

# Trapped: My Twelve-Hour Ordeal in DusitD2

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## Nowhere to Run: How Urban Terrorism Is Impacting Nairobi's Architecture and Public Spaces

It is nearly impossible to go a single day in Nairobi without going through "security." It is a part of the urban landscape. Surveillance cameras, sniffer dogs, metal detectors, and concrete walls are all meant to deter terrorists and petty criminals; they communicate fortification, even in grocery stores and gyms.

But the visual language of security is full of paradoxes; while the quasi-militarised architecture seeks to reassure the public that we are safe from attack, it simultaneously acknowledges that we are *indeed* under attack, and all the time - only one unpredictable, unfortunate moment away from siege.

Another paradox: we endorse these forms of security through our daily acquiescence, but at the same time acknowledge its superficiality. Each time a bored or underpaid guard waves a metal detector wand around us -ignoring the beeping sound - and glances through our bags, we tell ourselves that this the whole exercise is pointless. Yet few complain or change their behaviour. And terrorist attacks continue to happen.

On 15 January, in 14 Riverside, which hosts the DusitD2 hotel and various commercial offices, a suicide bomber detonated himself at the Secret Garden Café. Other attackers forced their way through the single entrance using hand grenades and automatic weapons. Many victims were, tragically and fatefully, barricaded inside a "fortress." While the vast majority of people trapped within the compound were rescued by private and state security forces, by the end of the

siege, [21 people](#) had been killed. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

George Musamali, a security analyst and CEO of the security firm Executive Protection Services, argues that the method of terrorist attacks evolves following the path of least resistance and that Kenya's security apparatus has failed to keep up with the terrorists. Airplane hijackings, for example, were more common until heightened airport security made them more difficult. Then, car bombings like the twin attacks on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, became more common. Musamali says that after that restrictions on acquiring and transporting large quantities of explosives made this type of terrorist attack more difficult.

Now, of all the attacks in Kenya that have been claimed by Al Shabaab since 2011, the majority have involved active shooters. In the case of 14 Riverside, the same provisions that would have protected people from a bomb blast may have sealed victims in. Musamali says, "If you look at the modus operandi of Al Shabaab, they force their way in. More measures being recommended are not being implemented, so that's why you find it so easy for Al Shabaab to use the same method in 2015 as in 2019. They see no change in tactics."

The 14 Riverside attack has reinvigorated valid concerns about the security of commercial complexes in Nairobi, as key gaps in security at 14 Riverside are replicated in many other malls and compounds throughout the country. Perhaps the question we need to ask is what security really means for the public. Until then, we will continue to be sniffed, scanned, patted - and let through.

### **Guards, gadgets and now guns**

Nairobi has always been a city obsessed with insecurity and, as a result, its residents are accustomed to security and surveillance. Because Nairobi did not truly ever break out of its original colonial, race-segregated lines, it got a head start on the privatisation of "public" space in the name of "securing" it. Mike Davis, writing about Los Angeles in the 1980s, pointed out that "the universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the [destruction of any truly democratic urban space](#).... The 'public' spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity." He could just as well be describing Nairobi.

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*commercial complexes in Nairobi, as key gaps in security at 14 Riverside are replicated in many other malls and compounds throughout the country. Perhaps the question we need to ask is what security really means for the public. Until then, we will continue to be sniffed, scanned, patted - and let through.*

A mosaic of fences and walls is designed to provide social insulation for upper class residents from the threat of the public poor. In this way, Nairobians have come to develop a peculiarly comfortable relationship with security apparatuses that would seem severe in other cities. Through perimeter walls, barbed wire, guards, and gates, Nairobi polices its social boundaries. “The [fear of the criminal other](#) has shaped Nairobi’s built form in profound ways,” writes anthropologist Constance Smith, “but has also led to a new architecture of desire and aspiration, influencing architectural aesthetics.” The security apparatus is not only an extension of fear, but also a marker of aspiration.

