011.[1] This emerging threat to peace and security in the Horn of Africa is an illustration of why the presence of what can be termed 'ungoverned spaces', as they relate to one-sided violence, raises concerns. First of all, what is an 'ungoverned space'? A key proposition regarding 'ungoverned space' is that such a space is closely associated with there being an absence of state authority as the main allocator of resources and the main provider of collective goods.[2] This makes sense, because ungoverned territories have been characterised as being under-governed, ill-governed, and contested spaces and exploited areas.[3]

However, the conception of what precisely constitutes an ungoverned space is not limited to physical space (land, air, and sea), as an ungoverned space is also the conceptual absence of a state's capacity to exercise control over the space and the population within it.[4] Simultaneously, this paradigm has been used for centuries to understand the relationship between ungoverned territories and the prevalence of conflict; the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW); and thievery, ranging from cattle rustling to sea-related criminal activities such as piracy.[5] At the behest of the de-facto rulers of a territorial space ungoverned by the state, not only national stability but also regional peace and security, are being fundamentally challenged due to the diffusionary nature of kinship traits among African societies. Social scientists have defined diffusion as a social process and as activities that occur among people in response to learning of, or adoption of, a decision about an idea that the leader would like to have integrated among those who subscribe to a culture, religion, or social class,[6] such as an Islamist clarion call against the so-called infidel Christian invaders. In this article, 'diffusion' refers to the spatial spread of terror-related activities and assets across territorial borders from ungoverned spaces in Somalia to other states, such as Kenya, in the Horn of Africa.

This proposition is increasingly validated by the rise of '*inkblot*'-like networks among the terrorist groups, criminal gangs, insurgencies, and other radicalised elements that originate from within ungoverned spaces and which spread to the neighbouring states and territories. In general, terrorist groups that grow and thrive in ungoverned spaces are rapidly spreading beyond these ill-governed territories; they are metastasizing into new spaces in which the state has had a relatively stable presence. Al-Shabaab (Al-Shabab) is one such terrorist group – one whose power and influence have spread beyond Somalia and has found new spaces of operation (spaces in neighbouring countries) in which to work.[7] Since 2011, Al-Shabaab has conducted deadly attacks inside the Kenyan territory. This is worrisome, particularly because the freezing of borders (in a way that limits coordinated cross-border law enforcement activities), and the "fuzzy" territoriality disputes over the Kenya-Somalia border, are factors which create weaker border control. Moreover, disaffected minorities exploit the vulnerabilities of porous borders to "*export*" terrorist activities to the neighbouring country of Kenya.

Al-Shabaab's power and influence appear to be rapidly migrating into Kenya in a fashion similar to the behaviour of an "*ink blot*" as it spreads. In this article, the analogy of an "*ink blot"* is used to describe terrorist groups' networks, which diffuse from areas of high concentration in Somalia to areas of low concentration in Kenya. On many occasions, they carry (along with them) methods of warfare, ideological orientation, and tactics. The group's penetration of Kenyan society is largely based on kinship networks and Muslim brotherhood networks. Northern Kenya, the area of the country that borders Somalia, is predominantly occupied by people of Somali origin who confess the Islamic faith. Blood kinship and

religious or ideological brotherhood have been found to sustain ferocious neo-tribal behaviours.[8] Some communities fight to retain their traditional clan systems, and any intrusion of market structures or unfamiliar cultural practices is violently resisted. A group of people with similar descent may find it beneficial to forge transnational ties of solidarity through a shared kinship lifestyle. However, the "export" of terror-like behaviour from the ungoverned spaces in Somalia into Kenyan territory remains unacceptably problematic in its spreading of violent extremism and threats to national security. One reason for the persistence of the terror-related insecurity in Kenya is that the phenomenon of the "export" of terror as it relates to ungoverned spaces in Somalia is an important topic of study which, to date, has been surprisingly under-researched. In order to assist the Kenyan government in its development of a robust suite of potently effective counter-terrorism (CT) measures – or, more modestly, to at least potentiate a better understanding of the relationship between ungoverned spaces and the "export" of terrorist activities – it is necessary both to interrogate the factors that enable such activities to be exported, and to assess whether and how it may implicate Kenya's national security architecture in unintended complicity in Al-Shabaab's spread.

This article seeks to unravel the factors enabling the "export" of the Al-Shabaab terrorist group's behaviours and activities, and to examine the risks (to neighbouring states) associated with ungoverned spaces. To this end, the article contains three sections. The first lays the foundation for the concept of what constitutes an 'ungoverned space', doing so by framing the definition of such spaces in terms of three propositions regarding a) territoriality, b) sovereignty, and c) statehood. The second section explores the relationship between the phenomenon of ungoverned spaces in Somalia and the prevalence of terror activities in Kenya. The third section asks the important question: What implications might the dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Somalia have on how Kenya's national security architecture could be most effectively structured?

The article adopts 'ink blot logic' to explain the spread of Al-Shabaab in Kenya by examining its spread through ungoverned spaces in Somalia. By doing so, it extends the analysis of this topic by classifying the various definitions of the term in terms of three propositions. It identifies the main agents, their motivations, and the political and security implications of their actions, mainly with regard to the neighbouring state of Kenya to which terrorist activities are being "exported." Consequently, I draw upon an eclectic literature – focusing on the three main vertices of *(un)governed spaces* (sovereignty, territoriality, and statehood) – to create a theoretical conceptualization of *'transnational ungoverned spaces' (the spatial deprivation theoretical framework)*, amenable to analyzing (and possibly predicting) the interterritorial evolution of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab. This approach potentially allows for better identification of, and greater insight into, the complex network of factors at play within ungoverned spaces, the agents operating in such spaces, and the terrorist behaviours within the nexus of opportunity within the terror-"importing" country. This is one of the contributions that the article will make with reference to terrorist group networks. The systematic review of the extant literature – a body of literature dating from the inception (in the 1990s) of the concept of ungoverned spaces – will be complemented by case studies drawn from Kenya and Somalia.

Conceptual Clarification

When Ann Clunan and Harold Trinkunas[9] advanced the concept of ungoverned spaces within the broader framework of state sovereignty, they inform the reader that the existence of such spaces should be understood as being a sign of a failed state or a suspension of what they call 'effective state control.' Marc Lynch[10] builds upon the duo's conception in order to explain how non-state actors could exploit ungoverned spaces to form criminal gangs – or, worse still, terrorist groups. Closely related to the failed state thesis above is the category identifying weak states. Patrick Cronin[11] combines geographical and population parameters in order to frame what constitutes *ungoverned spaces* as being not only isolated regions of inhospitable terrain that governments cannot easily reach, but also the migrant- and immigrant-populated slums and the inaccessible border regions of well-governed states.

We cannot develop a sound conceptual framework of what an ungoverned space is without interrogating the existing debate on the subject. Among the emerging explanations attempting to address the question of the spread of terrorist activities is the argument that ungoverned spaces and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) occur in a circular spiral of causality, causing increased access to such weapons beyond the ungoverned territories.[12] The RAND Corporation[13] refers to this phenomenon as being "awash in arms", meaning that increasing non-state actors' access to weapons creates an unhealthy competition with the state over the legitimate use of force. The alternative, and equally prominent, school contends that the presence of ungoverned spaces is associated with criminal networks – a blemish, stain, or mark against the state; a stain that transiently mars and spreads in the way an "ink blot" moves and spreads. The "ink blot" explanation cautions against the simplistic linear causality advocated by the "awash in arms" school. The ink blot school's contention is that a complex and intricate network of militant forces – acting across, and reinforcing each other across, international boundaries – causes the "export" of terror behaviours from ungoverned spaces.[14] In other words, the effects of ungoverned spaces are transient beyond their places of origin. The debate goes even further to focus on how weak borders fail to mitigate threats to peace and security in Africa. However, the focus has been on the effects of ungoverned spaces within the affected country's territorial spaces. Yet, as is evident from the emerging terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab in Somalia (emerging from within its largely ungoverned spaces) and Kenya (importing terroristic behaviours), the question of how the behaviours and activities of a terrorist group diffuse into the neighbouring state through 'borderless borders'; and the security risks associated with the inkblot networks; remains unresolved.

