

KENYA'S REGIONAL DIPLOMACY: PERIPHERAL OR ADAPTIVE PRAGMATISM?

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ABSTRACT

Kenya maintains close bilateral and multilateral relations with all its neighbouring states. However, analysts have argued that Kenya lags behind in taking up strong positions at the regional and international levels, unlike some other key states in the region. With the most competitive economy in the region, a relatively well-educated population and a well-trained workforce, the question is why the country has not consistently converted these comparative advantages into a pivotal political influence in the region. Kenya has been faced with disparate challenges amounting to varying levels of regional engagement throughout the administrations of Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki, as well as the current regime of Uhuru Kenyatta. Despite its economic and military power, Kenya's foreign relations have been characterised as moderately and passively engaging, with the exception of Moi, who more actively became involved in resolving regional conflicts and tensions. The country has in many respects behaved in a way that some analysts describe as 'punching below its weight' in a region in need of more robust leadership.

Analysts of Kenya's foreign policy are beginning to question whether a diplomatic shift took place under the Kibaki and now the Uhuru Kenyatta administration. This comes in the aftermath of the Kenyan incursion into Somalia in 2011, which is, to date, the most extreme display of 'hard power' in Kenya's post-colonial history. Under Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenya has managed to galvanise regional and African support against the International Criminal Court. Over the past two years, it has also played host to various high-profile world leaders, among them US President Barrack Obama, China's Premier Li Keqiang, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and South Korean President Park Geun-hye.

However, the question for Kenya is how to frame regional strategic priorities and wield the relevant tools.

With conflicts in South Sudan and Burundi and the protracted insurgency by the Islamic extremist group, al-Shabaab, it is imperative that Kenya clearly defines its political space within the region and infuses its regional relations with strategic thinking around tools for leveraging both its hard and soft power.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

COMESA	Common Market for East and Southern Africa
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC	East African Community
ICC	International Criminal Court
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
LAPSSET	Lamu Port and Lamu-Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport
OAU	Organization of African Unity

INTRODUCTION

Kenya has, for some time, been dismissed as a reluctant regional actor. Those who question its influence and lack of leverage in regional geopolitics point to the country's comparatively better economy and draw attention to the absence of a corresponding geo-political and cultural influence.¹ These critics argue that Kenya has not consolidated its status as a pivotal state and that it sometimes adopts regional engagement strategies that are a passive object of the geo-strategic interests of others. On the flipside are those who maintain that Kenya has upheld pragmatic principles in its regional engagements by focusing on domestic concerns and generally favouring multilateralism and soft-power approaches. The question is, why has Kenya not consistently converted its material and ideational resources into political influence in regional geopolitics?

A radical departure in Kenya's regional engagements, however, was its incursion into Somalia in October 2011 to wage war against the Islamist extremist group al-Shabaab. This was the largest military adventure that Kenya had undertaken outside the country's borders since independence. Kenya, for once, appeared to be shifting its regional engagement strategies from the customary low-risk, non-interference posture towards a stronger engagement that aligns its interests with its economic and military strengths. Would Kenya be willing to continually use both 'hard' and 'soft' power to grow its image as a pivotal actor in the region?

This paper revisits the debate on Kenya's regional diplomacies and, in particular, explores the passive versus pragmatic dichotomy in its engagement. It assesses the reasons behind Kenya's perceived ambivalence in regional geopolitics and considers whether or not Kenya needs to assert itself more robustly, especially at regional and continental levels. With the East African and Horn of Africa regions becoming an important hydrocarbon area, and a new frontier for oil and gas opportunities, it is important that Kenya understands the political space it wants to occupy at various levels and also clearly defines instruments it wants to use to maximise the benefits of its diplomatic engagement in line with its long-term development strategy, Vision 2030.² The paper also examines whether or not events such as Kenya's incursion into Somalia ('Operation Linda Nchi', which translates as 'Protect the Country') and President Uhuru Kenyatta's pronouncements about a more assertive pan-African focus represent a shift in the country's regional relations and foreign policy. The objective is to promote an understanding of Kenya's interaction and behaviour within the region and to stimulate discussion around strategic thinking and tools to take advantage of the country's various forms of power.

1 Kimenyi MS & J Kibe, 'Africa's powerhouse', *Foreign Policy Opinion*, 6 January 2014, The Brookings Institution, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/12/30-kenya-economy-kimenyi>, accessed 24 August 2014; Mabinda C, 'Is Kenya punching below its weight?', *The Star*, 26 April 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2014/04/26/is-kenya-punching-below-its-weight_c928619, accessed 17 September 2016.

2 Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariate, 'Kenya Vision 2030', <http://www.vision2030.go.ke/index.php/vision>, accessed 15 December 2014.

The paper sets out to explain Kenya's regional relations and their historical context. It then outlines the presidencies of Jomo Kenyatta (1963–1978), Daniel arap Moi (1978–2002), Mwai Kibaki (2002–2013) and Uhuru Kenyatta (since 2013) and how Kenya's foreign policy changed over the course of these administrations. It then examines more closely Kenya's intervention in Somalia to investigate whether this signals a shift in Kenya's diplomatic approach. The following sections outline the motivations and aims behind Kenya's foreign policy by taking a deeper look into its regional integration initiatives such as the Lamu Port and Lamu–Southern Sudan–Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor, and Kenya's sometimes difficult relations with South Africa. It then outlines the key determinants of its diplomacy and the forward-looking prospects of Kenya's new foreign policy. The paper concludes with a summary of Kenya's foreign policy and the importance of Kenya playing a stronger role within the region, and makes recommendations for policymakers.