Because the public is so inured to life behind high walls and barbed wire (or outside of them) - in contrast with other cities where “the right to the street” is taken for granted - in Nairobi the extraordinary ubiquity of security is tolerated. It is more important that security is seen rather than guaranteed. Security consultant Andrew Franklin criticises what he calls the “industry of fear,” which is the market’s response to urban terrorism: “guards, gadgets, and now guns.” If this were not the case, perhaps there would be more investment in tactics that are less visible but equally effective.

For a mall, the bulk of the work in detecting and preventing a terror attack is painfully mundane. It is unglamorous, says Franklin, like examining food delivery boda bodas that move in and out of compounds, often unchecked. Or scanning deliveries that come in before dawn and get loaded in the morning. Franklin suggests that at least some of the ammunition used at the 14 Riverside attack was already within the compound - an insight echoed by other analysts with whom I spoke - indicating large gaps in security that have nothing to do with what people see when they enter and exit every day.

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Another important but undervalued tool is counter-surveillance. Musamali recommends that malls, in addition to hiring trained observers to monitor suspicious activity, should also equip tenants with specialised observation skills. In London, for example, the city combatted terrorist attacks by the Irish Republican Army in part by training ordinary people to spot and flag behaviours that mark intention to plan a terror attack.

## **Locked city**

Sometimes, in addition to being inconvenient, the architecture of security may actually compromise security. With its single entry point, the design of the 14 Riverside complex may have jeopardised the lives of those inside. One independent security analyst I spoke to (who chose to remain anonymous) said that there were originally meant to be twelve attackers at 14 Riverside. “Logistics made it difficult for the other to pursue. One group was supposed to actively engage in killing of hostages and the other six were supposed to engage the responders,” he said. “The other team did not arrive on time. [14 Riverside] only has one entrance. It could have been devastating.”

“We’re living in a concrete city where everyone has locked themselves in,” says Musamali. “If someone manages to break your access control, compromise it, and get in, then you definitely have given them easy targets because people do not have escape routes.”

The former analyst added that he knew the independent security company that previously completed a security assessment at 14 Riverside. Because the compound was originally intended to be only an office space, he said, there were additional recommendations the security company made to accommodate the presence of a hotel. Those suggestions were not heeded.

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Indeed, there is no legal obligation for building managements to achieve a certain standard of security, and those that do exist are seldom enforced. For example, the [Occupational Safety and Health Act](#) (2007) requires that all employers ensure

that their employees are familiar with fire escape routes. Nevertheless, fire drills are few and far between. In the case of 14 Riverside, not all who were trapped within the building knew of or were able to access the small pedestrian walkway in the rear.

Furthermore, and equally disturbing, there are scant standards or guidelines for private security companies in Nairobi. Byron Adera, a pioneer Kenya Special Forces officer and security consultant, says that mediocrity runs throughout the sector: “You see different uniforms, different malls, but it’s the same kind of searching that is done. They’ve got a wand in their hands, and they sweep you without asking questions if it beeps.”

To fill the void in industry standards, Adera and other former military personnel have formed the Association of Corporate and Industrial Security Management Professionals, an organisation that liaises with the government, security providers, building managements, and other stakeholders to develop and enforce standards for security providers.

But, even if there are standards of quality for security provision, there is no obligation for mall managements to invest in it—and, perhaps worryingly, little financial incentive to do so. Previously, the (anonymous) analyst had been approached by the management of a well-known mall in Westlands to run a security audit, but, after quoting the cost of his services, the management decided not to move forward, citing cost. “The management of these properties only look at the bottom line,” he said. “They don’t look at other factors.”

In other countries, it is understood that the intention of terrorists is to make crowded spaces “empty” - to terrorise the public into retreating inwards in fear. But in Nairobi, where inclusive, truly public spaces have long been “designed” out, where the attack happened in one of the most insulated, formidable-looking, closed-off, “safest” places, the horror of urban terror attacks runs deeper.