Recently, a number of scholars have linked ungoverned space to inaccessibility, the dilapidation of spatial infrastructure, and misgovernment, all of which could invite socio-cultural and political resistance to state penetration.[15] The absence of state control creates an environment conducive to the growth of terrorist groups. Here, the natural attitude, in many ways, is that of questioning the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. Accordingly, this "vacuum" could easily be filled with cultural entities – clan feuds, ethnic groups, religious fundamentalists, radical youths, tribes, or loose social kinship fabrics. The maturation and diffusion of this form of networking define society's basic culture, including civic traditions, political organization and blood kinship. The blood kinship phenomenon is not confined to the people of Somalia by origin. Instead, it can be found in many parts of the world. For instance, the Pashtun tribe located in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (FATA) has a long history of resistance to external authority, dating back to colonial times.[16] Similarly, the Muslim inhabitants of Mindanao have contested the authority of the Manila government and its religious and cultural orientation since the Spanish colonial era. Likewise, the Caucasian and Chechen peoples in the Northern

Caucasus have resisted the influence of modern Russian culture. Domitilla Sagramoso,[17] for example, has observed the relationship between some Chechens' perennial violence and the heavy-handed influence of Russia:

> [A] loose network of formally autonomous violent groups or Islamicjamaats has developed throughout the region, primarily in the Muslim republics of Ingoshetia, Dagestan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia [……] and Kabardino-Balkaria.

The features outlined above reflect the security risks associated with ungoverned spaces resulting from the struggle between power influence and cultural resistance – and therefore, the presence of ungoverned territory. But what does the absence of state authority in an ungoverned space – or, conversely, the absence of ungoverned spaces – look like? Before we delve deeper into the framing of the concept of ungoverned space, it would be logical to shed some light on what constitutes a 'governed space.' *If an 'ungoverned space' is the physical or non-physical area where there is an absence of state capacity or political will to exercise control, a 'governed space' is a space within which a state has the capability of exercising control through the fulcrum of a local, regional, or national central government authority.* Thus, the main characteristics of a governed state are as follows: The state has influence over the population. It secures its international borders. It promotes cultural harmony. Formal and competitive markets are present. There are functioning institutions. Lastly, there is a seamless flow of information connecting the various components of the state and social networks.

The differences or similarities between ungoverned and governed spaces are not that simple. One does not necessarily mirror the other. In an ideal natural setting, the rule is that if I can see you, it means you are visible and present. But in the phenomenological context of existence, things are not that straightforward. The concept of *governmentalism* is always imperfect. The relational aspect of *intergovernmentality* points precisely to the fact that it is a system akin to an international treaty. In Michael Foucault's[18] conception of government, the powers of the central authority are limited; each state is obligated to observe and respect the rights and competencies of other states. This relationship so far has been one of the contributing factors to the question of legitimate authority. For instance, by the virtue of Somalia's sovereignty, Kenya cannot dictate how the former ought to be held accountable and held responsible for the actions of the militant group Al-Shabaab, born and bred within its territory. However, as alluded to in the foregoing discussion, sustaining a governable state requires the protection of the state's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the building of statehood or nationhood. In part, the purpose of this article is to resolve the conceptual tensions between what constitutes 'ungoverned spaces' and 'governed spaces' – resolving this tension by framing the various perspectives into the three aforementioned propositions.

The first proposition approaches the concept of sovereignty. Within the confines of international law, the key defining elements of sovereignty are recognition, the state, authority, coercion, and territory. Stephen Krasner[19] classified sovereignty into two types – international-legal sovereignty and domestic sovereignty. In this regard, sovereignty is concerned with the inviolability of borders and freedom from eternal interference in a state's domestic affairs. In this world order, states' interaction cannot be determined by one sole actor. For example, even though the Al-Shabaab terrorist group's activities in Somalia perhaps tangentially implicate Kenya's national security apparatus to some extent for having

not found more ways to exert even greater international pressure against such activities (or perhaps, for fuelling the rise of extremism in response to Kenya's aggressive responses such as the occupation), the fact remains that ultimately, Kenya cannot dictate the domestic policy of Somalia. An emerging argument is that *ungoverned spaces* create opportunities for organized groups to express and articulate their collective interests – and that if this phenomenon is not managed by the state's machinery and governance structures, these other groups tend to dominate the space. In such an environment, therefore, legal sovereignty belongs to the state, while political sovereignty resides in the organized group. This conflict between legal and political sovereignty implies that the efficiency of the state to deploy force and/or forces and fight against terror groups is greatly hampered. This phenomenon can be worsened by kinship networks established between the terror group and the local population. As such, *ungoverned spaces* can be areas that are poorly governed; or they can be areas located within otherwise viable states, yet being places where the central government's authority does not extend.[20] However, as has been pointed out by Prinz and Schetter,[21] there is the need for a distinction between forms of ungoverned space, as (particularly when viewed from a surveillance perspective,)the term is often extended to encompass virtual realms, such as the dark web, that may undermine state sovereignty.

Territorial integrity is a key component of sovereignty. Effective border controls define the territorial integrity of a state. The sum of it all is the outcome of a governable space characterized by a stable security situation. Within the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), there are two important assumptions undergirding territorial integrity: 1) If a state is not effective, then the state's territorial rights could come into question; and 2) any group that is able to impose order or demonstrate effectiveness could gain territorial rights in given areas.[22] Janice Thompson,[23] emphasizes that territorial integrity, therefore, goes beyond sovereignty to encompass building tight linkages between the state and its people. *Ungoverned spaces* cannot simply be classified as physical locations where state authority functions poorly by normative standards, but also where it is altogether absent in its normative enforcement, as shown by Richard Mallet: Such 'mental spaces' unconstrained by loyalty to a state's governance are characterized by physical manifestations of this ideological rejection of the state's rule of law, thereby resulting in lawless, uncontrolled territories, black markets, and places where state regulation is absent.[24]

The second proposition is territorial deprivation. Advocates of this school of thought argue that the formation of political or social movements is hinged on the need to address the prevailing conditions. Social movements have been known to metamorphosize into extremist groups with the aim of conducting terror-related activities.[25] When the initial social movements fail to reach their desired goals, they give birth to terrorist movements.[26] Whereas grievances are driven by mainly ideological factors, identity politics in Somalia have precipitated clan tensions, and distorted religious grievances have played a role in creating unity among the aggrieved group.[27] This political Islam bequeaths terror groups with the ability to interpolate long-term religious goals and a united focus on issues. On the relationship between religious ideology and diffusion of terror activities, Weinberg et al. construct grievances as representing four elements: 1) injustices, 2) political oppression, 3) identity, and 4) religious divisions.[28] Indeed, modern greed-grievance theorists Regan and Norton[29] have now explained the existence of strong, direct links between identity and the spatial distribution of terror activities. In other words, the presence of violence on one side of the border can be explained by the formation of similar groups in the neighbouring localities, especially where such groups subscribe to a similar religious or cultural orientation.

On a similar note, territorial deprivations can lead to a state of grievance. The term 'relative deprivation' connotes the gap between what individuals hope to achieve and what they desire to achieve. If this gap is widened, then rebellion is likely to occur. Gurr avers that the more individuals feel deprived in their local setting, the more they are likely to initiate mobilization/recruitment initiatives that traverse beyond their territorial spaces. Al-Shabaab uses the internet to launch propaganda aimed at recruitment and resource mobilization, mainly in Kenya. As a result, the Somali diaspora has become impressed and has become a partner remitting an estimated 1 billion dollars a year to al-Shabaab.[30] The prevailing divisive political environment in Kenya aids in the monumental diffusion of Al-Shabaab's activities. The weak and predatory security forces of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia, [31] and a perception that the opposition has weak legitimacy (although a representative government, the TFG had, in 2004, been created in Kenya), both aid Al-Shabaab's recruitment efforts – doing so with great alacrity. Historically, for instance, the 2007–8 period saw a great influx of foreign fighters whose main motivation was to oppose the occupation.

Finally, there is the question of statehood. In Max Weber's definition of what constitutes a state, the relationship between coercion and territory is key.[32] However, the mere use of physical force within a territory does not alone adequately define what a state is. Other elements defining what constitutes a state are having a permanent population, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. The most important aspect of statehood, however, is the capacity of the state to demonstrate its capability of controlling its borders. The lack of this control creates conditions ideal for the diffusion of terrorist groups or the formation of what Taylor[33] calls "quasi-independent fiefdoms." Mikulas Fabry[34] memorably refers to such formations as *statelets* – entities created by the dissolution of a larger state. Risse and Stollenwerk[35] clarify statehood based on the capacity of a government to have control over its territory. It is notable that the loss of legitimacy and authority over the population and space leads to the formation of an ungoverned space. Therefore, *ungoverned spaces* are characterized by (1) the absence of ownership or control, and (2) the absence of state institutions.[36] Invisibility or remoteness is also a key ingredient of *ungoverned areas* that enable terrorist groups to thrive. Ethnic homogeneity can make it difficult for the terrorists to stand out to observers and can enable them to blend easily into the general population without notice. It is no wonder, therefore, that despite efforts to eradicate Al-Shabaab, the group remains a 'tough nut to crack', because its members easily sublimate into the general population whenever they are targeted in combat operations. Additionally, apart from the conceptual framework which facilitates the understanding of the concept of ungoverned space, the behaviours of terrorist groups must also be explained. In line with this view, this article utilises the *relative deprivation* framework both to explain the evolution of Al-Shabaab and to explain how the group "exports" its terror activities from ungoverned spaces in Somalia into Kenya. This theoretical clarification uses the inkblot logic of diffusion to explain how ideas spread across territories in the Horn of Africa.