KENYA'S REGIONAL RELATIONS IN CONTEXT

Kenya has played what John Howell called in the late 1960s 'the role of a prestigious neutral between two amorphous, but often distinct, groupings of "radical" and "moderate" states'.³ The motivation behind the Kenyan leadership's regional and international engagement, for much of the post-independence era, seems to have revolved around espousing ethical principles that were less likely to ruffle feathers. In the immediate post-independence era, Kenya outlined the following basic norms and principles to guide its foreign relations:⁴

- respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states and preservation of national security;
- good neighbourliness and peaceful co-existence;
- peaceful settlement of disputes;
- non-interference in the internal affairs of other states;
- non-alignment and national self-interest; and
- adherence to the charters of the UN and the Organization of African Unity (OAU, later the AU).

These norms and principles emerged largely from Kenya's internal and external imperatives, including secessionist claims on its territory and anti-colonial/anti-Cold War necessities, in the context of the immediate post-independence epoch. Since independence in 1963, Kenya has been at the heart of a region predisposed to armed conflict. These regional security concerns have affected the country's engagements and

3 Howell J , 'An analysis of Kenyan foreign policy', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 6, 2008, pp. 29–48.

4 The country has just finalised a new foreign policy framework that provides broad guidelines on Kenya's foreign relations within what it considers a modern competitive and globalised environment. Government of Kenya, 'Kenya's Foreign Policy', <http://www.mfa.go.ke/policy-matters/Kenya%20Foreign%20Policy.pdf>, accessed 24 February 2015; Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the UN Office in Geneva, <http://www.kenyamission.ch/>, accessed 17 September 2016.

diplomatic choices. In the immediate post-independence era, Kenya was faced with insurrection in parts of its north-eastern region (the Shifta War),⁵ which ostensibly carried the support of neighbouring Somalia. With this threat on the horizon, Kenya made the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and preservation of national security integral to its regional diplomacy. Concerns over territorial integrity and secessionist proclivity also placed Kenya at the forefront in denouncing secessionist tendencies and supporting the OAU's principle of non-violation of territorial borders inherited at independence.

The above norms and principles have underpinned Kenya's external engagements for much of the post-independence era. As observed later, the country's external engagements have not changed much in terms of content across the four presidencies. They largely remained predictable, and oriented towards co-operation. Beyond the region, there has been a confluence of interests, especially in the immediate post-independence era, that prompted Kenya and the Western powers to seek each other out: Kenya seeking territorial security and pursuing its economic interests, with Western countries initially eager to contain the spread of communism and more recently to counter terrorism.

MODERATION AND PRAGMATISM – THE JOMO KENYATTA YEARS (1963–1978)

Having led Kenya to independence, Jomo Kenyatta pursued on the whole a moderate pro-Western and anti-communist approach in Kenya's foreign policy. However, regionally he took a mixture of self-justifying and sometimes pragmatic steps by, for instance, undertaking to pursue good neighbourliness and peaceful co-existence while at the same time entering into military alliances to shield Kenya from potential external security threats. Under Kenyatta, Kenya signed a mutual defence pact with Ethiopia in 1964 in response to what both countries saw as the continuing threat of Somalia's irredentism. This pact, which called for the co-ordination of the armed forces of both states in the event of an attack by Somalia, was renewed in 1980 and again in 1987. It remains in place today with the two countries retaining close political and military ties on account of their mutual suspicion of Somalia's irredentist tendencies.⁶

However, Kenyatta's government largely employed moderation and passive positions towards neighbouring countries. Even when Somalia and Ethiopia went to war in 1977, Kenyatta's government cleverly stayed out of the conflict despite its obvious sympathies with Ethiopia. His government too maintained restraint towards key trading partners

5 The Shifta War was a secessionist guerrilla campaign waged largely by ethnic Somalis against the police and army in Kenya. It occurred largely in the north-eastern parts of Kenya (called the Northern Frontier District from 1963–1967) in an attempt to create the Greater Somalia, encompassing the north-eastern part of Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The Kenyan government named the conflict 'Shifta' (from the Somali word meaning 'bandit'), to reflect what Kenya considered as unlawful banditry.

6 Metz HC (ed.), 'Pan-Somalism', *Country Studies: Somalia*, <http://countrystudies.us/somalia/16.htm>, accessed 5 September 2014.

Uganda and Tanzania (then Tanganyika). Clearly, the aim was to avoid compromising Kenya's economic interests.

Relations between Nairobi and Kampala were, however, tested in February 1976, when Uganda's Idi Amin advanced territorial claims on Kenya.⁷ Amin asserted that the colonial British administrators had given away some of Uganda's territory, which included the whole of the Rift Valley Province (up to within 32km from Nairobi) and parts of north-western Kenya. Kenyatta responded by deploying armed troops and personnel carriers along the Kenya–Uganda border.⁸ The situation was compounded in July the same year by Kenya's covert support to the Israeli commando raid on Entebbe Airport to rescue Jewish passengers on a hijacked Air France plane. Amin had granted landing rights to the jetliner hijacked en route from Athens to Paris via Tel Aviv, with 245 passengers and 12 crew on board, including 83 Israeli citizens. The hijackers demanded the release of Palestinian militants in jails in West Germany, Switzerland, Israel and Kenya. Kenya supported the covert operation by granting Israel full use of its airport facilities for the rescue. In their mission, the Israeli commandos destroyed a third of Uganda's air force, something which incensed Amin, who turned his rage on Kenya for allowing Israeli planes to refuel in Nairobi. Kenyatta responded by threatening to 'defend our country with all our blood and ... teach a lesson never to be forgotten to anyone who tries to play with our country and government'.⁹ Amin gave in after Kenya issued a strongly-worded statement that it would not cede 'a single inch of territory'¹⁰ and subsequently deployed troops and armoured vehicles along the Kenya–Uganda border – although the US is said to have silently stepped in to mediate.¹¹ Before his death in August 1978, Kenyatta's role in regional affairs diminished increasingly as he lost interest in matters beyond his country's borders.¹²

