

The GLOCEPS

Policy Paper

Research and Analysis in Strategic Interests and Transnational Crimes Pillar

Advancing Kenya's prospects at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC): opportunities and hurdles

Ida Gathoni



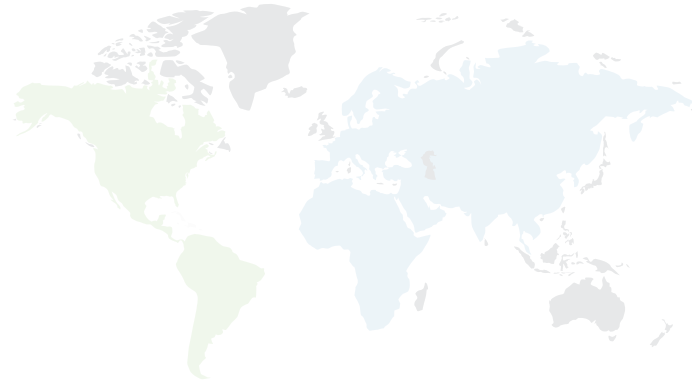
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Executive Summary

This policy paper addresses the opportunities and hurdles for Kenya in achieving key milestones at the UNSC. The seat presents Kenya with some unique prospects that can produce significant gains if well leveraged. She should maximize the chairmanship and her one-month presidency to maintain contact with potential strategic allies as she puts forward agendas that are critical to the country. Among the key strategic opportunities is the spearheading of the Afro-Caribbean regional bloc

comprising Kenya, Niger, Tunisia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (hereafter referred to as the A3+1). Nevertheless, some internal dynamics and geopolitical hurdles such as the political turmoil in Sudan, the border dispute between Ethiopia and Sudan and ongoing conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, pose impediments. This paper recommends the improvement of Kenya's global image and bolstering of relations between the UNSC and the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) through activities of the A3.





Introduction

The seat at the UNSC gives Kenya's diplomacy a wider international platform that comes with the opportunity to influence global security affairs. It offers Kenya the potential to influence agenda, improve networks and gain status. The country's prospects at the Council however, remain dependent on the opportunities she exploits, and how she deals with potential and pre-existent hurdles. There exists prospects in possible global strategic alliances, dominance of various UNSC leadership positions and steering of the A3+1. Still, internal dynamics, particularly those related to Kenya's global image as well as the rapid evolution of geopolitical alignments pose a challenge. The country's engagement at the UNSC is guided by the need to prioritize better international relations and increase her international standing. At the continental and global

levels, the country should strengthen bilateral connections, promote regional integration, and foster strategic collaborations.

With decades of domestic stability, economic growth and accommodative foreign policy, Kenya is in a position to leverage on peace and security matters while building mutual relationships with the world's hegemony. She has an opportunity to engage with global decision makers on matters of interest. However, she can only be effective if she can overcome internal dynamics in governance and dramatic geopolitical shifts in the Horn of Africa and within the UNSC. This policy paper highlights the prospects for Kenya through the position and proposes how she can outmaneuver new as well as pre-existent hurdles.



Photo credit: The United Nations





Background

Kenya has had two terms as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, 1973-1974 and 1997-1998. The country was in June 2020, elected for the third time to take up a non-permanent position, for the period 2021/2022. The seat presents an opportunity to draw lessons from the previous two tenures. In both periods, Kenya contributed towards the achievement of the UNSC objectives as well as her priorities. Key accomplishments included the establishment of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) offices in Nairobi in 1974 and championing of Resolution 1189 on international terrorism following attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998.

