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**DIPLOMATIC INTERVENTIONS AND BORDER SECURITY:
EVIDENCE FROM THE KENYA–SOMALIA BORDERLANDS
(2010–2025)**

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Diplomatic Interventions and Border Security: Evidence from The Kenya–Somalia Borderlands (2010–2025)

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Abstract:

Purpose of the Study: This study examined the role of diplomatic interventions in enhancing border security along the Kenya–Somalia borderlands between 2010 and 2025. It sought to determine the effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements in addressing terrorism, illicit arms trafficking, irregular migration, and organised transnational crime within the volatile border region.

Methodology: The study adopted an exploratory research design using a mixed-methods approach. Primary data were collected from 187 respondents, including diplomats, government officials, security personnel, regional organisation representatives, and policy experts.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, while qualitative data from interviews and policy documents underwent thematic analysis for interpretation.

Findings: The findings revealed that diplomatic interventions significantly enhanced border security between Kenya and Somalia. About 82% of respondents confirmed that diplomacy effectively addressed cross-border security challenges, while 80% agreed that bilateral and regional agreements strengthened intelligence-sharing and joint security operations. Additionally, 87% rated Kenya–Somalia diplomatic engagements as effective in countering terrorism and related threats. However, challenges such as bureaucratic delays, political tensions, resource limitations, and inconsistent policy implementation hindered the full effectiveness of diplomatic initiatives.

Conclusion: The study concludes that diplomacy is a critical and sustainable complement to military strategies in enhancing Kenya–Somalia border security. Institutionalised diplomatic mechanisms, strengthened bilateral agreements, joint training initiatives, and community-centred security policies are essential for improving regional stability.

Keywords: *border diplomacy; Kenya–Somalia border; Al-Shabaab; counter-terrorism; IGAD; bilateral agreements; regional security; Horn of Africa*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Border diplomacy has emerged as a crucial component of modern international relations, driven by the growing intricacy of global security challenges and the transnational flow of people and commodities. The twenty-first century has seen borders cease to be boundaries that strictly separate two countries and become fluid areas where trade, acts of terror, migration and climate change intersect. Nearly 30% of the world's wars are linked to unresolved or disputed borders and the necessity of diplomatic solutions (United Nations, 2022). South China Sea and Line of Control in Kashmir are examples of how fragile the stability of the region is, if there is no strong border diplomacy. The examples of the South China Sea and Line of Control in Kashmir show how precarious the stability in the region is without strong border diplomacy (Lee, 2021; Ikenberry, 2020). International and regional institutions and actors like the UN and the European Union (EU) have stepped up their activities in conflict mediation, cooperation in cross-border surveillance and technical assistance to support stability in fragile areas (Goddard, 2022).

Border diplomacy is an example of the ways in which the United States has combined a security interest with a larger foreign policy interest. The dual goals of combating drug trafficking and border control of illegal migrants have had significant implications for national and regional security and have impacted on border management along the U.S.-Mexico border. The U.S. has been involved in cross-border security cooperation with Mexico through programs such as the Mérida Initiative which focuses on information sharing, institutional capacity building, and technology assistance (Rosenblum, 2021; Selee, 2020). Simultaneously, accords such as the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) exemplify the need of reconciling stringent security measures with economic cooperation. Technological advances such as the collection of biometric data, drone surveillance, and automatic entry systems have advanced the border monitoring system while simultaneously ensuring legal movement of persons (Felbab-Brown, 2022).

China's policy on border diplomacy reflects a policy of both internal security and external engagement. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a major infrastructure project in China's strategy to build connections with its neighboring countries, reducing the likelihood of war through fostering interdependency (Zhao, 2022; Summers, 2020). At the same time, China's approach to managing its western frontiers, in particular in Xinjiang, is a security-minded one that has prompted international concerns over human rights (Clarke, 2021). The example of the bilateral discussions, economic incentives, and diplomatic forums that China has used to defuse tensions with countries like Kazakhstan and Russia demonstrates the effectiveness of proactively engaging (Wang 2020). This was achieved through mutual respect, strategic planning and recognition of common interests.