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- 7 Bamukuraki M, 'The day Idi Amin wanted to annex western Kenya', *The East African*, 10 September 2011, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/The+day+Idi+Amin+wanted+to+annex+western+Kenya/-/2558/1234090/-/u5ilxrz/-/index.html>, accessed 24 September 2014.
- 8 *Sunday Nation*, "'Dada" always rubbed Kenya the wrong way', 17 August 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20081013072500/http://www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation/17082003/News/Amin_News170820039.html, accessed 15 September 2014.
- 9 Kenyatta J, Uhuru Park rally, 1976, in response to the Entebbe raid.
- 10 *Daily Nation*, 'Kenya, Uganda on brink of war', 8 September 2013, <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/Kenya+Uganda+on+brink+of+war/-/1950774/1984166/-/format/xhtml/-/119ssp/-/index.html>, accessed 3 August 2016.
- 11 Kamau J, 'Diplomatic collisions that shaped foreign policy', *Sunday Nation*, November 24, 2013, <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/Diplomatic-fights-that-shaped-foreign-policy/-/1950774/2086360/-/format/xhtml/-/125e1o/-/index.html>, accessed 12 May 2015.
- 12 Lippman TW, 'Kenya expected to keep its low profile in Africa', *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/08/28/kenya-expected-to-keep-its-low-profile-in-africa/2ad1075b-e99e-49ca-a646-bea09db5cae0/>, accessed 20 May 2015.

FENCE-SITTING, PEACE DIPLOMACY AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR – THE DANIEL ARAP MOI YEARS (1978–2002)

Kenyatta's successor Moi pursued a similar pattern of regional and international engagement albeit with minor variations. Moi came to power in 1978 in a period of regional turbulence where relations between Uganda's Amin and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere had been strained following Amin's accusations against Nyerere of supporting and arming Amin's enemies. The differences between the two heads of state escalated into a full-blown war at the end of 1979.¹³ This volatile setting presented Moi with the dilemma of how to maintain an open trading relationship with Kenya's warring neighbours, and in particular Uganda, which was fully dependent on Kenya's seaport of Mombasa for its export and import trade.¹⁴ Moi elected to pursue a 'fence-sitting' diplomacy in the Tanzania–Uganda war, which led to the toppling of Amin. Moi also came to power in the context of a hostile relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia. The two countries had fought over the Ogaden region in eastern Ethiopia (the Ogaden War) from July 1977 to March 1978. In 1982 the two countries also engaged in an intermittent armed conflict when Somali rebels with Ethiopian military support invaded central Somalia taking over several towns. In the Ethiopia–Somalia conflict, Kenya remained a natural although largely passive ally of Ethiopia, in line with the historical defence pact.

In 1985, Moi brokered a peace agreement between the then Ugandan rebel leader Yoweri Museveni and president Tito Okelo. Moi was credited for mobilising the stature of his office to provide leadership to the fractious and contentious negotiations in Nairobi.¹⁵ Despite the agreement being subsequently ignored by Museveni, who went on to fight his way to power in January 1986, the talks that led to the agreement largely bore Moi's presidential imprint. The Kenyan media portrayed Moi's mediation in the Ugandan conflict as an example of statesmanship and pan-Africanism.¹⁶

Moi also helped to mediate several other conflict situations in Burundi, Eritrea/Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia and the then Zaire, with varying degrees of success. In all these diplomatic engagements, he projected Kenya as a stable, robust island of peace in a turbulent region. By the mid-1980s, Kenya's regional standing and, indeed, Moi's personal power were at their peak because of his peace diplomacy in East Africa and the Great Lakes regions. The period between 1983 and 1988 could be 'declared as Kenya's diplomatic golden age, if the number of visits Moi went on and the heads of states/governments who visited Kenya are anything to go by'.¹⁷ On the continental stage, Kenya

13 Avirgan T & M Honey, *War in Uganda: the legacy of Idi Amin*. Westport, CT: L. Hill, 1982.

14 Softkenya, 'Kenya foreign policy and international relations – Kenya and the world', <http://softkenya.com/world/>, accessed 15 August 2014.

15 Tindigarukayo JK, 'Uganda, 1979-85: Leadership in transition', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26, 4, pp. 607–622.

16 Khadiagala GM, 'Mediation efforts in Africa's Great Lakes Region', AFRICAmmediators' retreat, http://www.hdcentre.org/uploads/tx_news/112MediationeffortsinAfrica_sGreatLakesRegion.pdf, accessed 12 September 2014.

17 Softkenya, *op. cit.*

hosted the annual OAU Summit in 1981 with Moi keeping the group's chairmanship for an unprecedented two-year term. The second term came after a carefully crafted scheme to deny then Libyan leader Col Muammar Gaddafi a chance to lead the continental body despite his attempts to take over in Tripoli in 1981.

In the course of Moi's tenure, he deployed Kenyan peacekeepers to Angola, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Uganda, and to various other countries outside Africa. He also served as chairman of the Preferential Trade Area (1989–1990) and the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) (1999–2000) and largely became the personification of Kenya's foreign policy.