On 4 February 2019, the U.S. Embassy issued a warning to its citizens to avoid areas frequented by tourists and foreigners, as there was risk of another terror attack. The risk will not wane. For the first time, for the city’s walled-off elites, there are no “safe zones” left. Not only are the trappings of security to which we comply daily ineffective but they are perhaps the very thing which makes us targets.

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# Trapped: My Twelve-Hour Ordeal in DusitD2

On Tuesday, January 15, my editor sent me on what I thought would be a routine, if unnecessary, assignment. I was to do an interview with George Ooko, the chief executive officer of the Commission for Revenue Allocation (CRA), which was to run in NTV's 9pm bulletin. As the reporter, I thought my story on county revenue was strong enough with the video clips we already had, and that it could run without it. But I was overruled, and along with my cameraman Dickson Onyango, I grudgingly set off for the DusitD2 complex on 14 Riverside Drive where CRA's offices are located.

The afternoon was sunny, hotter than usual, and dry. Our interview had been scheduled for 2:30 pm, but because of logistical challenges, we arrived at the venue some minutes past 2:40 pm. I was already anxious and irritable.

We were ushered into the boardroom of CRA's offices, located somewhere on the third floor of Grosvenor building, which is adjacent to the Dusit hotel.

Our interviewee Ooko arrived, and Dickson and I spent a few minutes setting up before settling down for the interview. But just before I asked my first question, we heard a loud explosion that must have lasted a few seconds and shook the entire building.

At first, we thought that the explosion was from a different building, perhaps from another office compound. But then, it was followed by gunshots. I remained unmoved in my seat, because I had not wrapped my mind around the fact that our building was under attack.

Ooko suggested that we hold the interview until we figured out what was happening. But just then, we heard a second explosion, again closely followed by gunshots. It is at this point that the CEO dashed to his office, leaving Dickson and I in the conference room.

From the windows, we could see people on the ground floor running for safety using the back exits with the help of the security guards. By this time, staff members who were on our floor started running up and down the corridors. We got up and followed them, not really knowing where we were going.

I was running for the stairs holding the camera bag, which had other equipment inside; it weighed about 10kg. Dickson was holding the tripod and the camera.

On reaching the stairs, we found a crowd of people scampering for safety. Nobody at this point had figured out what was going on; the flight down the staircase was confused and disorganised. In my hands, I was still gripping the bag.

Dickson, thinking like a journalist, asked me to carry the tripod with the camera bag. He wanted to capture some video. But just before he could frame his shot, one of the assailants shot at us, forcing everyone to scamper for safety. The sound of the gun was so loud that we thought he had shot at us from inside the building, perhaps from the ground floor through the staircase.

And because of the terror, I remember freezing on my way up for a few seconds before I regained my senses. Dickson was running for the lifts, which I thought was not a good idea, but driven by panic I followed him. But the lifts did not open.

I ran into the nearest open door, which turned out to be the door that led to the washrooms on the first floor. Inside, I found some people, whose number I could not figure out at that moment. It is in this washroom that I remember mumbling some prayers to God for safety.

But once we entered one of the cubicles, our fears grew. Someone whose identity we could not figure out was trying to gain access to the washroom from the ceiling, which was cracking under his heavy weight. I didn't have time to think of how bizarre this was, or how on earth that person got there. We were just looking for somewhere to hide.

We ended up in an open space just outside the washroom, which was a room under renovation. Again, a shot was fired towards the window, I guess after one of the attackers saw us from outside. We ran back to the washroom without thinking twice, just that this time around we ran into the first cubicle, the second one's ceiling having proven unsafe. It later turned out that the "intruder" was one of the staff members of the CRA, who was stuck on the second floor. By this time I

had abandoned the camera bag and the tripod in the empty room.



WATCH: As it Happened: Attack on  
14 Riverside, Nairobi

We were seven people in the first cubicle, its small size notwithstanding. The second one now had other people. Our first thought was to lock the main door of the washroom from the inside before we locked the door of the small cubicle. I do not remember the person who offered to lock the main door leading to the washroom. All I can remember is that the last man who entered the cubicle, a tall clean-shaven man, was the one who locked the door of the cubicle.