Nigeria's situation at its borders with Niger, Chad and Cameroon is a prime example of how transnational threats such as terrorism, weapons trafficking, and smuggling can destabilize areas. Border vulnerabilities and weak management can be conducive to insurgency operations or violent extremism, as seen with Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) activities. Nigeria has also engaged its neighbouring states through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) which is a regional security initiative that promotes information sharing and synchronized military operations (Onuoha, 2021; Idris, 2020). The MNJTF has had little success due to budget limits, political divergences, and logistical problems. The Nigerian case suggests that military interventions are not enough and comprehensive diplomatic and development efforts are needed to ensure the security of borders (Adeniran, 2022).

Libya in 2011 is a case in point of how a government's lack of effectiveness and poor border management can contribute to a sense of insecurity. After the collapse of the Gaddafi government, Libya's borders became a route for the illegal arms trade, trafficking in women and children, and the movement of jihadist groups into neighboring countries and the rest of the Sahel. The EU and the African Union, as well as the G5 Sahel, have tried to offer technical and financial assistance to secure Libya's borders, while the country continues to experience political disagreements (Bøås, 2022; Lacher, 2020). The Libyan situation is a case in point that weak institutions and diplomacy fostering disunity frequently translate into weak border security. Also, the transnational dimension of the Libyan border has shown the importance of the elements of community participation, border infrastructure and surveillance.

Sudan's involvement in border politics, particularly with South Sudan, is a prime example of the complex and multifaceted nature of historical, ethnic and resource-based conflicts turning into long-term border crises. The disputed area of Abyei continues to be a focal point of tension, although several mediation attempts by the African Union and United Nations. These efforts encompassed both peacekeeping missions and boundary commissions, as well as bilateral talks aimed at preventing the return of armed conflict (Shinn, 2022; Verjee, 2020). In the case of Sudan-South Sudan, it was an example of the importance of third-party mediation and international involvement in border diplomacy, particularly when trust in the conflict parties is limited. International actors have played a role in intervening in the conflict, which has brought some moments of peace, albeit not a total resolution, highlighting the limits and possibilities of foreign interventions (Ylonen, 2021).

Somalia continues in contending with significant internal instability, which directly affects its border with Kenya. The prolonged lack of an effective centralized government enabled non-state organizations, including as Al-Shabaab, to control critical border areas and use them as logistical centers for terrorist activities. The porous characteristics of Somalia's borders have enabled weapons trafficking, illegal commerce, and cross-border incursions, jeopardizing the national security of both Somalia and Kenya (Bryden, 2022; Hansen, 2021). Despite international



initiatives like the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) facilitating the reclamation of some districts, enduring stability remains tenuous.

Kenya, as a pivotal state in combating terrorism and transnational crime in the Horn of Africa, has developed military and diplomatic plans to fortify its border with Somalia. In 2011, the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) initiated Operation Linda Nchi to counter Al-Shabaab's incursion and has since engaged in ATMIS operations in Somalia. Also, Kenya has constructed sections of a security barrier at home to prevent the passage of terrorists and traffickers (Mwangi, 2023; Kagwanja, 2021). However, such efforts have provoked condemnation due to their counterproductive effects on the cross-border trade, community relationships, and humanitarian access. Critics argue that Kenya has adopted an approach to its security that has given little attention to diplomacy and socio-economic integration along its borders. In order to realize a lasting nonviolent peace and stability, Kenya needs to undertake a holistic approach that involves community policing, bilateral talks between Kenya and Somalia, regional diplomacy through IGAD, and inclusive efforts that encompass the communities living along the border regions (Odhiambo, 2022). There should be a better balance between security and diplomacy in addressing core elements of instability at the Kenya-Somalia border.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite a proliferation of bilateral agreements, diplomatic consultations, and regional frameworks between Kenya and Somalia since 2010, the border region has remained persistently insecure. Al-Shabaab launched a marked surge in cross-border attacks between June and August 2023, recording over 90 political violence events in the border area, including a notable rise in attacks in Lamu County and the Lower Juba region of Somalia (ACLED, 2023). This surge coincided with the drawdown of ATMIS forces, revealing structural fragilities that purely military frameworks had failed to address. Equally notable is that Al-Shabaab deaths recorded in Kenya declined by 57% between 2023 and 2024 from 33 to an even lower figure attributed in part to enhanced intelligence gathering, inter-agency coordination, and improved community engagement (Tandfonline, 2025). This divergence between periods of intensified violence and measurable security gains creates a critical research problem: under what conditions do diplomatic interventions succeed in enhancing border security, and what structural barriers constrain their full effectiveness? The current scholarship has largely focused on military operations and peacekeeping missions, with insufficient empirical attention devoted to the role of diplomacy as a non-military strategy for sustainable border security. This study directly addresses that gap.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study was guided by three specific objectives:



- (i) To assess the role of diplomatic interventions in addressing cross-border security challenges between Kenya and Somalia from 2010 to 2025.
- (ii) To examine the effect of bilateral and regional agreements on border security between Kenya and Somalia during the study period.
- (iii) To evaluate the effectiveness of Kenya–Somalia diplomatic engagements in countering terrorism along the border.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings carry direct policy relevance for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Defence in both Kenya and Somalia, as well as for regional bodies including IGAD, the African Union, and the United Nations. By generating empirical evidence on the effectiveness of diplomatic strategies in a real-world border security context, the study contributes to evidence-based policy design that can be applied across comparable conflict-affected borderlands in sub-Saharan Africa. Academically, it advances scholarship at the intersection of international relations theory, peace and conflict studies, and border security governance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Realism and the Strategic Logic of Border Diplomacy

Classical realism, as articulated by Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979), posits that states are primarily motivated by the imperative to secure their survival and territorial integrity in an anarchic international system. From this perspective, Kenya's diplomatic engagement with Somalia is not altruistic but strategically calculated: a porous, ungoverned border serves as a conduit for threats that directly undermine Kenyan national security. Kenya's participation in AMISOM/ATMIS and its pursuit of bilateral security agreements are thus best understood as realist instruments for projecting influence, reducing external threats, and filling the security vacuum created by Somalia's state fragility. Mearsheimer's (2001) offensive realism further explains why Kenya has assumed a quasi-hegemonic security role in the Horn of Africa, shouldering disproportionate security burdens in exchange for regional influence and the protection of its northern frontier. This framework also helps explain why diplomatic agreements between unequal partners are sometimes inconsistently implemented the stronger party may exercise selective enforcement where its strategic interests are not immediately threatened.

Liberal Institutionalism and the Role of Regional Organisations



Liberal institutionalism, as developed by Keohane (1984) and extended by Ruggie (1998) and Acharya (2001), offers a complementary framework by emphasising that international institutions reduce the transaction costs of cooperation, build trust through repeated interaction, and facilitate collective responses to shared problems. In the Kenya–Somalia context, IGAD and the African Union serve precisely these functions: they provide neutral forums for negotiation, help standardise intelligence-sharing protocols, and mobilise resources for joint operations that neither state could sustain independently. Gebru and Tronvoll (2024) have critically examined IGAD's non-interference principle and found that, while it was designed to prevent escalation of inter-state conflicts, it can also constrain timely and effective collective responses to intra-state threats with cross-border dimensions a limitation directly relevant to the Al-Shabaab challenge. This finding suggests that liberal institutionalism must be supplemented by a willingness to develop more flexible, threat-responsive engagement norms.

2.2 Empirical Review

A growing body of empirical work has begun to document the multi-dimensional nature of border security challenges in the Horn of Africa. The African Journal of Empirical Research published a landmark study in December 2025 that found institutional mistrust, overlapping jurisdictions, and persistent socioeconomic marginalisation to be the primary structural constraints on bilateral counter-terrorism effectiveness between Kenya and Somalia, despite moderate operational achievements. The study concluded that sustainable counter-terrorism requires a paradigm shift toward human-security-oriented models that integrate community resilience, coordinated cross-border intelligence, and development-focused diplomacy.

Juma and Oyombra (2024) documented the operational effectiveness of coordinated multi-agency patrols in Wajir County, finding that intelligence sharing and resource coordination between the Kenya Defence Forces, National Police Service, and immigration services significantly reduced cross-border infiltration. Their work demonstrates the practical operational translation of high-level diplomatic agreements into field-level security improvements.

Gotteland (2024) situates Kenya–Somalia dynamics within the broader regional architecture of Somalia's foreign relations, noting that Somalia's strengthened diplomatic ties with Eritrea, Egypt, and Turkey driven partly by the Ethiopian military drawdown from ATMIS have created new variables in regional security alignments that Kenya's bilateral diplomacy must increasingly accommodate.