The late 1980s and early 1990s, however, became tough for Moi following the demise of Cold War geopolitics and his diminishing strategic importance to the West. Moi was not the only one whose currency diminished at the time. Other leaders in the region and continent as a whole were affected. In the Horn of Africa in particular, Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Miriam and Somalia's Mohamed Siad Barre were destabilised by the end of the Cold War dynamics, with their regimes eventually being overthrown. Moi's regional and international engagement became increasingly reactive and ad hoc, especially towards Western leaders who wanted him out of power. Western capitals did not only brand him a despot but also withheld foreign aid and conditioned it on political and economic reforms.

AN OLD-SCHOOL GENTLEMAN AND THE THREAT OF AL-SHABAAB – MWAI KIBAKI (2002–2013)

Kibaki became president in 2002 and under him Kenya's economy grew steadily. While Moi's foreign policy was shaped by the destabilising effect of the civil wars in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa, Kibaki, a trained economist, was more influenced by Kenya's economic priorities. During his inauguration Kibaki had pledged to 'unite with our sister countries, which are here today to build a new Africa', and also made an undertaking that Kenya would 'continue to play a leading role in East Africa, Africa and the world ... support and facilitate all positive efforts to resolve the conflicts in Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, the DRC, and other trouble spots in Africa'.¹⁸ In practice, however, Kibaki made little mark on regional geopolitics, as he rarely appeared keen to lead the region on any issue, in contrast to his predecessor's noticeable peace initiatives. He did little to follow up on his inauguration pledges to engage the region and continent more proactively and instead went through the traditional insipid diplomatic practices, including visiting several African and Western capitals. Like some of his predecessors, he espoused policies that were least likely to ruffle feathers regionally and internationally. Regarded as the old-school gentleman, Kibaki nonetheless presided over an upward trend in Kenya's

18 *The East African*, 'Kibaki's political failures obscured a legacy of economic and social progress', (Date of article not known), <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/magazine/The+Kibaki+years++a+balance+sheet/-/434746/1206582/-/view/printVersion/-/dvlnt1/-/index.html>, accessed 16 August 2014.

economic growth and increasingly drew attention to Kenya's so-called economic diplomacy.¹⁹ His role and regional stature remained lower than that of his neighbours, especially Uganda's Museveni and Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi. Analysts argued then that Kenya was not behaving 'the way a big power [relative to its position in Africa and the region] ought to'.²⁰

Towards the end of his second term, however, Kibaki increasingly cultivated the image of a regional statesman by calling on the world to pay more attention to Somalia and South Sudan and admonishing Eritrea for supporting al-Shabaab.²¹ Adams Oloo observed that, 'initially, the president looked like an inward leader but of late he is showing more impetus on regional affairs, perhaps with an eye to leaving a holistic legacy that will have implications both in Nairobi and the EAC [East African Community] region'.²² A radical departure in Kibaki's regional engagement was when he authorised Kenya's incursion into Somalia to wage war on al-Shabaab in October 2011. This was the biggest military adventure that the country had undertaken since independence. This discussion is taken up later, but Kibaki's move seemed, for once, to be militarising the country's foreign policy, signalling a policy shift and a desire to align Kenya's security interests with its economic strength.²³ While the intervention raised questions about whether it would realise its objectives, the desire by Kenya to create a buffer zone to cushion its biggest infrastructure project, the LAPSSET, was not lost on keen observers. The LAPSSET project involves the development of airports, railways, roads and notably, an oil pipeline between Lamu on the Kenyan coast and South Sudan. The transport links are meant to join cities in Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Overall, Kenya's 2011 incursion into Somalia and its ongoing participation in the AU's mission in Somalia mark an unprecedented use of its hard power for the protection of the country's security and economic interests.

PAN AFRICANISM UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ICC – UHURU KENYATTA SINCE 2013

Kibaki's successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, emphasises a regional and Afrocentric policy. In his inauguration speech on 9 April 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta clearly proclaimed his government's commitment to rejuvenating the country's foreign policy and engagement

19 Meny W, 'Kenya to hire foreign nationals to drive economic diplomacy in her missions', *Daily Nation*, 12 November 2011, <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/politics/-/1064/1272134/-/8cpnq9/-/>, accessed 25 March 2014.

20 Wachira N & C Onyango-Obbo, 'Diplomacy: How Kenya lost its standing in the outside world', *The East African*, 31 January 2011, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Diplomacy-How-Kenya-lost-its-standing-in-the-outside-world/-/2558/1097856/-/item/4/-/6wkie0/-/index.html>, accessed 20 August 2014.

21 *The East African*, 2014, *op. cit.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 ISS (Institute for Security Studies), 'Kenya's Foreign Policy and Geostrategic interests', ISS and HSF (Hanns Seidel Foundation) Seminar Report, 10 May 2012, <http://www.issafrika.org/events/iss-and-hsf-seminar-report-kenyas-foreign-policy-and-geostrategic-interests>, accessed 20 August 2014.

to reflect, among others, an assertive pan-African focus.²⁴ Uhuru Kenyatta observed that Kenya's future depended not only on its national unity but also on deepening bonds with 'brothers and sisters in East Africa and Africa as a whole'.²⁵ In practice, a regional and pan-African focus was evident from his first state visits to Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa, among others.