Current successes within the new tenure remain pegged on the relationships within the Council since the nature of international diplomacy dictates a give and take. Therefore, it is important for Kenya to be clear on what she brings to the negotiation table, taking into consideration ongoing global and regional conflicts. As Kenya

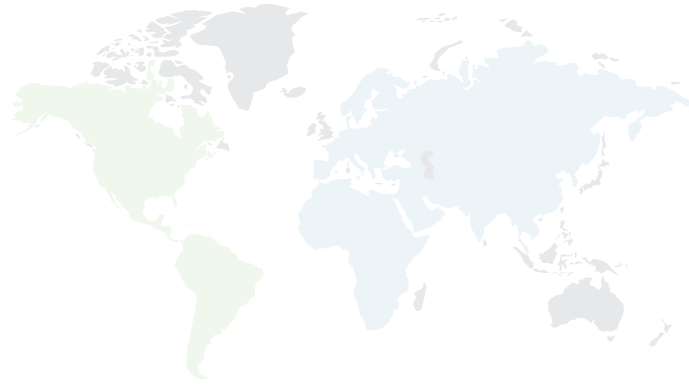
seeks to build a solid reputation for herself internationally, the country must first address some lingering obstacles that might undermine her interests at the council including geopolitical realignments and internal governance issues.

Kenya is currently serving with Tunisia and Niger commonly referred to as the A3. They represent a fundamental political bloc with the potential to bring together the Africa Union (AU) and UNSC objectives in analysis and action. The A3 continue to assume influential roles within the Council and remain principally crucial in the handling of African files. The bloc provides legitimacy and credibility to the Security Council's political strategies or policies on Africa. The merging of the group with the Caribbean region forming the A3+1 creates an even more formidable bloc with the capacity to give valuable political capital within the Council especially when united. This policy paper seeks to examine potential opportunities and impending hurdles that face Kenya within her third tenure.



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Key Issues

The following issues remain crucial in the discussion of opportunities and hurdles Kenya is exposed to while seating at the UNSC.

a) Opportunities for Kenya at the UNSC

The third tenure at the UNSC portends significant gains for Kenya if well leveraged. These include leadership of the Afro-Caribbean regional bloc (the A3+1); developing strategic alliances; and prospects from leadership positions at the UNSC.