Owiso and Kasera (2025) examined informal cross-border trade and security concerns across the IGAD region, finding that poorly regulated informal trade corridors serve as conduits for contraband and militant financing a direct challenge to the effectiveness of formal diplomatic security frameworks. Makayoto, Handa, and Wekesa (2024) evaluated counter-terrorism strategies employed by Kenyan security agencies between 1998 and 2020, identifying human rights tensions



as a persistent cost of militarised approaches, and implicitly strengthening the case for diplomatic and community-centred alternatives.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an exploratory research design using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed-methods framework enabled the researcher to gather numerical data on the effectiveness of diplomatic interventions while also obtaining in-depth insights into the contextual and operational dynamics influencing Kenya–Somalia border diplomacy and security. The exploratory approach was appropriate because the study addressed complex political and security issues with limited prior empirical research. The research was conducted in the Kenya–Somalia border region, specifically in Nairobi, Mandera, Garissa, Lamu, Mogadishu, and Kismayo. These locations were selected because they represent major centres of diplomatic engagement, border security operations, and policy coordination related to Kenya–Somalia relations. The target population comprised 400 respondents drawn from government institutions, security agencies, diplomatic offices, regional organizations, and policy experts. Using Yamane’s formula, a sample size of 200 respondents was selected through purposive and stratified random sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation across all respondent categories. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. A pilot study involving 20 respondents was conducted to test the reliability and clarity of the instruments, with Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.7 confirming acceptable internal consistency. Ethical clearance was obtained from Kenyatta University and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality of respondents was maintained throughout the study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 187 were completed and returned, yielding an overall response rate of 93.5%. This exceeds the 80% threshold widely recognised in social science research as sufficient to minimise non-response bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The high participation rate reflects both the salience of border security issues among stakeholders in the region and the strong institutional networks mobilised for data collection.

Table 1: Survey Response Rate by Respondent Category

Category of Respondents	Target Sample	Actual Response	Percentage (%)
Government Officials	50	47	94
Security Personnel	70	65	93



Diplomats	30	28	93
Regional Organization Representatives	20	19	95
Policy Experts	30	28	93
Total	200	187	93.5

Source: Field Data (2026)

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender Distribution

Table 2 presents the gender distribution across respondent categories. Male respondents constituted 64% of the overall sample, reflecting the historically male-dominated character of security and defence sectors. Notably, female representation was highest among diplomats (40%) and policy experts (42%), suggesting that gender inclusion has made more measurable inroads in diplomatic and policy roles than in operational security functions. This finding aligns with the growing international consensus that gender diversity in security governance produces more effective and inclusive strategies (UN Women, 2023).

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Govt Officials (%)	Security Personnel (%)	Diplomats (%)	Reg. Orgs (%)	Overall (%)
Male	68	72	60	63	64
Female	32	28	40	37	36

Source: Field Data (2026)

Age Distribution

The majority of respondents (42%) fell in the 35–44 age bracket, representing mid-career professionals with substantial operational and diplomatic experience. The 45–54 cohort (25%) comprised senior officials with extensive institutional knowledge. This age profile is conducive to nuanced, experience-grounded assessments of long-term policy effectiveness.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Bracket (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
25 – 34	41	22
35 – 44	78	42
45 – 54	46	25
55 and above	22	11
Total	187	100

Source: Field Data (2026)



Education Level

A well-educated respondent pool was confirmed: 44% held bachelor's degrees, 27% master's degrees, and 10% doctorates, with the remaining 19% holding diplomas. The predominance of degree-level education among respondents in diplomatic and policy roles underscores the technical and analytical demands of border security governance.