Uhuru Kenyatta's emphasis on pan-Africanism is, to an extent, a consequence of the political environment that surrounded his election and the legal proceedings against him by the International Criminal Court (ICC). He used the perceived Western disapproval²⁶ of his candidacy to bind support in his electoral strongholds under the emotive banner of protecting Kenya's sovereignty.²⁷ After his election, he courted other African states and the AU to campaign against the ICC and its allegedly 'politically motivated' agenda. That push resulted in an AU consensus to support a deferral of all cases against active heads of state at a summit in Addis Ababa in October 2013.²⁸ This lobbying of the AU and the AU member states by Uhuru Kenyatta's government steered Kenya into the pan-African limelight.²⁹

However, with the ICC's dropping its case against him in 2014, the Kenyan government seems to be renewing relations with Western countries and it does appear that Uhuru Kenyatta's term in office will not be markedly different from the traditional cautious approach of Kenya's leaders in its external engagements.

Broadly, Kenya has, since independence, not pursued an aggressive grand political strategy to influence the course of regional geopolitics. By comparison, its neighbours Ethiopia, Uganda and even Tanzania have variously reflected robust regional and pan-African engagements. Uganda and Ethiopia have, in particular, exhibited activist or

24 *Capital FM News*, 'President Kenyatta's inauguration speech', 9 April 2013, <http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/eblog/2013/04/09/president-kenyattas-inauguration-speech/>, accessed 28 August 2014; Kagwanja P, 'Inside Kenyatta's emerging, assertive policy in East Africa', *The East African*, 13 April 2013, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/OpEd/comment/Inside-Uhuru-Kenyatta-assertive-foreign-policy-in-East-Africa/-/434750/1747338/-/huljnn/-/index.html>, accessed 4 September 2014.

25 *Capital FM News*, *op. cit.*

26 Joselow G, 'US official Says Kenya's elections have "consequences"', *Voice of America*, 7 February 2013, <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-official-says-kenya-elections-have-consequences/1599063.html>, accessed 30 September 2014.

27 Manson K, 'Global insight: Another Kenyatta outsmarts the West', *Financial Times*, 11 April 2013, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e9b4db3a-a2a6-11e2-9b70-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3E8vSicwk>, accessed 25 August 2014.

28 Rosen J, 'Strategic Posture Review: Kenya', *World Politics Review*, 21 January 2014, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13509/strategic-posture-review-kenya>, accessed 20 August 2014.

29 Onyango-Obbo C, 'Great Lakes Crisis 6: The end of Western 'spheres of influence', death and fall of Africa's big men', 10 September 2013, <http://nakedchiefs.com/2013/09/10/great-lakes-crisis-6-the-end-of-western-spheres-of-influence-death-and-fall-of-africas-big-men/>, accessed 3 September 2014.

more assertive and hands-on regional engagement especially by deploying their troops in the eastern DRC, South Sudan and Somalia, while Tanzania is renowned for its role in supporting Africa's liberation struggles, especially in Southern Africa.

Kenya has, on the whole, sought to advance its interests not by defining the regional political agenda but rather by taking the regional environment as a given and then making pragmatic, but cautious, efforts to ensure its economic and security interests. Samuel Makinda refers to Kenya's regional and international engagement during the Cold War as 'quiet diplomacy' and observes that what underpinned this type of engagement was a dependency syndrome.³⁰ He says Kenya was among the countries that put up little resistance to the pressures of foreign capital interests and, because of its dependency on foreign capital, became averse to taking radical stances on international affairs.

Overall, over the last five decades, Kenya has stood out in solving regional conflicts, as it did during the Sudan and Somalia peace processes. In terms of diplomatic significance, the country hosts some of the largest diplomatic missions and international agencies in sub-Saharan Africa. Andrew Tyrus Maina, however, observes that Kenya's foreign engagement has not been a slave to any ideals but rather has sought out opportunities where they lay, even if they were not congruent with its proclaimed norms.³¹ Looking ahead, it does appear as if Kenya will continue largely with pragmatic friendly relations to promote the expansion of its business interests across the region. This amicable posture will be underpinned by the desire to obtain outcomes the country wants by using soft power rather than coercion.

A closer look at the 2011 Somalia incursion may tease out whether this represents a major shift in Nairobi's foreign engagements.

KENYA'S INTERVENTION IN SOMALIA: A SHIFT IN DIPLOMATIC APPROACH?

As observed earlier, Kenya's incursion into Somalia marked a radical departure from the country's historical stance of morality and conservatism. The question is whether the move marks a new path in the country's approach and role in regional politics.

Praised by Kenyans at the time as a bold move to demonstrate the country's hard power to protect its strategic interests, the incursion went against its traditional core principles and norms of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, good neighbourliness and peaceful settlement of disputes. Kenya's incursion into Somalia seems to have reversed the country's image and policy of non-interference. There are, however, those who argue the opposite, that the objective of national interest had superseded Kenya's soft power

30 Makinda S, 'From quiet diplomacy to cold war politics, Kenya foreign policy', *Third World Quarterly*, 5, 2, 1983, pp. 300–319.

31 Maina AT, 'Kenya foreign policy: Normative or pragmatic?', *The Foreign Policy Analyst*, 30 May 2013, <http://theforeignpolicyanalyst.wordpress.com/2013/05/30/kenya-foreign-policy-normative-or-pragmatic/>, accessed 8 September 2014.

stance of non-interference in the internal affairs of its neighbours.³² The point here is that Kenya had previously not faced challenges from outside its international borders that required military force, unlike its other East African neighbours that have been more proactive about their security, but that are less powerful economically and militarily.