In view of the above three propositions, this article argues that the spread of Al-Shabaab terrorist ideas is likened to the spatial properties of an '*inkblot*' as it spreads. *In this article*, the Rorschach *Inkblot* phenomenon is defined as a game-like activity that allows researchers to discover thinking patterns and the extent to which certain personalities and thought processes spread across a geographical space.[37] Although the technique has been used by psychiatrists and psychologists as a tool for measuring personalities,[38] it can also be utilised by social scientists to map out a group's dynamics, especially, when studying social behaviour such as the recruitment and mobilization of terror-related activities

across territories. Like the diffusion of ink on blank paper, terrorists' activities in the context of ungoverned space use existing kinship networks to 'export' terror-like behaviour. *S*patial deprivation (SD) also plays a key role in facilitating or preventing the growth and spread of terrorist activities across borders. Given the wider conception of relative deprivation which encompasses economic and political issues, it may not be an ideal framework to offer explanations for the formation of a regional network by a terrorist group, bred in ungoverned space. Rather, in this article, I will build and utilize the notion of spatial deprivation as a model theoretical configuration to explain the connections and the push factors that enable terrorist activities to diffuse across borders from ungoverned spaces in Somalia into Kenya as illustrated in Figure 1.
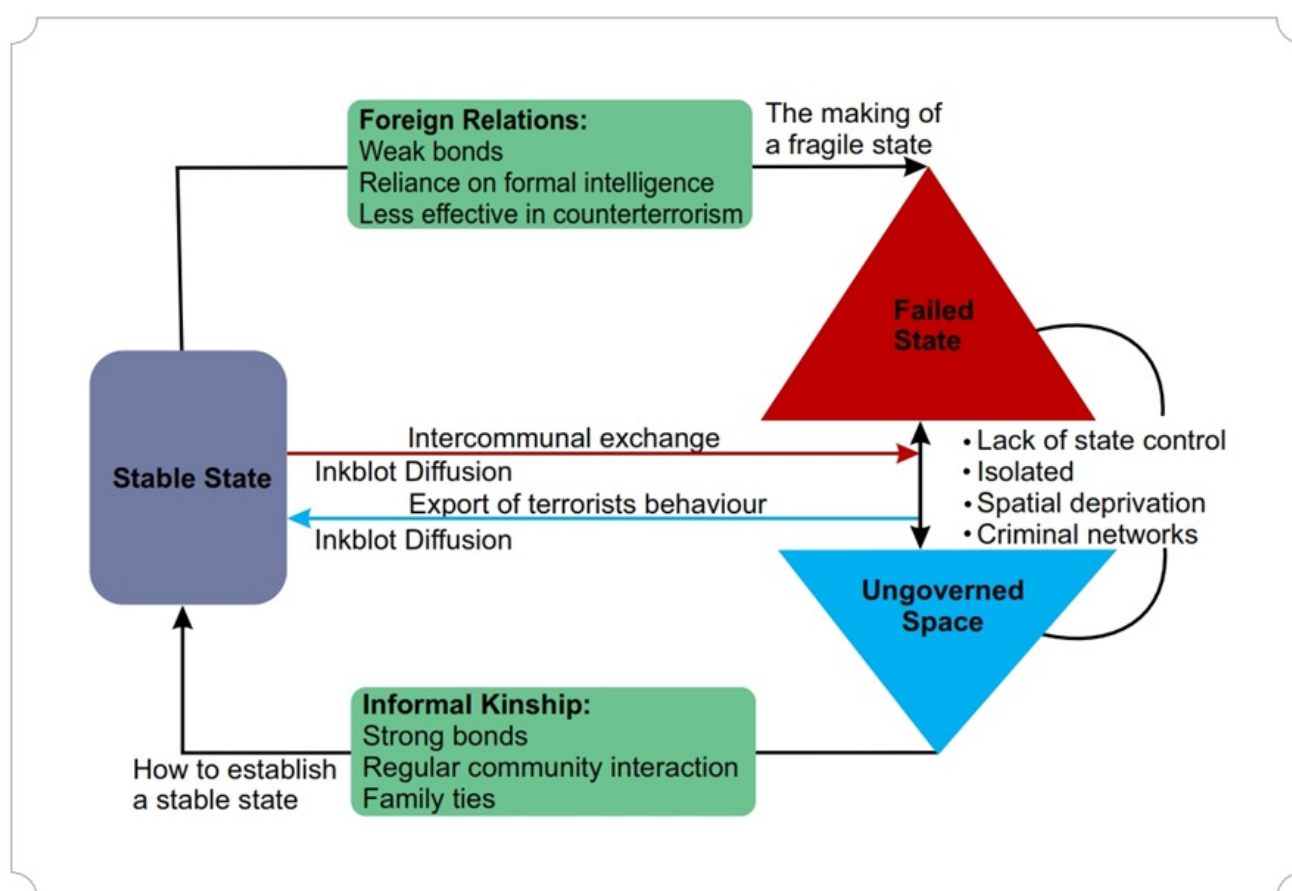

Figure 1. Spatial Relations between a Fragile State and a Stable State in the context of a Neighbourhood of Ungoverned Spaces

Source: Author's construct of the comparison between a fragile state and a stable state: Fragility is manifested in a state's inability to provide security and development for its citizens, hence creating ungoverned spaces that are conducive for the diffusion of terror groups across territorial borders.

Figure 1 above is an illustration of why the Al-Shabaab group is one of the reasons that the country of Somalia is ranked

as a failed state.[39] The country has been described as one with weak state authority and a lack of functional/basic law and order.[40] While there has been a general belief that Somali clans were acephalous (lacking headship) during the pre-colonial period,[41] there is a contention that they were indeed highly centralized bifurcated states that thrived as independent states based on clan kinship. In line with the theoretical framework in this article, the survival of clan formation is a strong indication of a state's failure to exert control – a failure resulting in the growth of ungoverned territories. In the same vein, the regime of Siad Bare failed to initiate a nation-building exercise; rather, he continued to thrive on clan power politics. As a result, power was exercised through clan territorialisation, making Somalia operate in a more power-diffuse way in the absence of a nation-state.

As a consequence of this territorial dishonesty, Al-Shabaab exploited this *incomplete governance space* – a space where the state is unwilling to exercise authority in certain areas. Indeed, the group's administrative structures are highly decentralized, taking into account the interests of various clan states. When the Somali state collapsed in January 1991, the resultant chaos brought AIAI (Al-itihaad al-Islamiya) to the centre of Somali society and gave them influence. Its first rallying call implored a society governed by Sharia law, resulting in relative peace in its territories. This early success incorrigibly endeared the people to fundamentalist groups. But, as the next section reveals, the evolution and the diffusion of Al-Shabaab is a complex phenomenon that goes beyond state fragility.

The three Typologies of Ungoverned Space

Before we examine the historical development of the Al-Shabaab phenomenon in Somalia, it is crucial to understand the various types of ungoverned spaces associated with state fragility. Somalia is considered as being a fragile state based on factors such as the unavailability or the extremely poor delivery of public services; state structures that lack political goodwill; and the lack of capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction and for the development and safeguarding of the security and human rights of its population.[42] In a 2008 report, the RAND Corporation characterizes ungoverned space as being a key defining parameter of fragile states. The convergence between state fragility and ungoverned space is defined by the presence or absence of effective governance structures.

There are three typologies of ungoverned space: contestations, incomplete governance, and capability.