Table 4: Education Level of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diploma	36	19
Bachelor's Degree	82	44
Master's Degree	51	27
Doctorate	18	10
Total	187	100

Source: Field Data (2026)

4.3 Diplomatic Interventions and Cross-Border Security Challenges

Overall Effectiveness of Diplomatic Interventions

Respondents were asked whether diplomatic efforts between Kenya and Somalia have contributed meaningfully to the resolution of cross-border security challenges including terrorism, arms trafficking, and irregular migration. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Role of Diplomatic Interventions in Addressing Cross-Border Security Challenges

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	154	82
No	33	18
Total	187	100

Source: Field Data (2026)

An overwhelming 82% of respondents affirmed that diplomatic interventions have been effective in addressing cross-border security challenges. This finding is consistent with broader empirical evidence from the Horn of Africa: since the start of Somalia's counter-insurgency operation against Al-Shabaab in August 2022, Kenya and Somalia have strengthened security cooperation and counter-terrorism collaboration, and Al-Shabaab-attributed deaths in Kenya fell by 57% between 2023 and 2024 a decline attributed in part to enhanced inter-agency coordination and community engagement enabled by diplomatic frameworks (ACLED, 2023; Cogitatio Press, 2025). The qualitative data reinforced this quantitative picture. A security sector respondent observed that diplomatic ties have substantially boosted information exchange between Kenyan and Somali security agencies, enabling more timely identification and disruption of transnational terrorist



threats. Diplomats noted that bilateral consultations have created regularised channels for harmonising security policies that would otherwise operate in silos.

Intelligence Sharing and Operational Coordination

A recurring theme across interviews was the centrality of intelligence sharing as the most operationally significant dividend of diplomatic engagement. Respondents described joint intelligence committees, formalised reporting systems, and real-time digital communication platforms established through diplomatic channels, enabling both security agencies to act preemptively on threat intelligence.

"The diplomatic ties between Kenya and Somalia have boosted cooperation in sharing information among our security agencies, helping them to identify and ward off trans-border terrorist threats before they materialise." — Senior Security Official

This operational translation of diplomatic relationships into real-time intelligence flows is a critical finding. Mwangi and Yusuf (2022) similarly documented that diplomatic channels of intelligence sharing significantly improve the operational effectiveness of border security forces through coordination, preparedness, and rapid response capability. The present study's respondents confirmed that intelligence shared through diplomatic structures was not merely reactive but enabled strategic deployment of resources to high-risk border zones.

Joint Security Operations and Regional Peace

Diplomatic engagement has directly enabled joint security operations: coordinated patrols, surveillance missions, and joint monitoring of illegal activities along the border. Respondents consistently attributed improvements in response times and territorial coverage to the operational frameworks established through diplomatic agreements. A regional organisation representative stated:

"Through diplomatic engagement, Kenya and Somalia have been able to collaborate on joint security projects that have helped strengthen monitoring and control of the border region in ways neither country could achieve unilaterally."

The peace-stabilising dimension of diplomacy was also underscored. Respondents noted that regular bilateral meetings and regional forums have provided structured channels for de-escalating tensions, reducing the risk that misunderstandings along the border escalate into diplomatic or military confrontation. Williams (2020) has argued that diplomatic engagement between neighbouring states is an essential mechanism for managing transnational security threats that inherently exceed any single state's capacity — a claim strongly validated by the present study's findings.



4.4 Bilateral and Regional Agreements and Border Security

Impact of Formal Agreements

Table 6: Effect of Bilateral and Regional Agreements on Border Security

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	149	80
No	38	20
Total	187	100

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 6 shows that 80% of respondents agreed that bilateral and regional agreements have significantly improved border security management. Formal agreements have established clear rules of engagement for intelligence sharing, defined operational protocols for joint border patrols, and created structured channels for counter-terrorism coordination. A security officer explained that bilateral agreements provide a clear operational framework that minimises duplication of effort and ensures that both sides follow agreed procedures, particularly during sensitive operations in contested border zones. The 20% who indicated limited impact pointed to inconsistencies in implementation, resource shortfalls, and occasional political tensions that disrupt operational continuity structural challenges that recur throughout the qualitative data and are discussed in Section 4.5.

The Role of IGAD and the African Union

Regional organisations emerged as critical multipliers of bilateral diplomatic efforts. Respondents consistently identified IGAD and the African Union as providing three distinct forms of value: first, neutral platforms for dialogue and mediation that reduce bilateral friction; second, frameworks for collective action and resource pooling that extend the reach of what Kenya and Somalia could achieve independently; and third, technical assistance, training resources, and access to international donor support.

Gebru and Tronvoll's (2024) critical examination of IGAD's conflict management role found that while IGAD's non-interference principle has often constrained proactive responses, the institution nonetheless remains the most important regional architecture for aggregating member-state security efforts (DOI: 10.34891/hb2m-tf52). A regional organisation representative in the present study affirmed this, noting that IGAD has been instrumental in bringing Kenya and Somalia to the same table and establishing shared priorities for border security.