Mukhisa observes that circumstances have changed in the recent past with Kenya's jostling for eminence as a leader in regional frontier markets and tourism and also because Kenya has been paying the price of neighbouring a failed state in Somalia.³³ This has resulted in Kenya's robust engagement in the region because of changing geo-strategic opportunities and interests. To Kituyi, the growing importance of regional stability to Kenya's economic projections has seen a departure from its traditional approach of benign disinterest and pacific posturing that characterised its regional behaviour. The era of innocence has gone and Kenya has realised that leadership sometimes entails the use of force.

KENYA AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Kenya has long demonstrated commitment to regional integration, seeing it as a critical component of the country's development trajectory. The country has had a history of co-operation especially with Uganda and Tanzania, dating back to pre-independence. The British first established a customs union between Kenya and Uganda in 1917, while the then Tanganyika joined in 1927. This co-operation was formalised into the East African High Commission, which provided for inter-territorial co-operation in 1948. This arrangement proposed a common external tariff and currency as well as common services in transport and communication.³⁴ After these colonies gained independence in the early 1960s, the EAC succeeded this inter-regional co-operation in 1967 with the aim of strengthening ties between member states through a common market, a common customs tariff and a range of other public services. Unfortunately, the EAC collapsed in 1977 due to a number of endogenous and exogenous factors. These included personality differences and divergences in national interests. There was the ideological East–West divide that separated the world and this exacerbated differences in development strategies between Tanzania and Uganda on the one hand, which leaned towards socialist ideologies, and Kenya on the other, which leaned towards the capitalist path.³⁵ The situation was made worse by perceptions around unequal sharing of EAC benefits. The overriding view was that Kenya was benefiting more, especially in terms of employment.

32 ISS, *op. cit.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 Oluoch F, 'Leaders launch economic bloc', *Sunday Nation*, Nairobi, 28 July 2013.

35 Mngomezulu BR, 'Why did regional integration fail in East Africa in the 1970s? A historical explanation', KZN HAAS, <http://www.kznhaas-history.net/files/seminars/Mngomezulu2013.pdf>, accessed 3 September 2014.

The EAC was re-established in the 1990s and officially launched on 7 July 2000. Currently, it has a membership of six states: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan,³⁶ Tanzania and Uganda, up from the original three that founded the original EAC in 1967. Somalia has also applied to join the EAC. According to a communiqué from the 17th EAC Heads of State Summit held in Arusha in March 2016, the earliest that Somalia can be admitted to the regional bloc is in 2017.³⁷ Overall, the deepening and expansion of the EAC has widened opportunities for Kenyan businesses and exports, which are among the most diversified in the region.³⁸ Uhuru Kenyatta, who assumed the one-year EAC rotating chairmanship in November 2013, championed plans for the rollout of an EAC single currency, expected to be completed over the next decade. Rosen notes that 'the currency is expected to strengthen Kenya's regional economic footprint, particularly in the country's emerging services sector, known for its strength in telecommunications, supermarkets and banking'.³⁹ The Kenyan government seems to be paying particular attention to economics in the region and the continent. The country's exports to the regional market account for over 20% of its total export value (about \$1.2 billion in 2013) with Africa combined representing around 40% of Kenya's total export share.⁴⁰

The LAPSET project referred to earlier is expected to substantially improve Kenya's economic trade with Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda. Kenya and Tanzania nonetheless remain competitors on several fronts, including the transit of goods to their landlocked neighbours. As Kenya moves forward with both the LAPSET project and a planned \$11 billion expansion to its port in Mombasa, Tanzania is also planning construction of a new \$11 billion Chinese-backed port in Bagamoyo, which will likely compete for goods – and tax revenues – bound for Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda.⁴¹

Kenya has also played a leading role in COMESA, which is the leading destination for Kenya's exports, accounting for over 40% of the total.⁴² It is also a member of the Africa Caribbean Pacific – European Union and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation. Kenya has treated regional economic blocs as critical tools for its economic development. It is the key manufacturing, communication, commercial and financial centre in Eastern and Central Africa and remains the region's hub and entry point for air transport.

36 According to the East African Community (EAC) website, South Sudan joined the grouping in May 2014. EAC, 'Overview', <http://www.eac.int/about/overview>, accessed 17 September 2016.

37 Ngirachu J, 'South Sudan, Somalia to wait longer to join EAC', *The East African*, 20 February 2015, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/South-Sudan--Somalia-to-wait-longer-to-join-EAC/-/2558/2630478/-/qlumthz/-/index.html>, accessed 12 March 2015.

38 EAC, 'Facts & Figures Report (2013)', http://www.eac.int/statistics/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=153, accessed 5 October 2016.

39 Rosen J, *op. cit.*

40 ITC (International Trade Centre), http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx, accessed 4 August 2016.

41 Rosen J, *op. cit.*

42 Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations in Geneva, http://www.kenyamission-un.ch/?About_Kenya:Kenya_Foreign_Policy, accessed 3 September 2014.

Outside the EAC, Kenya and Ethiopia have emerged as the key actors within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Kenya and Ethiopia have worked closely on the Somalia conflict under the aegis of IGAD and maintain an agreement on a common Somalia initiative. Uhuru Kenyatta and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn have also emerged as leading figures in efforts to promote IGAD-sponsored peace talks in South Sudan following the violence that erupted in mid-December 2013.