First, (1) *contest*ations occur where a group contests the legitimacy of the government's rule, instead pledging loyalty to an insurgent movement or to a tribe, clan, or other identity groups that compete with the state for control. The various perspectives on how the Al-Shabaab terrorist group was formed seem to point to a *contested governance space*. On this account, some scholars observe that it is a remnant of Al-itihaad al Islamiyah.[43] Its fundamental objective was to topple the Siad Barre regime and to craft an Islamic state that would unite all the Somali-speaking peoples from Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia.[44] Similarly, Menkhaus argues that after Somalia's 1977 invasion of Ethiopia, the Somali state became like a house built on sand, as many radical groups contested its legitimacy. Indeed, President Siad Bare concentrated on survival tactics, mainly holding on to power by playing off opponents by using the aid that Somalia received during the cold war. The state's fragility – and, hence, the evolution of *contested governance space* – seems to have preceded

extremist organizations, as they began in the 1960s when radical Salafi and Wahhabi Islam were initiated in Somalia.

Initially, Somalis had been predominantly Sufis, who typically hold moderate views.[45] Somali Wahhabi and Salafi groups' continued interaction with the outside world (Afghanistan) was made possible due to failed statehood in Somalia. The lack of border control and enforcement arrangements created the opportunity for extremist groups to move freely to the outside world – an opportunity they took advantage of. It is therefore plausible to argue that Somalia's failed statehood, which characterises the conditions for an ungoverned space, strengthens the view in this article that the evolution of ungoverned space in the country has indeed contributed not only to the terrorist group's initial formation, but also to its continued diffusion into neighbouring states. The political environment in Afghanistan became unconducive to the operation of the Somali Wahhabi and Salafi groups. Hence, upon returning back to Somalia, these groups aligned with the radical views of Abdulla Azam, who was a proponent of pan-Islamism. Furthermore, having plotted how to form a fundamentalist organization, they succeeded by becoming leaders of Al-Shabaab. By the year 2000, the youthful members of the AIAI group transformed into Al-Shabab and enlisted the ICU (Islamic Courts Union) as its youth militia.

Secondly, (2) *incomplete governance* is where the state lacks the capacity and resources to exert control over its population and space. This 'lameness' of the state (a situation where its ability to project power is hobbled or crippled) can result in criminal syndicates, tribal groupings, or religious groupings filling the resultant territorial vacuum.

Finally, when triaging limited resources in a way deliberately designed to favor its most likely supporters, a state – in a blatant abdication of proper governance – may callously refuse to provide basic infrastructure and other public goods and services in some proscribed regions on the basis of ethnic, tribal, or political biases.

The first and second typologies characterize most of the insurgency and terrorist groups in Africa. Organized groups exploiting the ungoverned space may take different forms – forms such as Marxist, separatist or Islamist. In the Horn of Africa, for instance, the Al-Shabaab terrorist group has been advancing its agenda as an Islamist group, adhering to religious ideology. However, it is important to specify that the activities of Al-Shabaab go beyond its Islamic ideology. Its goal is to establish a caliphate to control the entire country. Hence, the discussion in this section – and indeed, in the entire article – will mainly reference the first two typologies (contested governance and incomplete governance).

There are arguments that Al-Shabaab is a recent phenomenon, having originated in 2005 when 30 extremists formed a movement that envisioned unifying all Islamic radicals, creating an Islamic state, and perpetuating jihad in the region.[46] Despite the varied historical accounts, the common denominators here remain incomplete governance and contested space. And in fact, the group continued to receive financial support from ICU and held 9 of the 97 seats that made the Shura council. As *explanatory* confirmation of the validity of its formative contestation of governance space, Al-Shabaab and ICU seized the port of Kismayu in September 2006 and went on to make the port financially stable.[47] From 1996 to 2000, Somalia's poor internal governance hastened the formation of Al-Shabaab. First, AIAI was weakened by Ethiopia's incursions after decrying its involvement with Ogaden rebels. Second, internal feuds amongst the Islamic fundamentalist leadership of AIAI weakened it even further.[48]

The third and final typology is (3) capability. Not only did the state itself collapse, but the various coalitions of warlords

also collapsed, thus reducing their capability to control territories. Consequently, the resultant power vacuum was filled by various courts, which adjudicated communal feuds. They later merged to form the radical ICU, which took Mogadishu in 2006. Meanwhile, the future leaders of Al-Shabaab travelled out of the country to receive training on how to wage jihad and form an Islamic state. For example, Farah Ayro went to Afghanistan, where he was hosted and trained by the Taliban regime. ICU ideology aimed to eliminate clan allegiance and galvanize the state under Sharia law, but instead inherited the rhetoric of Siad Barre on Somali state-building – thereby embracing clannism. The *incomplete governance spaces in Somalia* have accelerated the fragility of the country, thereby making it prone to being easily overrun by Islamic militias. It also creates an environment which risks pushing otherwise promising actors struggling to emerge as contenders for legitimacy within a radicalized climate to ultimately become too radical for neighbouring countries to work with.

The 2000 talks in Djibouti produced a Transitional National Government in Somalia (TNG). However, the weak regime failed to receive regional support amidst fears that it had affiliations with al-Qaeda. The August 1998 attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania had both been linked to the activities of the new leaders of the Somali government. Consequently, the regional framework under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) started a process to replace it.

How did the Al-Shabaab Terror Group Evolve?

Contemporary conflict psychology sees terrorist behaviour in its current form as being a relatively recent development brought into the limelight after the September 11 (9/11) attack against the US by the militant Islamist extremist network al-Qaeda. Subsequently, the deployment of US forces to reinforce AMISOM (the African Union Mission in Somalia) has been interpreted by Al-Shabaab and its allies as an attempt to subjugate Somalia and the Somali people's Islamic culture. This view is consistent with al-Qaeda leaders' proclamation of a fatwa from their base in Khartoum. This progressive spread of al-Qaeda's empathetic behaviour towards Somalia, in turn, shaped the rapid development of the presence, in the Horn of Africa, of the US and its allies – a presence including the provision of technical and personnel assistance to fight the extremist group within Somalia. As a result of the US incursion into Somalia, Osama bin Laden – moving with speed – created a cell in Nairobi Kenya, and supplied the warlords with weapons to help stand up an uphill-battle resistance against the US forces. Moreover, the declaration in December 2007 that Godane – an al-Qaeda member – was Al-Shabaab's defacto leader prompted the US to declare it a terrorist organization.[49] Regarding this link between Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda, historians have asserted that al-Shabaab seeks to remain relevant by adapting and reinventing itself.[50] The group seeks to reposition itself on the international stage by claiming to fight for the rights of Muslims in the Horn of Africa and beyond. The reasons behind this public relations campaign are twofold: firstly, to gain an ideological edge over ISIS (the Islamic State) in Somalia; and secondly, to win donor support among Gulf states that are sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinian people.

In what seemed to be contestation within a contested space, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) appropriated the anti-American feelings among the populace and successfully overthrew the warlords – kicking them out of Mogadishu in June 2006. But blinded by such successes, the ICU foolishly disregarded the convoluted power politics of the region and – in an

utterly astounding decision – instead threatened the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Baidoa with annihilation instead of diplomatically reaching out to their own natural allies in the TFG (a representative body comprising many potential allies – all of whom they alienated all at once).[51] This amplified rhetoric galvanized a consensus of international support against the group and gave Ethiopian forces much-needed impetus to intervene and topple the ICU. (The ICU took quite a fall: After having haughtily positioned itself as the saviour of Somalia, the ICU went from dominating Mogadishu to desperately fighting for survival in the statelet equivalent of urgently seeking intensive care.)

Astoundingly, Ethiopia's emergency intervention paradoxically gave the TFG an international lifeline while simultaneously rendering the TFG critically unpopular with the local population it claimed to represent.

What led to the rise of the ICU? Space contestation does not offer an exhaustive explanation of the ICU's rise and territorial expansion within Somalia. Additional factors, such as their predecessors' incomplete governance and abdication of responsibility, can also be seen as having contributed to the evolution of ungoverned space in the country.