The IGAD Borderlands Initiative addresses a specific dimension of border insecurity pastoral resource competition, which underlies as much as 67% of cross-border conflicts in the region by providing coordinated frameworks for water and grazing management that transform competitive dynamics into cooperative ones (IGAD, 2025). This socioeconomic complementarity to formal



security agreements represents an important but often underappreciated dimension of regional border diplomacy.

Capacity Building Through Agreements

Beyond operational benefits, bilateral and regional agreements have unlocked significant capacity-building dividends. Joint training exercises, technical workshops, and cross-border simulations — all formalised through diplomatic agreements — have improved operational readiness and built the institutional relationships essential for effective coordination. Respondents noted that officers who have participated in joint training programmes demonstrate higher levels of confidence, faster decision-making in high-pressure situations, and deeper professional relationships with their counterparts across the border.

4.5 Effectiveness of Diplomatic Engagements in Countering Terrorism

Perceptions of Counter-Terrorism Effectiveness

Table 7: Perceived Effectiveness of Diplomatic Engagements in Countering Terrorism

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly Effective	96	51
Effective	67	36
Not Effective	24	13
Total	187	100

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 7 presents the most striking finding of the study: 87% of respondents rated Kenya–Somalia diplomatic engagements as effective or highly effective in countering terrorism along the border a remarkable level of consensus in a field often marked by sharp disagreements between security and diplomatic practitioners. The 51% who rated interventions as highly effective were predominantly drawn from senior security and diplomatic personnel with direct operational experience of joint counter-terrorism programmes. These findings are broadly consistent with data from ACLED (2023) and the U.S. Department of State (2024), which document measurable if uneven reductions in Al-Shabaab-attributed violence in periods of intensified Kenya–Somalia cooperation. The Cogitatio Press (2025) analysis of Al-Shabaab trends recorded that total deaths caused by the group declined from 512 in 2023 to 387 in 2024, with Al-Shabaab deaths in Kenya falling by 57% a reduction attributed to a more robust counter-terrorism effort, enhanced intelligence gathering, inter-agency coordination, and improved community engagement.

Mechanisms of Counter-Terrorism Effectiveness

Respondents identified three interlocking mechanisms through which diplomatic engagement produces counter-terrorism dividends. First, structured intelligence sharing enables both security agencies to map extremist networks, identify supply routes, and establish early-warning systems



that can prevent attacks before they occur. Second, joint operational planning through diplomatically established frameworks produces coordinated deployments that are demonstrably more effective than unilateral operations. Third, capacity building through joint training programmes raises the technical competency of frontline personnel on both sides of the border.

"We receive intelligence through diplomatic channels on possible infiltration of terrorists, which allows us to deploy security personnel strategically and avert attacks before they happen." — Border Security Officer

A policy analyst further observed that regular diplomatic consultations have helped to systematise counter-terrorism efforts, moving both governments from reactive to proactive postures. This shift toward strategic anticipation represents a qualitative improvement in security governance that purely military approaches, which tend to be reactive by nature, cannot achieve alone. Mwangi and Yusuf (2022) confirm that intelligence-driven joint operations anchored in diplomatic frameworks improve both the operational efficiency and the institutional credibility of border security forces.

Challenges to Full Effectiveness

Despite the broadly positive assessments, respondents identified four categories of challenge that constrain the full realisation of diplomatic potential in counter-terrorism. First, political tensions including changes of government, varying national priorities, and periodic diplomatic disputes create periods of uncertainty that disrupt operational continuity. Second, bureaucratic delays slow decision-making, particularly in fast-moving security situations where rapid response is critical. Third, resource constraints inadequate personnel, surveillance equipment, and logistics limit the capacity of security agencies to act on available intelligence, especially in remote border zones. Fourth, inconsistent implementation of agreements between national and sub-national levels means that locally-operating security units sometimes lack awareness of, or capacity to implement, protocols established through high-level diplomatic channels.