I remember one of the people I was hiding with in the cubicle was breathing heavily, loud gasping breaths which scared most of us. In our thinking, any slight sound would alert the attackers to where we were. Our attempts to ask the good old man, who I later learnt was Prof. Edward Akong'o Oyugi, to manage his breathing, fell on deaf ears, adding to our turmoil.

I was sitting on the toilet seat, which I believed was the safest position and was away from the door, just in case one of the attackers gained access and tried shooting through the door of the cubicle.

But my comfort did not last. Since Prof. Oyugi, who by this time was leaning on the door of the cubicle, could not control his breathing, someone asked me to give up my seat for him. It meant that I would take up his position, which I thought was riskier since I would be standing directly opposite the door. But I got up, and gave the old man the seat.

The other people had taken up all the safe spots away from the door. I decided to squeeze myself to the side of the toilet seat. The other two men squeezed themselves on the opposite side, while another two stood on the opposite direction, but away from the door.

The heat inside out cubicle was beginning to get thicker and hotter. My standing position was also getting uncomfortable. Because of the squeezed space between the toilet seat and the wall, I had to stand on one leg, and switch to the other often.

Any slight noise sent us all into a panic. I remember at one point someone in the opposite cubicle had tried flushing the toilet, I do not know for what reason, throwing the whole washroom into further panic mode.

By this time, the shooting was rampant, punctuated by tense silence.

I remember one man who had taken refuge in the wash area where the sinks were mumbling a prayer. In the adjacent cubicle, I could hear some people whispering what I believed were their last prayers. One was on the phone, telling the person on the other end that we were under attack.

The time now was heading towards 4pm. At this point, I decided to alert my colleagues in the newsroom on what was happening.

I checked my phone and news was already spreading that DusitD2 complex was under attack. I was scared for my life. I remember making a prayer to God asking him not to send me to hell if I died.

The ensuing hours would be some of my longest. We would swap sitting positions, but carefully so as not to make noise. My legs grew sore at some point, but the thought of getting killed in case I went outside the washroom kept me stuck in my position.

Lucky for us, the washrooms were air-conditioned, which helped cool the damp air that was increasingly filling up the space. My fear, however, was the gap underneath the cubicle door, which easily exposed our legs. We all tried as much as we could to push ourselves as far from the door as possible.

As time went by, the air in the washroom become thicker and heavier. I took off my tie and waistcoat, and so did the others. Seconds turned to minutes, and minutes into hours. We didn't speak much to each other. How could we? What can you tell six other strangers in that moment?

To keep myself distracted, I stayed in communication by text message with friends and colleagues, who were encouraging me to keep strong.

There were occasional gunshots, which made us jump every single time. At some point, we heard someone try to gain access of the main door that led to the washrooms where we were in. We could not tell who it was, because they never gained entry.

We kept silent, and the good old professor tried to control his breathing, even though he occasionally went back to his “default setting”.

I remember telling the people I was hiding with that help had come after my colleagues in the newsroom informed me that the police had arrived at the scene. This was sometime after 4pm. Little did I know that I would spend the next 12 hours holed up in the same place.

I had by then not informed my parents about the situation since I knew they would get too anxious and panicky. But I kept contact with my colleagues. My bosses had also reached out to me, asking me not to lose hope as they were trying all they could to get me help. I remember speaking to Dickson just a few minutes after we separated, telling him that I was hiding inside one of the washrooms on the first floor. I later learnt that he was hiding on the same floor, but in a different room.

I remember one dear friend from work asking me to keep communicating with her through text messages. I know she was trying to keep me calm. This, however, did not last long, as my phone battery died. I do not remember what time it was, but before my phone went off, I gave her a number of one of the people I was with so that she could reach me.

I informed my parents of what was happening some minutes past 10 pm with the help of a friend. And since I knew how agitated my father would become, I told my friend to notify my mother first. I can't imagine what she felt at that moment.