What helped lead to the rise of Al-Shabaab? The Ethiopian occupying force held a marked advantage over the ICU in terms of military capabilities. As a result, the ICU responded with asymmetric warfare – ultimately including resorting to the use of suicide bombings carried out by its youth militia. This militia was Al-Shabaab. The ferocious nature of such attacks increased its prominence. Also, as the Ethiopian forces withdrew, the incoming AMISOM forces who came to replace them were mainly Christian. This strengthened Al-Shabab's side of the fight by enabling its members to mobilize support among radical groups by framing their role in the conflict as that of Muslim jihadists defending themselves against a crusade of so-called 'infidel' invaders. While facing off against AMISOM, Al-Shabaab – capitalizing on its international jihadi social-credit 'account' (which it had been adding to by building alliances) – drew on this 'account' by drawing foreign fighters and calling on foreign Muslim sympathizers to join the cause. Some Somali youths from America, despite (or perhaps because of) having only relatively limited exposure to geopolitics, fell victim to this Islamic theological propaganda and simplistically interpreted AMISOM's coordinated intervention as being a crusade against Muslims.[52]

One can also frame the above example in terms of Al-Shabaab capitalizing not only on their relationships with fellow jihadis (perhaps learning from the ICU's failure to do this), but also capitalizing on the contestation of ungoverned space – which, in the modern parlance of the American idiom, was (like an unclaimed ball) 'up for grabs' and (like an unpicked fruit) 'ripe for the taking'. Once it claimed its prize, it tenaciously defended what it had taken – even at the expense of potential rivals, discarding them when no longer useful (a self-preserving weakness which could be exploited by counterinsurgency specialists). For instance, more moderate groups such as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia were soon extinguished by Al-Shabaab's ruthless dominance and moral flexibility.

As mentioned previously, the way in which radical fundamentalist groups can fundamentally reshape not only the political map but even the moral map of a contested societal space can be visualized by picturing the way an ink blot spreads. For instance, both move in waves – what sociologists might call liminal 'waves of change.' These waves can move forward in different ways depending on the micro-geography of the sheet of paper across which they are moving. (This is one reason why different ink blots have different patterns.) Likewise, when dark waves of change attempt to inundate, submerge, sublimate, subjugate, or stain the values or conscience of a people, these waves will strike against long-standing

obstacles to its attempted domination of the societal terrain – unwanted obstacles such as traditional teachings or institutional memory. Like a river striking against a mountain, it has to adapt in order to achieve its goals. Sometimes it does so by going around the obstacle – such as by finding a way to temporarily coexist by forming a coalition of uneasy allies (in the way a spreading ink blot wave may circumvent a micro-obstacle by flowing around it). Other times, it indirectly undermines or directly attacks an opponent (in the way the leading edge of an ink blot wears its way through a micro-obstacle by soaking through it or submerging it). This is how it spreads.

Because new ideas spread in different ways, they result in different kinds of changes. Just as ink spreads in different patterns as it soaks through obstacles in different ways, attempts to 'soften up' a society by removing cultural barriers to a new ideology may manifest in various forms – including cultural adaptation, religious indoctrination, or ideological radicalization.

Depending on the micro-topography of the paper, some parts of an ink blot flow faster than others – just as different kinds of resistance can impede or speed the spread of an ideology (or military force) into and through areas of potential conquest. In the case of ink blot diffusion into virgin territory (corrupting the paper and staining its heart black as it succumbs), micro-gradients in the paper such as downward-angled channels (potential avenues of spread) can increase the rate of change by welcomingly facilitating it (in the way Soviet-era revolutionaries welcomed Stalin with open arms – not knowing they would ultimately be purged). In the case of Al-Shabaab's diffusion across borders, acceleration in the rate of diffusion is usually the result of influential members of the social system making the decision to radicalise new members and their decision being communicated to others who then blithely follow their leader and speed his rise to prominence – not realizing they may be doing so to their own detriment. Targeted disruption of this chain of trust can be a key strategy of counterinsurgency operations.

Dating from 2006, several factors facilitated the growth of Al-Shabaab as it metastasized beyond the ungoverned spaces in Somalia. First, it seized the opportunity to galvanize the local population around the hatred that they had towards the Christian invaders. Thus, it was able to near-effortlessly recruit and spread across the region, including in Kenya. Second, rather than engage in pitched conventional battles against the Ethiopian forces, it resorted to guerrilla campaigns against them, and later on waged asymmetric warfare on Kenyan soil. Third, they took the opportunity to depose the leaders of the ICU, who fled Somalia. Fourth is the social interaction among communities from both sides of the border, creating what I coin "cross-border 'homes'" and identities, as illustrated in Figure 2.
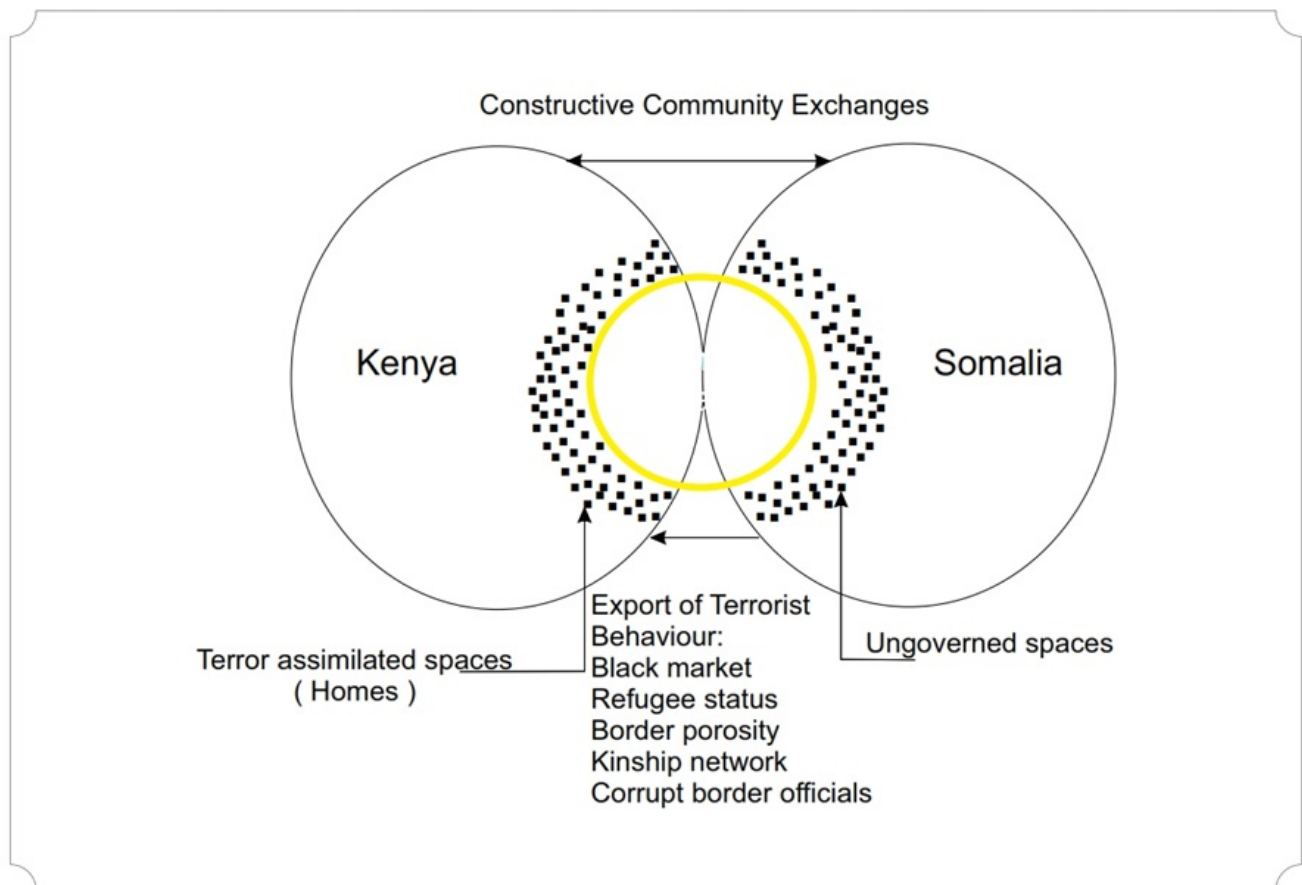
Figure 2. Formation of Cross-Border "Homes" and the Export of Terrorist Activities

Source: Author's construct of how terror-related activities, behaviours, and assets are 'exported' from ungoverned spaces in Somalia to the Kenyan space. It is important to note that the ethnic interactions between the Somalia Somalis and the Kenyan Somalis do not always lead to the destructive outcome of terror. There are other constructive outcomes such as trade, exchange of information, and social safety nets that communities benefit from through informal interactions.

Figure 2 illustrates how the al-Shabab group became more of a regional 'outfit' in part due to their view of how to galvanize the Greater Somalia space in terms of their foreign policy. The withdrawal of Ethiopian forces in 2009 and their replacements, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) comprised of soldiers from Uganda and Burundi, gave al-Shabab the much-needed reason to advance their cause beyond Somalia's territory. It effectively fashioned itself as a Muslim liberator against Christian crusaders. For example, in October 2008, the group carried out attacks on the Ethiopian consulate and government offices – attacks which claimed many causalities. In 2009, it bombed the African Union peacekeeping mission in Mogadishu – an attack which claimed the lives of more than 20 people.[53] Moreover, in 2010, the group acknowledged carrying out attacks in Kampala that left more than 70 people (including US citizens) dead.