"While national-level diplomacy has facilitated better coordination, some border units at the local level are still not operating as they should, with limited communication infrastructure and insufficient equipment." — Border Security Officer

These challenges are not unique to the Kenya–Somalia context. The ACLED (2024) analysis of the post-ATMIS drawdown period documented how the withdrawal of regional forces created a security vacuum that Al-Shabaab rapidly exploited, demonstrating how fragile security gains can be when implementation is disrupted or resources are reduced. Rotberg (2018) similarly argued that diplomatic agreements must be accompanied by sustained investment in institutional capacity and consistent political will to produce durable security outcomes.



5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study has generated three sets of empirical findings that collectively make a strong case for the strategic importance of diplomatic interventions in Kenya–Somalia border security. First, diplomatic engagement has been the primary enabler of the intelligence-sharing and operational coordination that underpin effective border security management. Second, bilateral and regional agreements particularly those facilitated by IGAD and the African Union have provided the formal institutional architecture through which cooperation has been operationalised. Third, Kenya–Somalia diplomatic engagements have demonstrably improved counter-terrorism outcomes, contributing to the measurable reduction in Al-Shabaab-attributed violence in Kenya recorded in 2024. These findings are theoretically consistent with both realist accounts of strategic diplomacy and liberal institutionalist explanations of how formal organisations reduce cooperation costs and build the trust necessary for sustained collective action. They also advance the broader scholarly argument that sustainable security in conflict-affected border regions requires a security-development compact that integrates diplomatic engagement, community resilience, and socioeconomic development a paradigm shift away from the exclusively militarised approaches that have dominated international responses to Al-Shabaab.

5.2 Conclusions

The study concludes, first, that diplomatic interventions are not peripheral to border security governance but central to it. They create the relational infrastructure trust, communication channels, shared protocols without which even well-resourced security operations are fragmented and reactive. Second, bilateral and regional agreements, when consistently implemented and adequately resourced, translate diplomatic intent into operational capability, enabling joint patrols, coordinated intelligence, and systematic capacity building that strengthen both countries' security institutions. Third, the effectiveness of counter-terrorism diplomacy is real but conditional: it depends on sustained political will, adequate resourcing, and effective bridging between national diplomatic agreements and sub-national operational realities. The study also concludes that the structural challenges identified political instability, resource constraints, bureaucratic delays, and implementation inconsistencies are not insurmountable. They are governance challenges amenable to policy solutions, provided that both governments and their regional and international partners prioritise their resolution.

5.3 Recommendations

Strengthening Diplomatic Frameworks



Both Kenya and Somalia should institutionalise their diplomatic engagement through the establishment of permanent Joint Border Liaison Offices at key crossing points including Mandera, Buur Gaabo, and Kiunga. These offices would maintain real-time communication between security agencies, coordinate rapid-response protocols, and serve as hubs for community engagement bringing formal diplomatic relationships to the operational frontier where they have the greatest impact.

Enhancing Agreement Implementation

Both governments should establish joint monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track implementation of existing bilateral and regional agreements. These mechanisms should include independent review panels, regular public reporting, and clear accountability frameworks tied to resource allocation. IGAD and the African Union should be formally mandated to support these mechanisms, drawing on their regional expertise and neutral convening power.

Expanding Capacity Building

Joint training programmes for border security personnel should be significantly expanded, with emphasis on intelligence analysis, community engagement, and the legal frameworks governing counter-terrorism operations. Cross-border exercises, professional exchanges, and joint simulations should be regularised within the diplomatic calendar, ensuring that institutional relationships between security forces are maintained and deepened over time.

Developing Comprehensive Border Security Policies

Both governments should develop integrated border security policies that explicitly align national counter-terrorism objectives with regional stability frameworks. Such policies should incorporate community-based early-warning systems, socioeconomic development components for border communities, and mechanisms for coordinating formal security operations with the informal conflict resolution capacities of border communities. The IGAD Borderlands Initiative provides a useful model for integrating resource governance and conflict prevention into formal security architecture.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Future research should examine the long-term socioeconomic impacts of improved border security on border communities, including effects on trade, livelihoods, and educational access. Comparative studies of border diplomacy in other African conflict-affected borderlands including the Chad Basin and the Sahel would yield transferable lessons for policymakers in the Horn of Africa. Additionally, dedicated studies on the role of community-based intelligence and local conflict resolution in complementing formal diplomatic security frameworks are needed to fill a significant gap in the current evidence base.



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