Kenya maintains a number of diplomatic missions and has bilateral relations with all its neighbours. It has signed a number of bilateral trade and economic co-operation agreements with different countries in the region, including Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Kenya's regional engagements have, therefore, largely reflected its domestic security concerns and economic agenda. Many of its political endeavours have, however, been cautious and suboptimal given that it has not taken as many radical political or military positions as neighbouring Uganda and Ethiopia. There are different interpretations of Kenya's apparent lack of interest in strong regional engagement. There are those who think it has pursued cautious policies disguised as non-interference in the internal affairs of other states while in principle aimed at self-preservation. In other words, successive Kenya governments have prioritised their regime's security over external military or political engineering. There is, however, also the view that the country has not been exposed to sufficient external political and security challenges that necessitated the flexing of its muscles.⁴³

SOUTH AFRICA–KENYA RELATIONS

Kenya maintained quiet but substantial relations with South Africa during the apartheid era. In 1990, however, Roelof ('Pik') Botha, former South African minister of foreign affairs, visited Kenya in the first publicised ministerial-level contact between the two countries.⁴⁴ There were further engagements when South Africa's then president FW de Klerk visited Kenya in June 1991, and Moi visited Cape Town in June 1992, the first visit to South Africa by an African head of state in 20 years.⁴⁵

Kenya's engagement with apartheid South Africa can be seen through the prism of its post-independence foreign policy norms and guidelines such as good neighbourliness, peaceful co-existence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. However, Kenya under Jomo Kenyatta and later Moi failed to grasp the strategic importance of supporting South Africa's main liberation movement, the African National Congress, in its fight against apartheid, as Tanzania did. By doing business with the apartheid system, Kenya made major strategic blunders that dimmed its image in pan-African politics.⁴⁶

43 ISS, *op. cit.*

44 Encyclopedia of the Nations, 'Country Listing', <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-12186.html>, accessed 20 October 2014.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *The East African*, 2014, *op. cit.*

Kenya and South Africa established official diplomatic ties in 1992 and upgraded these relations to full diplomatic status on 12 April 1994, but it remained evident that the rapport between them continued to be poor. For instance, in 1997 president Nelson Mandela landed at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and could not alight from the plane to meet the Kenyan delegation at hand because he 'was asleep'. Instructively, this incident and similar justification was repeated in 1999 when president Thabo Mbeki also landed at the same airport and failed to alight.⁴⁷ On both occasions, South Africa gave assurances that there was no sinister motive behind the non-appearance of the head of state, but it was not lost on Kenyans that the incidents might have a lot to do with Kenya's past attitude towards the South African liberation movement.

In economic terms, Kenya is the regional hub for trade and finance in East and Central Africa. For much of the 1990s and 2000s, there existed mistrust between the Kenyan government and business community on the one hand and South African companies and government on the other in what some observers view as a 'cultural difference in business approach'.⁴⁸ Overall, a sense existed in Kenya that South African companies exhibited aggressive market entry strategies and that the South African government was not open to investment from and trade interaction with Kenya and Kenyan companies.

Subsequently, Kenya and South Africa established common forums to help repair their relationship due to their mutual geo-economic importance, but there remain concerns in Kenya about the trade imbalance in favour of South Africa, with South Africa exporting to Kenya almost 15 times more than it imports.⁴⁹

KEY DETERMINANTS OF KENYA'S REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

ECONOMY

Since independence Kenya's economy has affected the country's regional engagement and diplomacy. Kenya has, despite turbulent times, largely had a good developing economy, at least by African standards. While the economy has largely been dominated by foreign capital, the country also has a sizeable manufacturing and export sector whose main

47 Mureithi C, 'When Mandela snubbed Kenyan delegation', *Daily Nation*, 12 December 2013, <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/news/When-Mandela-snubbed-Kenyan-delegation/-/1950946/2108648/-/format/xhtml/-/5e9xsqz/-/index.html>, accessed 4 September 2014; Otani R, 'Sleepy Mbeki snubs Kenyans', *IOL News*, 6 September 1999, <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/sleepy-mbeki-snubs-kenyans-1.11853#.VCPEwRgobWI>, accessed 4 September 2014.

48 Mbogo S, 'SA business shows renewed interest in Kenya', *Financial Mail*, 6 February 2014, <http://www.financialmail.co.za/coverstory/2014/02/06/sa-business-shows-renewed-interest-in-kenya>, accessed 8 September 2014.

49 Mabuda P, 'South Africa's Foreign Relations towards Kenya: The Political and Economic Dynamics', unpublished MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2008, <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/7946/RSA%20foreign%20relations%20with%20Kenya.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed 24 September 2014.

market has been neighbouring countries. Kenya's engagement with the region has been underpinned by its comparative advantages in being home to the largest seaport in East Africa (Mombasa), and therefore controlling access to landlocked Burundi, eastern DRC, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda. Especially under Kibaki's government, it actively sought to capitalise on emerging markets as it aimed to make itself a middle-income country through its Vision 2030 development plan.

Oil finds in parts of Kenya, including Turkana and Garissa county, have seen Kenya positioning itself as a petro-carbon hub and lead frontier economy in the region. Meanwhile, Uhuru Kenyatta has pledged to make Kenya 'the number one place to do business in Africa' thus emphasising the position of Kenya's economy in its regional and international engagements.⁵⁰

LEADERSHIP

In Kenya, as in many African states, external engagement is largely influenced and sometimes moulded by the president. Moi, for instance, was quite visible in regional geopolitics through his various personal diplomatic initiatives compared to his predecessor, Jomo Kenyatta who, like Kibaki, kept a lower profile, leaving much of the advocacy and implementation work to the relevant ministers. So far, Uhuru Kenyatta has been quite noticeable at regional level with his various travels to the region's capitals. Jomo Kenyatta and Kibaki could be regarded as more passive in their regional engagement as they often left the advocacy and implementation of foreign policy to the ministry of foreign affairs. Moi was, however, more active in his regional engagement as he adopted a cautious approach that rarely ruffled feathers, but was more prominent in regional engagements. While the jury is still out on Uhuru Kenyatta, he has not been averse to taking risks as demonstrated by his mobilisation of the region and the continent to take a stand against the ICC. Broadly, Jomo Kenyatta and his son could be said to have been charismatic figures, while Moi was more resolute, especially in his peace initiatives, and Kibaki was regarded as aloof. Despite their personality differences, there have been more similarities in their regional policies than differences.