In 2010, the group declared war on Kenya because of Kenya's support of the TFG and began to carry out attacks with increased frequency. On 16 October 2011, Kenya invaded southern Somalia; and its forces were integrated into AMISOM

in February 2012. The Elade attack on 15 January 2016, and the 2017 KDF camp attacks in Somalia, demonstrate that the military capabilities of the group and its acts of terror are still reminiscent of its peak days.[54] In both attacks, KDF camps were completely overrun, as hundreds of soldiers died and others fled. The following week, KDF announced its renewed attacks on the group's positions, indicating that the KDF's role in Somalia had completely metamorphosized from a conquering army to a reactionary peacekeeping force. From the foregoing discussion, although the structural growth of Al-Shabaab is a consequence of the rejection of Sufism and the view that radical Islam offered better prospects for the Somali nation, it is clear that decades of misrule and tribalism, endemic corruption, and the lack of nation-building initiatives are responsible for the formation of ungoverned spaces in Somalia, with the attendant dire consequences for Kenya's national security architecture.

Other Factors Elevating Kenya's Vulnerability to Al-Shabaab Attacks

The triggers for Al-Shabaab's sustained attacks on Kenyan soil go beyond the spatial deprivation (SD)*explanation*. Kenyan society sometimes lacks the kind of fervent patriotism that can be found among her neighbours such as Tanzania; and the idea of what constitutes being 'Kenyan' is, at times, a fluid construct.[55] Whereas the SD theoretical framework explains, to a large extent, the "ink blot" network of terrorist cells in Kenya, there are other underlying causes for the growth of that network. For instance, Kenya's high levels of bureaucratization coupled with streamlined infrastructure and ordered societies, provide anonymity to individuals who build successful terrorist cells. This adequately explains the presence of Al-Shabaab in the capital city, Nairobi. This scenario sharply contrasts with the environment in Somalia where the terrorist group originates from. Somalia has deep intricate inter-clan connections that dictate socio-political arrangements; hence, it makes outsiders easily detected or singled out. This portends danger to strangers if they don't get local protection. However, even in situations where foreigners get local support, deep-seated kinship ties would limit their influence. Indeed, the strength of "hard bonds" (nuclear family relations extended family, clannism, and ethnic affiliation) transcends that of "loose bonds" (interstate relations, foreign policy, and regional security arrangements), as illustrated in Figure 3. Therefore, counter-terrorism measures must prioritize the hard bonds in a bottom-top approach.
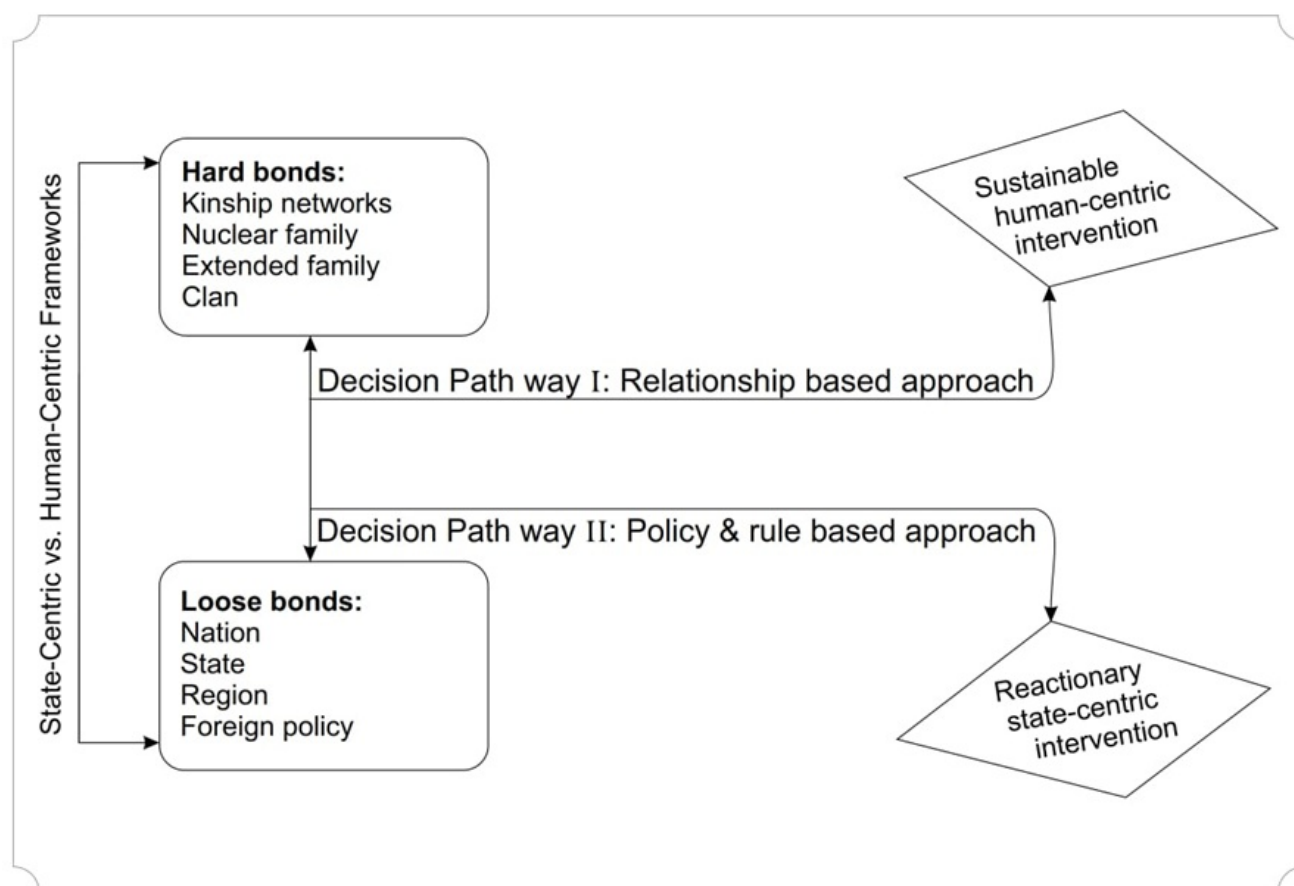
Figure 3. Proposed Decision-Making Pathway Model for Framing Counter-Terrorism Measures among Transnational Kinship Societies

Source: Author's construct comparing hard bonds and loose bonds and their respective implications on the outcome of counterterrorism strategies for the respective decision-making pathways of a) a relationship-based approach; and b) a policy- and rule-based approach.

Figure 3 above clearly illustrates the implications of each one of the decision pathways in tackling transnational terror activities leading to either a) relationship-based, long-term sustainable interventions, or b) state-centric approaches characterised by short-term, 'knee-jerk' reactions resulting in only temporary interventions with unsustainable outcomes. Al-Shabab's infiltration of Kenya's northeastern, Somali-speaking (kinship affiliation) region remains the key factor in accelerating the diffusion of terror groups across borders. Al-Shabab is said to be directly benefitting from Somali diaspora remittances through Kenya and Somali local businesses to finance their activities. With global remittances to Somalia averaging anywhere from USD $500 million to USD $1 billion, Al-Shabab has managed to recruit and train youth in Kenya, making its operations more discreet and more difficult to detect. Regarding Al-Shabaab's capitalization of kinship network ties to organize lethal attacks on Kenyan soil, a recent report on Kenya's decade-long military incursion into Somalia had this say:

> *"The profiling and arbitrary detentions, harassment, extortion, and even forcible relocation and expulsion, contributed to the alienation and grievances that provide rich fodder for radicalization and recruitment. Rather than attract adherents through ideology, al-Shabaab capitalized on Kenya's response and sought to identify with the disaffected communities, mainly at the coast and in north-eastern Kenya, in the process morphing from a distant threat that could be contained in Somalia to one that is now no longer easily identifiable."[56]*