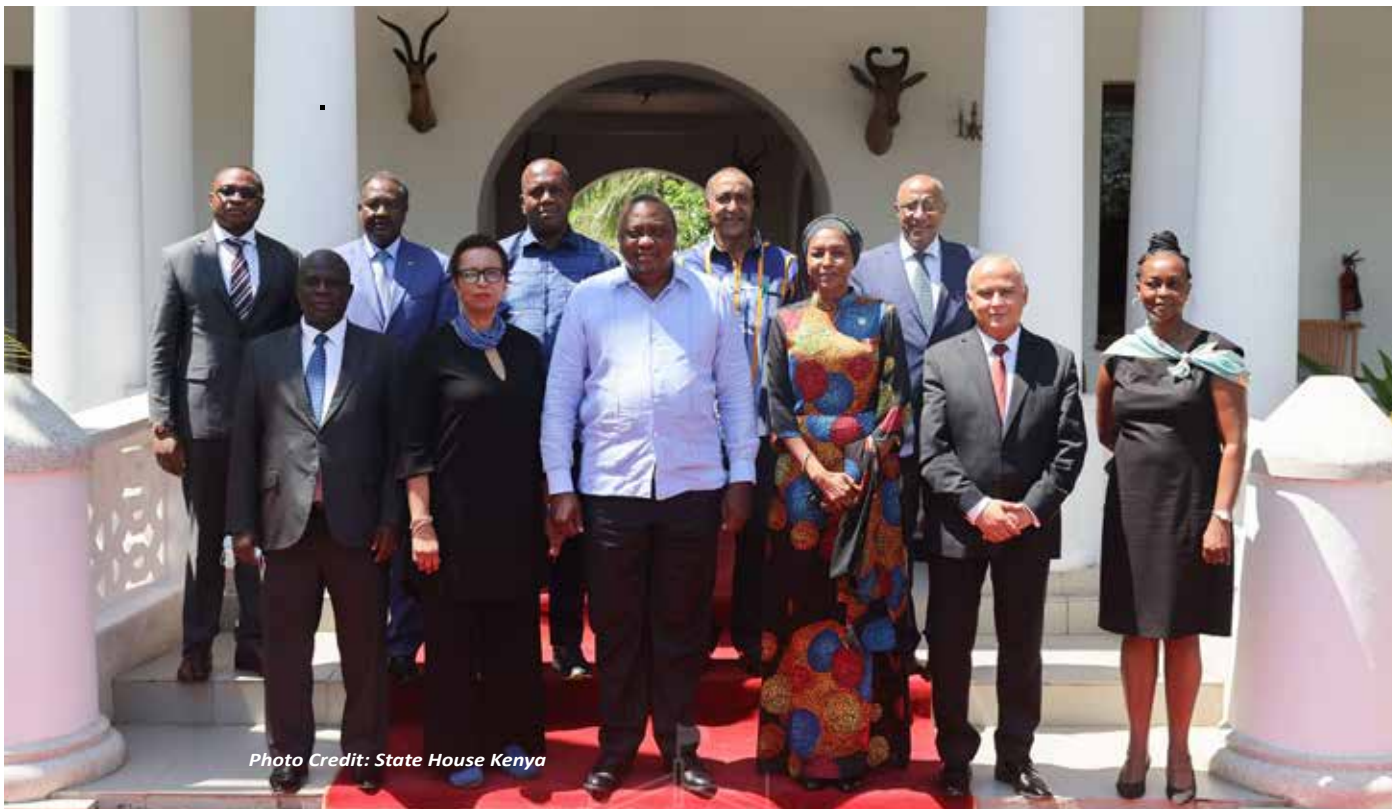


Photo Credit: State House Kenya

The diplomats representing Kenya (Martin Kimani), Niger (Abdou Abarry), Tunisia (Terek Ladeb) and St. Vincent & the Grenadines (Inga Rhonda) on the UNSC

Spearheading the activities of the A3+1 bloc

Kenya is expected to deliver more than the rest to the continent since she is the more dominant power of the A3+1 bloc. The group presently comprises Niger, Kenya, and Tunisia (representing the African region), and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (representing the Caribbean). The A3 bloc has over the years gained diplomatic importance and influence at the UNSC. For instance, in 2019, it issued 16 joint statements during both country-specific and thematic debates, a testament to the impact of a unified position on African files. The addition of the

Caribbean to the A3 makes the group even more remarkable as it presents a critical platform for furthering the Afro-Caribbean agenda at the UNSC.

African issues have consistently been at the top of the UNSC agenda with African member states being nearly 28 per cent of the UN's overall membership. In addition, in 2018, over 50 per cent of Security Council meetings, 60 per cent of its documented outcomes, and 70 per cent of its resolutions within Chapter VII of the Repertoire





of the Practice of the Security Council were on African peace and security issues. The A3 has continuously shown willingness and ability to identify and convey their interests at the UNSC. For example, the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) suspended the Sudanese government from participating in all Africa Union (AU) activities pending the formation of a civilian-led transition government in June 2019. The A3 then broke a stalemate at the UNSC and precast the Council's press comments in support of the AUPSC's decision.

Kenya has already demonstrated strides in leadership within the bloc, with the hosting of a retreat targeting the creation of goals and strategies and ensuring the assimilation of a common approach in developing capacities

towards the protection of Afro-Caribbean agendas. Geopolitical and institutional dynamics, as well as conflicts and interests of the Permanent Members of the UNSC that is United States (US), China, United Kingdom (UK), France and Russia (hereafter referred to as P5), have in the past proven deterrent to the achievement of specific agendas. Therefore, remaining unified on both African and Caribbean issues should be paramount during this term.

A cohesive A3 position on Africa is reinforced when appraised by decisions of the AUPSC, as they provide legitimacy, credibility, and leverage in A3 engagements with other council members. Kenya has a critical responsibility to foster collaboration between the UN and AU since she is serving at the UNSC and AUPSC concurrently.