News had by this time spread that two NTV journalists were part of the hostages trapped inside the complex. That in part got me worried, because I could not imagine what would happen if the terrorists got wind of this and stormed our hiding place.

At some point, I lost hope, thinking that we would only be rescued in the morning. But we resolved that we would fight the attackers, and at least die fighting in case they got to us.

Sometimes towards midnight, we heard loud noises and the lights suddenly went off. We agreed not to open the doors until we were sure that those knocking were the police.

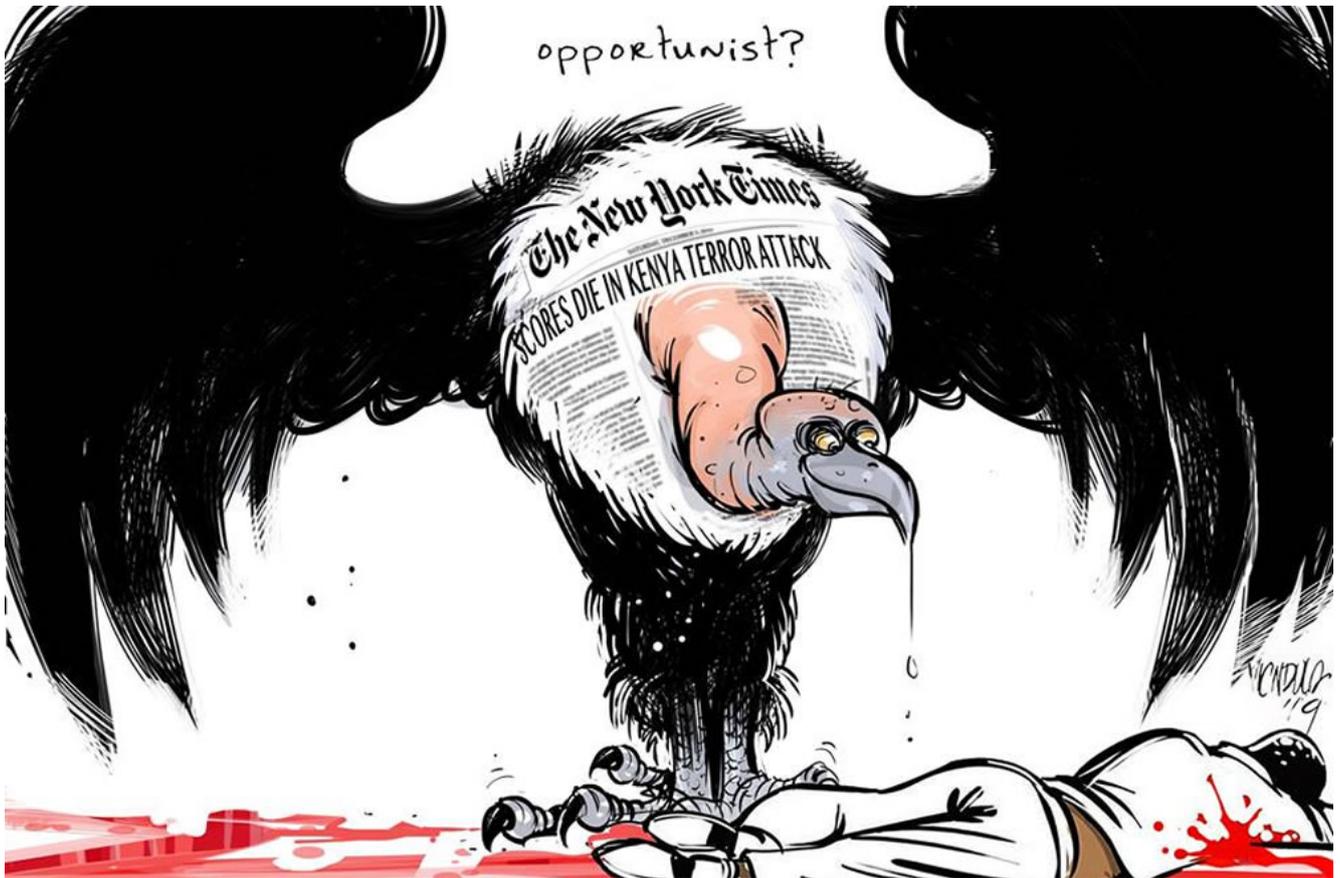
We stayed in darkness for another two to three hours before we finally heard footsteps inside the building. When the police got to us, we were ordered to walk out one by one, with our hands raised up. They frisked us before asking us to sit down at a central place as they combed other rooms looking for hostages. The time was about 3:45 am.