It is clear the current CT model emphasises the interstate relations between Kenya and Somalia. Yet the consequence of the above (Figure 4) complex interethnic relationship is that it makes Kenya a soft target of Al-Shabaab, a terrorist organization with extensive networks across borders through kinship relationships. The nexus between Al-Shabaab in Kenya and Somalia lends credence to scholars who argue that state fragility is infectious as it spreads through countries in a region.[57] In a study conducted using simple-structured and semi-structured interview guides, Nisar Majid et al.[58] established a nexus between concentrations of remittances, clan connections, and kinship relationships. The study supports the hard bonds hypothesis in many ways. For instance, among the Somali families interviewed, people were found to have several other family members overseas, especially in Kenya, with virtually all those interviewed stating that they received remittances from abroad through extended-family-based or lineage-based networks. On the issue of family lineage among the Somalis, the British East Africa Institute's report by Nisar Majid et.al.[59] had this to say:

> *"There is a clear logic to this concentration of resources within extended families and sub-clans, reflecting historical processes of migration and a continuous process whereby families are likely to focus their financial support on enabling relatives to migrate. In some cases, this is enabled by official family reunification programmes in host countries[.....] but it also takes place through more informal channels. This process of migration[......] based livelihood change is understood in [terms of] resilience and vulnerability. It is a process] of social transformation, which takes place over extended periods of time."*

The above example illustrates [that] family relationship[s] can be both a springboard of resilience and a hotbed of vulnerability to [a] terror group. The group oscillates between Somalia and Kenya; and with no clear-cut distinction as to who belongs to the Al-Shabaab group, the radicalised elements are able to diffuse across borders with the aim of planning and executing terror attacks. Indeed, as we have seen in the above discussion, after the ungoverned spaces in Somalia provided a hospitable environment for terrorist groups, they looked for other havens where they would receive sympathy to grow and get recognition by exploiting underlying societal *grievances*. As Justin George postulates, states with weak institutions become a hospitable environment for religious extremists because of their structural disposition characterized by "fuzzy" international borders, post-colonial legacies, political corruption, the marginalization of large populations, and the scarcity of tangible social stabilizers.[60]

Although state fragility, as explained through the SD, makes it easy for terrorist networks to thrive in Kenya, the state of fragility alone would not result in the transnational operations of the group. Other factors like a feeling of deprivation and the ability to appropriate the economic and logistical advantages offered by Kenyan society have made Al-Shabaab

prominent in the country. Kenya's key partners in the Global War on Terror (GTW) – i.e, France, Israel, the UK, and the US – have spent significant sums on equipment and on building up the county's capacity to thwart terrorism. The country's security partners have aimed to equip her to smash terrorist cells on her soil and to secure western interests in the country. Moreover, these external initiatives have been reinforced by robust internal moves to enhance the capacity of counter-terrorism forces. There has been the creation of new anti-terror institutions such as the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU), the Joint Terrorist Task Force (JTF), and the National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC). Responses to terror attacks have been appalling. This can be accounted for by the elitists' interests in the security forces – interests which override national security priorities; coupled with the politicization and outsourcing of the security sector.[61]

In many of the incidences of combat operations against Al-Shabaab attacks, there has been weak coordination from the security apparatus, and various police divisions often act independently. There has also been a hiatus in command as various police divisions jostled over who should take command of the response. Astonishingly, for instance, in the Garissa attack, despite the presence of KDF soldiers who cordoned off the area, no one attempted to confront the gunmen who were shooting students in the halls of the residence. The thinking was that special forces trained to combat terrorist attacks (RECCE) would be best suited to handle the situation. But the elite combat team took a full 10 hours to arrive.[62] Al-Shabaab was able to achieve its objectives, not because of a lack of intelligence and requisite personnel among its opposition, but because of poor communication and coordination. Moreover, Kenya security agencies have detailed emergency response measures that should be taken in the case of an attack – but such response plans are useless if they are not used. Therefore, these systemic failures make Al-Shabaab successful in their operations, with their attacks' high casualty counts garnering headlines among the world's media.

The Inkblot Diffusion Theory and Kenya's National Security Architecture

In this section, I utilize '*ink blot*' diffusion logic to answer the question: What implications might the dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Somalia – and Al-Shabaab's regional network's exploitation of such spaces – have on how Kenya's national security architecture could be most effectively structured?

To begin with, there are several reasons why and several ways how the ungoverned space is responsible for the growth and survival of the Al-Shabaab terrorist group in Somalia. This phenomenon has evolved at the behest of the country's civil war and poor governance, which destroyed the judiciary system, leaving the country in an anarchical state and unwilling to provide its citizens with essential services such as security as well as adequate food, clean water, health care, and education. As a result, it led to the rise of leaders and the formation of militant groups dedicated to governing themselves using all means deemed necessary, including inducing fear. This observation is in line with this article's theoretical framework – the idea that state failure and, hence, the formation of *grievances*, is likely to attract terrorist organizations and other organized networks.[63] This is because failed states are vulnerable and are also prone to both relative deprivation (RD) and spatial deprivation (SD). Similarly, Lind et al. argue that a fragile and failed state like Somalia suits terrorist organizations in that the fragile state's outward manifestation of sovereignty limits outside intervention.[64] However, the controversial question of whether or not the formation and networking of such groups implicate neighboring

states in complicity due to their purportedly having unwittingly potentiated the growth of the network is an open question which remains unresolved. Critiques of the KDF's (Kenya Defense Force) intervention in Somalia put up a spirited argument that this security arrangement exposes Kenya to a myriad of terror attacks and security challenges. These arguments are also quite useful in understanding the regional spread of Al-Shabaab beyond the ungoverned space. Likewise, the three aforementioned propositions offer similarly useful, explanatory insight into the "ink blot"-like network of the terrorist group from its nucleus (the ungoverned space) to the periphery (the neighbouring state).

The first proposition is that within the broader framework of *spatial deprivation*, the definition of *ungoverned space* transcends state failure or governmental absences to encompass (1) a primordial existence of ethnic and tribal hierarchies, with their embedded customs and laws; (2) land populated by traditional nomadic tribes; (3) criminals; and (4) religious authorities. Within this theoretical framing, although Kenya is not officially considered as being a failed state – and hence, the spatial absence of ungoverned spaces – the "*ink blot*" effect of Al-Shabaab implicates the country's national security architecture. On this point, there has been a contention that Kenya's support for the Global War on Terror (GWT) negates the efforts that are made by the country's counter-terrorism strategy. On this note, Kenya's close ties with the State of Israel and the US make it susceptible to terror attacks. Related to this phenomenon is what Clunan and Trinkunas identify as being the fundamental elements of effective sovereignty. It is therefore important to frame ungoverned space beyond its origin point – that is, beyond the nucleus of the failed state. In this article, the effect of Al-Shabaab in a relatively strong state like Kenya is equally profound. This view has also been upheld by Kenya's top government officials. For example, when the former minister of foreign affairs visited Israel, he reiterated that Kenya becomes a prized terror target not because it harbours ungoverned spaces, but due to its close ties with Israel and the US. Moreover, the former leader of the Kenya Council of Imams, Sheikh Ali Shee, warned against the government's policy of supporting the US fight against terrorism. With the "fuzzy" borders between the two countries, such a policy placed the country in the unenviable situation of receiving retaliatory blows meant for the Americans.[65] Kenya's unwavering support of the War on Terror simultaneously strengthens and undermines its own security – because on the one hand, doing so bolsters its defence and increases regional stability (protecting vulnerable populations); while on the other, it puts itself in the line of fire and fuels propagandistic recruitment claims that Kenya expressly approves of US imperialism (as framed in crusadist terms).[66]

Al-Shabaab's attack in Nairobi on January 15th, 2019 – an attack that killed a dozen people, caused destruction to property, and injured hundreds of people – was done in retaliation to Kenya's global war on terror and deep ties with Israel and America.[67] The statements issued by Al-Shabaab confirming the responsibility for the attack claimed that the main reason for the attack was the US decision to confirm Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. As Anderson and McKnight asserted, Al-Shabaab seeks to advance its regional vision by adapting and reinventing itself. Faced with an imminent challenge from the Somali faction of ISIS (the Islamic State) – the group has declared war on Al-Shabaab – it now seeks to adopt an international status by claiming to fight for the rights of Muslims not only in the Horn of Africa, but wherever they may be in the world. The significance of such a statement is twofold: firstly, to assert its ideological edge over ISIS in Somalia; and second, to please its rich donors from the Gulf states who are sympathetic to the Palestinian plight. To reach a wider audience and generate the much-needed publicity necessary to attract its international donors, Al-Shabaab

launches its attacks in Kenya, because of the presence of free and robust media there. Al-Shabaab is cognizant that many reputable international media houses base their correspondence on Nairobi and know that launching more attacks in Kenya would propel it to the world stage to an even greater extent while at the same time enabling it to stay relevant at home. Therefore – to rebrand itself, mobilize support, and appeal for more funds – Al-Shabaab uses Kenya as its most effective platform. Through such methods, Al-Shabaab remains popular in Kenya, and many youths who harbour *grievances* against the Kenyan government for the ever-increasing unemployment situation find solitude in Al-Shabaab's regional network.