Photo Credit: Twitter.com



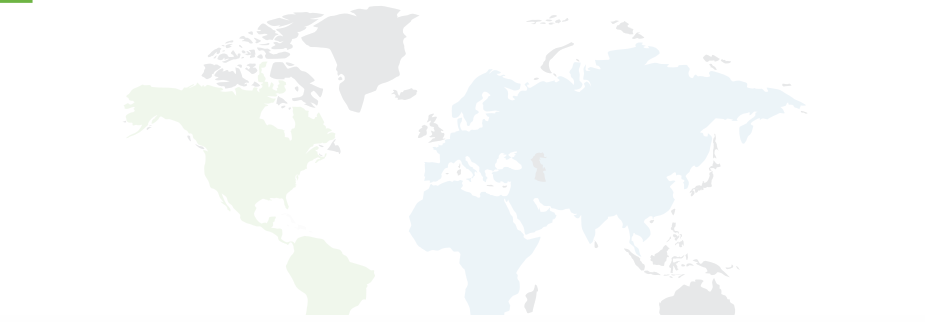


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Maximizing on the leadership prospects

Kenya is exposed to various leadership positions at the UNSC which will put her in a strategic position to influence representation of her interests while presiding over matters of global peace and security. Through this, the country stands to gain finances for various projects, and a positive global image. The UNSC Presidency will enable her to shape the Council's schedule, call for meetings, shape the agenda and exercise some control on the members. As the Council holds its Arria Formula meetings during the period, it is important for Kenya to take interest on the agenda focusing on the role of social media in advancing hate speech. This remains critical since the country is approaching an electioneering period. Given her tumultuous history of pre and post elections unrest, this issue would be critical in drawing out and addressing

pitfalls associated with the negative deployment of these platforms.

The country can equally lead the discourse on conflict in Africa as she will be chairing the Ad hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in the continent. There are presently a couple of issues under the subsidiary organs that are yet to be assigned penholders. For instance, Niger and Ireland are co-chairing an expert group on climate change that does not yet have a penholder. Considering her outstanding position, having been the first African nation to set up a climate change authority as well as housing the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) headquarters, Kenya should move to take up this leadership role on matters of climate change.