Those 12 hours taught me the value of family and friends, and that life is a gift. Live every day as if it was your last day alive, because one of these days, you might just be right.

I occasionally get paranoid. I am still afraid of being in the dark. Noises and bangs on the door scare me a lot. I am afraid of staying in crowded places. I get anxious being by myself. I still live scared. But I hope it will end soon.

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## **The Vanguards of Democrazy!**



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## **Rebranding Al Shabaab: Geopolitics, Greed, Ineptitude and the Losing Battle Against Terror**

We live in a world where the most crucial aspects of our lives have become profoundly interconnected and indeed interdependent. And this reality, needless to say, makes international cooperation for security a strategic imperative.

Unfortunately, when it comes to security, and more specifically terrorism and counterterrorism, the marketability of one's expertise mainly depends on one's willingness to unquestionably embrace the official narrative. In the West and across the Middle East and Africa, the media and pundits have become relentless echo chambers of this master narrative.

How has that master narrative made our world safer in the past two decades? Do we not have more terrorists today than when the global war on terrorism was launched and have not despots and corrupt rulers around the world joined the cause? Is it not time to pose the question: Why is insecurity dealt with as though it exists in vacuum?

Considering the prominence of what I call the dis-strategic approach to fight Al Shabaab, I believe that things are likely to get worse before they start getting better.

### **FGS: An imaginary government**

Almost every aspect of security in Somalia is outsourced to foreign actors with deeply entrenched competing interests. Though their scopes vary, none of these actors are accountable to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), which has fostered a condition that entirely lacks strategic cohesion and centralised command and control.

A case in point: The Kenyan Defence Force (KDF) has a free hand in Jubbaland and the Kenyan government has more clout in that federal state than the FGS. (Capturing the port of Kismaayo in Jubbaland from Al Shabaab was a stated goal of KDF when it invaded Somalia in October 2011.)

Similarly, Ethiopia has a free hand in Baay and Bakool regions of the South West federal state. While both Kenya and Ethiopia are part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom), they have been operating strategically independent of the mission that was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council and funded by the international community. The troops on the ground from Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda mainly take their orders from their respective governments in Nairobi, Addis Ababa or Kampala.

Like its predecessors, the current FGS has not been able to subdue Al Shabaab, significantly improve security or to implement a robust strategy to claim a monopoly on violence. Around mid-2017, FGS staged a targeted disarmament campaign in Mogadishu that proved to be subjective and problematic as it was interpreted as a sub-clan defanging operation. This ill-advised campaign ignited inter-clan tensions that continue to get worse.

When the dust settled, the FGS reactivated a controversial foreign-driven

cooption strategy initiated by the previous government to lure top Al Shabaab militants to defect and join the government. This strategy led to some key government appointments, such as that of [Zakariya Ahmed Hersi](#) - believed to be the man who orchestrated the deadly Garissa University College attack in Kenya - who is now one of the top officials at Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA).

In August 2017, Mukhtar Robow (aka Abu Mansour), who was the former spokesman and a deputy leader of Al Shabaab, defected. For more than a year, Robow was treated like a celebrity who had only played the role of a terrorist on TV. Robow then embarked on a government-funded rebranding campaign. During that period, he met with a number of traditional clan elders, international diplomats, including the British Ambassador, and various government officials and Members of Parliament.