The second proposition under the *spatial derivational* theoretical framework is that a country can be prone to terrorist activities if the state cannot or is not willing to inhibit terrorism. In other words, a country cannot foil terrorist activities if its security regime does not have the requisite capacity and the justice system is inefficient and incompetent.[68] The most plausible explanation for the continued terrorist attacks on Kenyan soil is due to institutional weaknesses (especially the laxity in immigration laws) that have been exploited by Al-Shabaab and her sympathisers.[69] Although Kenya does not feature among the failed states, a combination of domestic structural weaknesses has embroiled the country into a haven and breeding ground for terror activities.

There are, however, some scholars who do not agree with the view that weak institutions are responsible for the evolution of terrorism. Newman cautions against the assumptions that a weak state would be ideal for terror groups to operate. He argues that even strong states do harbour terrorists as they appropriate to their advantage the great economic and logistic avenues present. For instance, on September 11, Al-Qaeda operatives operated freely in the US and Germany undetected.[70] The above structural school of thought contradicts the statehood thesis and seems to promote the view that terrorist activities thrive in an environment of weak nationhood – that Al-Shabaab is likely to export their behaviour to Kenya if they get local support from opinion leaders such as clerics or sheikhs. However, a majority of thinkers in this field seem to agree that terrorism is reinforced through weak states.[71] The Kenyan government enjoys legitimacy. However, deep corruption in state institutions, a reduced capacity to conduct border patrols, and the lack of support offered to militant groups by disaffected citizens are features that expose the country's national security to the risks of a terror attack. Therefore, the weak states thesis as a function of SD seems to contribute to the export of terror activities from ungoverned spaces in Somalia to Kenya. However, other underlying factors make Kenya a platform for al-Shabab-related activities and suggest that the weak state thesis alone is insufficient. There are weaker states than Kenya in the region, but terrorists can hardly operate there simply because of the way the society proudly upholds nationalism. At a later stage, it is the intention of this article to argue that it is the configuration of the Kenyan society, coupled with a relatively prosperous economy in the regional context, that makes it a darling of Al-Shabaab.

The third and final proposition is that given western countries' increasing lack of interest in intervening in terror activities in Africa,[72] there is enormous pressure on regional powers like South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya to assume a dominant role in fighting terrorism.[73] In other words, the African states are striving to address the *spatial deprivation* created by the global powers. Kenya is one of the leading regional powers that have been at the forefront of fighting terrorism in the horn of Africa (Cannon 2016). In 2011, due to continuous terrorist attacks, the Kenyan government resolved to intervene militarily in Somalia which it considered as being the heart of the Al-Shabaab terror group. However, from September

2013 to date, Kenya continues to be on the receiving end of the Al-Shabaab attacks. Some of these attacks on Kenya have been devastating. These include the January 2016 attack on the KDF camp in El-Adde (located in Gedo, Somalia, the 2015 Garissa University attack, the 2014 Mandera attack, and the 2013 Westgate terror attack.[74] However, these threats, and others like them, are less likely to substantially influence Kenya to withdraw troops from Somalia in the way that Black Hawk Down resulted in the US withdrawal. In any case, *Operation Linda Nchi* (Swahili for "Defend the Homeland") that had begun in 2011, though having officially ended in mid-2012, actually continues under the AMISOM umbrella. Al-Shabaab's mutational behaviour, especially its diffusion across borders into neighboring communities, makes it difficult to erase the group using state-centric counterterrorism measures. As Negasa Debisa[75] succinctly puts it in his security-diplomacy approach to the question of terrorism in the Horn of Africa, there is no single profile of the problem – and (thus) no single solution to it. Indeed, to date, Kenya continues to face scattered threats of terror attacks.

Although Kenya is not considered as being a fragile state, there are 'pockets' of peripheral extra-legal territories that experience minimal state presence and development. Such areas frown on being called Kenyan territory. Just as the whole idea of a single Somali nation can be questioned, some have argued that the country called Kenya exists without a nation. Consequently, Kenya has received challenges to its sovereignty from within. Such challenges have been posed by the Shiftas of Northern Kenya and MRC[76] separatists from Mombasa. This suggests that Kenya is not an*empirical statehood* but rather a juridical sovereign.[77] For example, the idea of the Kenyan state wanes as one moves away from the capital further north to the former northeastern province. Originally, the colonialists had used the area as a buffer zone against attacks from the Arabs and hostile tribes from Sudan. Consequently, they did little to introduce state structures, and their policy was not to disturb pre-colonial structures. However, after independence, this marginalization resulted in the need to belong to a more empirical state, and the inhabitants chose to join Somalia rather than remain in Kenya. They even declared war on Kenya – a war which was brutally suppressed by the founding Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta's government in Nairobi.[78]

Since Kenya's independence in 1963, the northeastern part of the country remained without infrastructural connections, with minimum to no presence of state machinery. The lack of state machinery or contestation of certain spaces, whether physical territories or non-physical spaces, coupled with the absence of effective state sovereignty and control, comprise of what political scientists have defined as being an 'ungoverned space'.[79] One consequence of this territorial lawlessness is that it makes the diffusion of extremist groups into the neighbouring territory much easier. Erratic attacks along the Kenya-Somali territorial border pose threats to regional stability; there have been a number of kidnapping incidents, together with trading in illicit goods. Al-Shabab and other international terrorists spread insecurity from areas that are highly ungoverned to other regions, attacking civilians and undermining transport routes. Kenya's border's porosity occasioned by corruption and the lack of a unified ethnic sense of belonging increases borders' vulnerability to the cross-border diffusion of terror activities. As a result, Al-Shabaab attacks in these areas happen every month against the few instances of government machinery, communication installations, and those perceived as being "foreigners." This is a combination of relative deprivation and spatial deprivation of the Somalis by the Kenyan state. The spatial deprivation phenomenon has particularly endeared the people of Somali origin to extremists to the point where such people are literally giving out information on the movements of non-Somali Christians to Al-Shabaab operatives who murder them.

There have been incidences where locals gather in the evenings to listen carefully to Al-Shabaab propaganda and religious rhetoric.

Conclusion

This article deployed inkblot diffusion logic to examine how the Al-Shabaab extremist group, based out of ungoverned spaces in Somalia, is able to spread across borders to Kenya through structural cracks such as black markets, refugee movements, border porosity, corruption among border officials, and kinship networks. The study shows that there is a likelihood of most of these factors reinforcing each other, and this article suggests ways in which these interconnections can frame counterterrorism (CT) strategies for stabilizing states. By framing CT scenarios as laid out in this article, researchers and policy actors can explore the extent to which the spatial diffusion of terror-related activities and behaviours is posing a threat to Kenya's peace and security and a threat to the national security of other states in the Horn of Africa. This suggests that, although inkblot diffusion logic can provide insight into the link between ungoverned spaces and the spatial distribution of certain behaviours and activities along kinship networks, this alone cannot fully explain most ideological, protracted guerilla warfare and elusiveness behaviours exhibited by the militant groups. For example, the tendency of Al-Shabaab toward carefully engaging in calculated behaviours deliberately designed to evoke Islamic empathy might not be facilitated either by the ungoverned spaces themselves or by other macro-facilitative factors such as border porosity. Rather, it is perhaps based on a very intuitive kinship connection.

The triangular relationship between territorial sovereignty, one-sided violence, and statehood becomes particularly significant because of the problems posed by the fluid nature of the terrorist group – a group which has the ability to "export" terror activities from ungoverned spaces to neighbouring states. This relationship is complex, and a major component of counter-terrorism is about containing the diffusion of the inevitable "*ink-blot*"-like networks of a terrorist group. Ungoverned space forms the nucleus of this network. However, the implication of terrorist activities outside the epicentre is as corrosive as that at the nucleus. Therefore, the war on terror in Kenya cannot be won by simply focusing on remedying the ungoverned spaces in Somalia. As part of its efforts to tackle the Al-Shabaab terrorist group, Kenya's national security architecture must be cognizant of the vulnerability of the local population and of enfeebled community institutions that are already frustrated by the limitations of formal governance systems. Therefore, the purpose of effective sovereignty, territorial integrity, and nation-building are to manage the ink-blot networks of Al-Shabaab. Ungoverned space is inevitable in fragile or failed states such as Somalia – but must this always lead to ripple effects within neighbouring states?

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