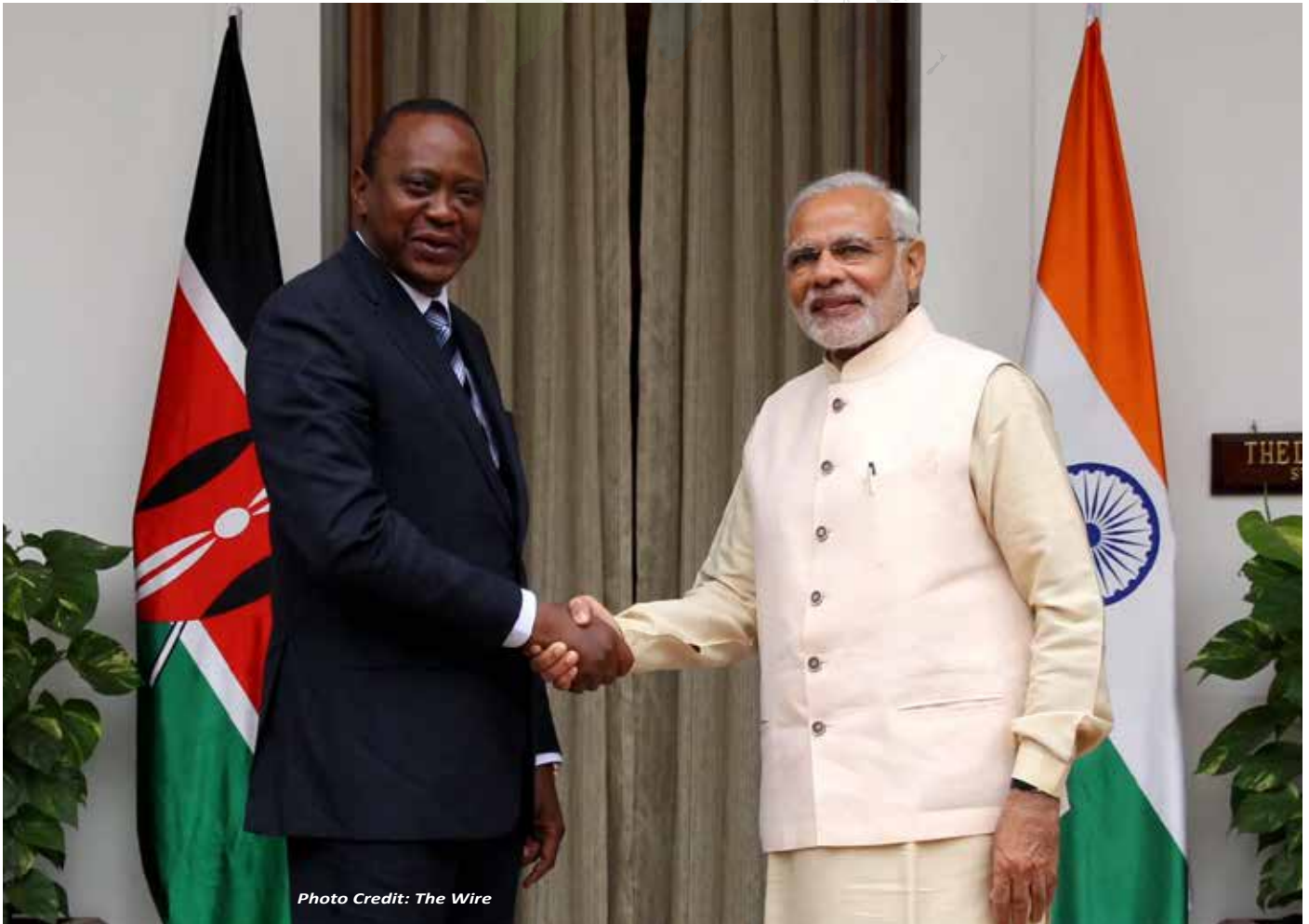


Photo Credit: The Wire

New strategic global alliances

The membership in the UNSC allows Kenya to build strategic global alliances. These can be issue-based or anticipatory of likely challenges to global concerns. Furthermore, non-permanent members remain potential allies to any country trying to make big strides at the UNSC. Kenya has the opportunity to work together with India and Mexico and form a strategic alliance that will advance collaborations in health, trade, and education. Similarly, she will be in a position to intensify Kenya-Arab relations when the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joins the council in January 2022. The country thus has to pay more attention to and vote on concerns in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Libya, Yemen, and Iran. Additionally, she has an obligation to show the Arab Gulf states the benefits of a mutual engagement, being one of Africa's most innovative, developed, and politically active

countries.

It is envisaged that tension among the Council's P5 has the potential to create a geostrategic nightmare at the UNSC. Conflicting interests stemming from in-house alliances have the potential to inhibit collective action particularly on engagements in Africa. However, this can also be an opportunity as all the P5 have a friendly predisposition with Kenya. For instance, the country has long been seen as a development partner by Europe. Due to the current international scenario and deteriorating regional developments, their relationship should prioritise geopolitical issues. Hence, the UNSC seat will allow the European Union and European Council members to step up their involvement with Kenya on regional peace and security.





b) Hurdles for Kenya's agenda

Kenya's key strategic objective at the UNSC is to maintain her focus on protecting her interests. However, a few issues may impede her achievement of these goals. These include global geopolitical realignments and the internal dynamics in governance.