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Initially, the FGS and the international community presented Robow as a model of de-radicalisation; both were eager to allow him to participate in the South West federal state election. When it looked like Robow was winning the election, something suddenly compelled the FGS to pull the rug under him - a process that caused deaths in Baidoa, the arrest of Robow, and the expulsion of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General which subsequently led to domestic and international [consequences](#).

The irony is that up till now, Al Shabaab has been successfully outperforming the FGS in almost all fronts: in terms of governance and a monopoly on violence in areas which it controls, collecting "taxes" or extortion money without preferring one group or economic class over another, providing humanitarian services, such as distribution of goats and sheep during Eid, and "administering justice". So effective are Al Shabaab's courts that people who are in business disputes or those whose houses have been occupied by a member of a strong clan often seek

rulings in their courts. Unlike the FGS courts, where such rulings could change so many times due to bribes and counter-bribes, Al Shabaab's rulings are final. Or, as is widely known, there will be some serious consequences.

Add the controversial arrest of Robow and FGS' reputation of silencing its opponents by taking draconian measures against them and the government comes across as less democratic than the terrorists they helped rebrand. This could have negative implications on the state-building project in Somalia.

Despite the façade of competence that it projects to those that readily fund its "war against Al Shabaab", the FGS has been crippled by various projects that auction out Somalia's natural sources to the highest shady bidder. This is why the FGS has not gained an inch of new territory from Al Shabaab in the past two years.

### **Kenya's supposed war on terror**

Kenya is only second to Somalia when it comes to being the stage of some very spectacular terror acts by Al Shabaab. These include the Westgate mall attack in September 2013 where 67 people were killed, the Garissa University College attack in April 2015 that claimed the lives of 147 students, and the latest attack in January 2019 targeting the Dusit building complex in Nairobi where more than 20 people died.

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Due to the political fault lines, or the dynamics of colonial legacy, the politics of domination, the ever-mutating geopolitical interests that are often masqueraded as a war against terrorism, Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia (and rest of the Horn) are likely to remain volatile. And, as if this is not perilous enough, both Kenya and Ethiopia are bent on advancing their own [political, economic, and security interests in Somalia](#) while keeping diplomatic doors open and counting on successive incompetent and corrupt Somali governments that fail to recognise the importance of reconciling within itself and its own people before demanding

substantive respect to its sovereignty.

Meanwhile - and perhaps in a way that is less covert than Ethiopia's cooperation with Al Shabaab (elaboration below) - KDF has been executing Kenya's plan to unilaterally establish a buffer zone in an area that technically annexes Somali territory. KDF has been providing support to Jubbaland's leaders who implicitly endorse the wall that Kenya says it is building along the Kenya-Somalia border. Kenya has also controversially laid claim to a section of Somalia's maritime border, a triangle rich in oil; this case is currently before the [International Court of Justice](#). And in recent months, Jubbaland's leadership has technically severed its relationship with the FGS.

Moreover, it has been alleged that KDF operates an illegal enterprise with Al Shabaab and corrupt Somali officials. As recent reports have revealed, [KDF is "in business"](#) with the terrorist organisation. It helps them in "tax collection" at checkpoints and in smuggling contraband. A 2015 report titled "[Black and White: Kenya's Criminal Racket in Somalia](#)", stated that KDF was involved in a \$400-million sugar and charcoal smuggling scheme that funded Al Shabaab militants in Somalia. The report further claimed that profits from this illicit trade were being split between the Jubbaland administration of Ahmed Madobe (whose militia fought alongside KDF as they marched towards Kismaayo), KDF officials and Al Shabaab.

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These realities have corroded Kenya's goodwill capital.

### **Ethiopia's counterproductive intelligence**

Unlike Kenya, much of Ethiopia's insecurity is the side effect of authoritarian rule of the previous regime and the brutality of its security forces. It is worth noting that it was US-backed Ethiopian forces that pushed the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) out of Mogadishu in 2006; later on Al Shabaab forced the Ethiopian forces out of Somalia and took control of large swathes of central and southern Somalia, including the capital. This begs the question: How did Ethiopia manage to escape Al Shabaab's wrath despite being the country that destroyed the UIC and that

carried out [the most brutal occupation](#) in Somalia's history between 2007 and 2009?