GEOSTRATEGIC LOCATION

Kenya's geopolitical location as an Indian Ocean littoral state influences its regional relations with landlocked neighbours such as Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and even the eastern DRC. Most of these countries ship their goods through Kenya's port of Mombasa and this explains why Kenya has always tried to maintain cordial relations. Because of its access to the sea, Kenya has also sought to project itself as the bridge between the regions of East and Central Africa and the Horn of Africa and worked towards catalysing the region's development infrastructure to leverage its location. There has, however, been an

50 Kenyatta U, 'Kenya's interests first in formulating policy', *Daily Nation*, 16 February 2013, <http://elections.nation.co.ke/Blogs/Kenyans-interests-first-in-formulating-policy/-/1632026/1696088/-/i0oa9j/-/index.html>, accessed 8 September 2014.

apprehension within the region about overreliance on Kenya's transport infrastructure, especially the port of Mombasa. This was especially evident following the 2007/08 post-election violence in Kenya that created a transport crisis in the country that in turn hurt the economies of regional trading partners.

LOOKING FORWARD

Kenya has finalised a new Foreign Policy Framework⁵¹ that provides broad guidelines on its international positioning in a modern, competitive and globalised environment. The policy framework anchors Kenya's foreign engagement on five inter-linked pillars of diplomacy.

- Economic diplomacy aims to promote Kenya's socio-economic interests abroad and is guided by the country's vision of transforming into a middle-income country by 2030.
- Peace diplomacy focuses on consolidating the country's traditional role in promoting peace within the region.
- Environmental diplomacy aims to promote the shared use of natural resources and respond to common environmental threats as a peace-building tool.
- Cultural diplomacy emanates from a realisation that Kenya has cultural resources that it can apply as soft power to influence external public opinion and strengthen its influence.
- Diaspora diplomacy recognises the importance of harnessing the diverse skills and potential of Kenyans in foreign countries and consolidating their involvement in the country's development agenda.

The new Foreign Policy Framework seeks to benchmark best practices in foreign policy formulation and marks a departure from the traditional emphasis on moral issues towards strategic concerns that address the country's current interests. The Foreign Policy Framework is a good starting point for Kenya to establish a more coherent strategy for its diplomatic engagement. However, to realise the objectives of the new foreign policy principles calls for more than ideals. Indeed, the design of the new Foreign Policy Framework is more about the end. There is a need to pay additional attention to the means too.

Kenya needs to make itself more relevant if it wants other countries to develop and increase their interest in engaging and co-operating with it. To do so, Nairobi must develop strong and sustainable partnerships at the bilateral, regional and international levels and create strategic tools to advance and defend its interests.

51 Government of Kenya, 'Kenya's Foreign Policy', November 2014, https://www.kenyaembassy.com/pdfs/Kenya_Foreign_Policy.pdf, accessed 5 October 2016.

CONCLUSION

Kenya's regional diplomacy has, for the better part of its post-independence era, been characterised by a strong sense of morality and conservatism (with the exception of the Somalia incursion). The regional diplomacies of Kenya's different heads of state varied more in terms of form than substance. The overriding concern seems to have been to develop and maintain friendly relations with other regional states and sub-groupings and foster co-operation with the rest of the international community. While this approach has, to an extent, ensured that the country forges beneficial regional relations, critics feel that it has not helped develop the country's political and military influence in line with its economic abilities. The question for the future is whether Kenya needs to pursue a more assertive role and more diplomatic activism in the region. If it wants to overcome the tag of punching below its weight, then it will need to pursue a proper strategy in the grand plan of regional geopolitics and international processes. To do so, Kenya will need to respond to the ever-changing regional and global demands and expectations by adopting new tools and techniques to strengthen bilateral relations, foster regional integration and support strategic partnerships. The new Foreign Policy Framework is a step in that direction, but its success is dependent on human and institutional capacity. It is important that Kenya deploys relevant professionals and the necessary resources if it wishes to clearly articulate an overarching diplomatic strategy and a national strategic narrative about its core values and interests. In other words, alongside the new Foreign Policy Framework, Kenya needs strategic thinking around tools for leveraging its foreign relations if it seeks to overcome the perception of being an unwilling regional power. It also needs to strengthen its bilateral relations, foster regional integration and support strategic partnerships with key actors on the African continent such as South Africa, especially in view of both countries' commitment to pan-African ideals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A clear understanding of national, regional and continental priorities needs to drive Kenya's regional diplomacy. Kenya also needs to clearly define the political space it wants to occupy at the various levels.
- To overcome the perception of being an unwilling regional power, Kenya should infuse its new Foreign Policy Framework with strategic thinking around tools for leveraging its hard and soft power.
- The relevant ministries dealing with Kenya's interests in the region and beyond need to strengthen their institutional capacities and enhance the country's diplomatic effectiveness and competitiveness by working closely with relevant research, academic, business and other social formations.
- To enhance its economic diplomacy, Kenya will need to be more aggressive in facilitating the necessary regional infrastructure to promote efficiency of production, transportation and communication.

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