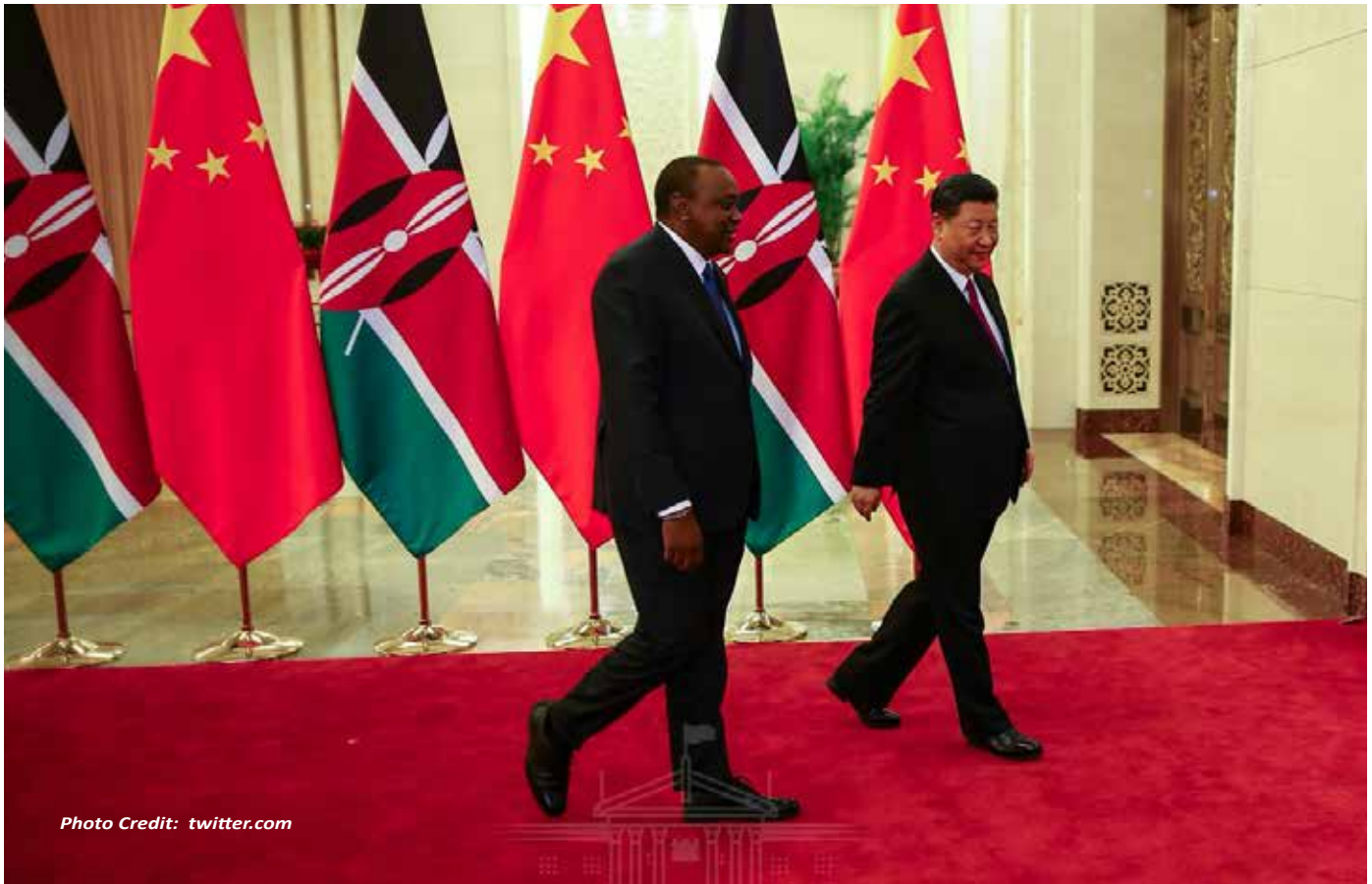


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Geopolitical realignments within and out of Africa

African states at the UNSC tend to be divided based on colonial affiliations and identities including language. There have been incidents of extra continental manipulations using African states as proxies. Therefore, Kenya's relations with the P5 as well as other Non-Permanent members remain paramount. Equally, there are worries about China's (one of the P5) influence in Africa. For instance, in the run-up to joining the UNSC, it is suspected that Djibouti was under pressure from China to maintain her candidacy against Kenya, which enjoys support from the West as well as most European countries. As it stands, both Djibouti and Kenya remain strong allies of China.

The UNSC, similarly, has its share of geopolitics. The United States is largely backed by Europe, on one hand, as Russia collaborates with China, on the other. African countries that have been elected to the council have been unable to establish and implement their interests owing to geopolitical alliances particularly in the P5. Similarly, differences among the P5, have weakened multilateralism in the Horn of Africa and made mediating regional problems more difficult for the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). This is a result of regional rivalries, reliance on external donors for peace and security interventions, and failure to account for collective security interests in pur-





suit of national interests. Kenya will have the challenge of overcoming these gaps and boosting international support for African-led peace and security efforts in the UNSC.

Regional geopolitics remain in the background of Kenya's tenure. Countries in The Horn are being drawn into a conflict that is threatening to destabilise an already fragile region. The tension in northern Ethiopia, Sudan's political turmoil,

and Somalia's contested electoral process might all exacerbate insecurity. Further, closely linked disputes, such as those between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project (GERD), Ethiopia and Sudan over their border, and the Kenya-Somalia maritime border dispute, can escalate tensions throughout the region. These will destabilise good neighbourliness and prevent the regional security cooperation order from being implemented.