The answer partially lies in the fact that there is not a single clan-based faction or armed religious sect in Somalia that the previous Ethiopian regime did not arm, fund and supply subjective intelligence data to in order to eradicate their rival groups. This divide-and-rule strategy has proved to be counterproductive and has led to the growth of armed groups that were previously unarmed.

Back in 2007, shortly after the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, the RAND Corporation published a book titled [Building Moderate Muslim Networks](#). The book offered what many policymakers in the West considered a viable strategy in countering extremism and curtailing terrorism: to arm, empower, and boost the image of "Sufi Muslims" who were willing to fight against the "Salafi jihadis" who were coming to destroy the graves and tombs of their holy men. Ethiopia became the testing ground; hence the growth of Ahlu Sunna WalJama'a (ASWJ), a paramilitary religious group of various shades that operates in some parts of Somalia.

But ASWJ could not be trusted to become a powerful faction with one common objective and command structure. After all, legendary freedom fighters, such as Sayyid Mohamed Abdulla Hassan of Somalia, Omar Mukhtar of Libya and the Mahdi Muhammad Ahmed of Sudan were all Sufis. Therefore, ASWJ had to be supported along sub-clan basis in order to ensure perpetual fragmentation and to sow seeds of mistrust. This was not too difficult for Ethiopia; it was already using a similar strategy against warlords, Al Shabaab, and the Ras Kamboni militia, a defunct extremist group.

### **The transnational threat pretext**

For terrorism to be curtailed, the local and the international press must scrutinise the official narrative in order to get to the bottom of the dynamics at play; it is the only way to filter out real terrorism from geopolitical gambits.

You may recall that back in 2002, a group calling itself the [Army of Palestine](#) fired anti-aircraft missiles at an Israeli airplane in Kenya, using two shoulder-launched missiles, only to miss and abandon their valuable arsenal for the Kenyan police to discover before the same group re-emerged in a suicide car bomb attack on a hotel ( Paradise Beach resort, Kikambala) populated by Israeli nationals, [claiming](#)

[the lives of nine Kenyans and three Israeli tourists](#). The Army of Palestine has since ridden off into the horizon, never to be heard from again.

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Seventeen years later, we have Al Shabaab using radicalised Kenyans, [claiming responsibility for the DusitD2 Hotel](#) terror attack and stating it “was retaliation for US President Donald Trump’s decision to declare Jerusalem the capital city of Israel”.

Of course the statement does not answer the critical questions that come to mind: What took them this long? Why this particular target? What does Kenya have to do with a decision made by the U.S. and Israel? But it does establish a sound pretext for Israel—which has been actively expanding its influence in Africa—to establish a military presence in the Horn in order to stop Al Shabaab’s transnational threats in their tracks.

### **Commonsensical counterterrorism**

Globally, as well as regionally, when it comes to understanding the causes and effects of terrorism, most have surrendered their commonsense and capacity to think critically to their respective authorities, who often subjectively frame their perceptions. Frightened minds naturally lend their full trust to and seek protection from the authorities, even when these authorities have nothing more than a false sense of security to offer.

Cooperation must be based on good faith and willingness to explore data beyond the fear of discovering other issues that may challenge our preconceived realities. When collaborating nations submissively get locked into a single story or an officially packaged master narrative that terrorists are only driven by religious extremism and that they are better dealt with when dead, one must take a quick scan through the rear view mirror of history.

Sustainable security will remain a pie in the sky as long the international community continues its Amisom-focused stabilisation initiative at the expense of rebuilding robust Somali military and security forces that are capable of keeping

extremists at bay and securing Somalia's borders.

And Somalia and its neighbours will not vanquish terror while Kenya, Ethiopia and their allies remain knee-deep in Somalia's internal political affairs and continue to exert influence on various Somali "leaders" by fuelling factional or clan-based politics.

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## **As it Happened: Attack on 14 Riverside, Nairobi**