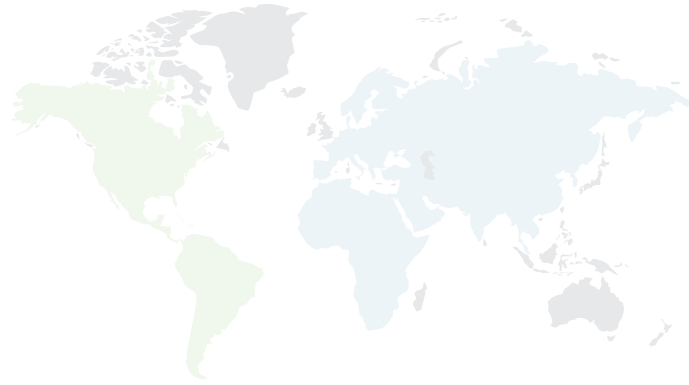
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Internal dynamics in governance

The problem of corruption continues to challenge Kenya's international image. Her corruption index for the year 2020 stands at 31 with a ranking of 124 out of 180 countries. Corruption in the rule of law undermines the accountability of institutions that defend human rights. It further contributes to a culture of impunity. This encapsulates threats to national security. It weakens the power of public diplomacy which is critical in aggressively promoting Kenya's image, values, and culture abroad amidst global competition. Some of the grand corruption schemes in Kenya include the

Goldenberg, Aror-Kimwarer Dam, Anglo-Leasing and Eurobond scandals, and the more recent Covid-19 Equipment Procurement scandals. These mega-scams are the product of collusion between government officials and politicians, who have built formidable corruption cartels that have proven unstoppable over time. Consequently, the IMF has given Kenya very strong conditions for debt relief. As a member of the UNSC, Kenya needs to eliminate internal concerns that might contribute to the discrediting of her global peace and security initiatives.





Conclusion

The temporary seat at the UN Security Council allows countries to be in the spotlight and build mutual relationships with the world's hegemony. There are geopolitical opportunities for Kenya to gain materially through deliberate effort to re-engineer her prospects and maximise on strategic relationships, leadership positions, and multilateralism in order to make her stint memorable. However, the country has to manage the obstacles in the geopolitical ties and act on corruption perception, that continues to dent her image.



Recommendations

Kenya should:

- a) expand her strategic alliances beyond the conventional development partners and acknowledge the footprint of the Gulf States as the UAE ascends to the UNSC in 2022. Her agenda should be towards mobilisation of resources on matters of SDGs.
- b) take up the position of penholder on the Climate Change and Security Informal Expert Group which is being co-chaired by Niger and Ireland to increase her visibility in the climate change conversation.
- c) purposefully bolster relations between the UNSC and the AUPSC through activities of the A3 in order to increase understanding of African positions and increasingly legitimize the credibility of the A3 engagements with other Council members.





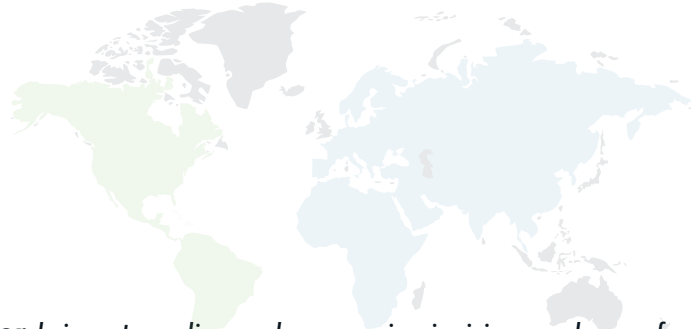
- d) reorient her national priorities in light of geopolitical realignments, particularly where the P5 are concerned. She should be ready to form new strategic alliances with the other non-permanent members while reinvigorating her economic relationship with the US.
- e) strengthen the working relationship of anti-corruption agencies in order to improve her international image, stabilise and legitimise her causes at the UNSC.



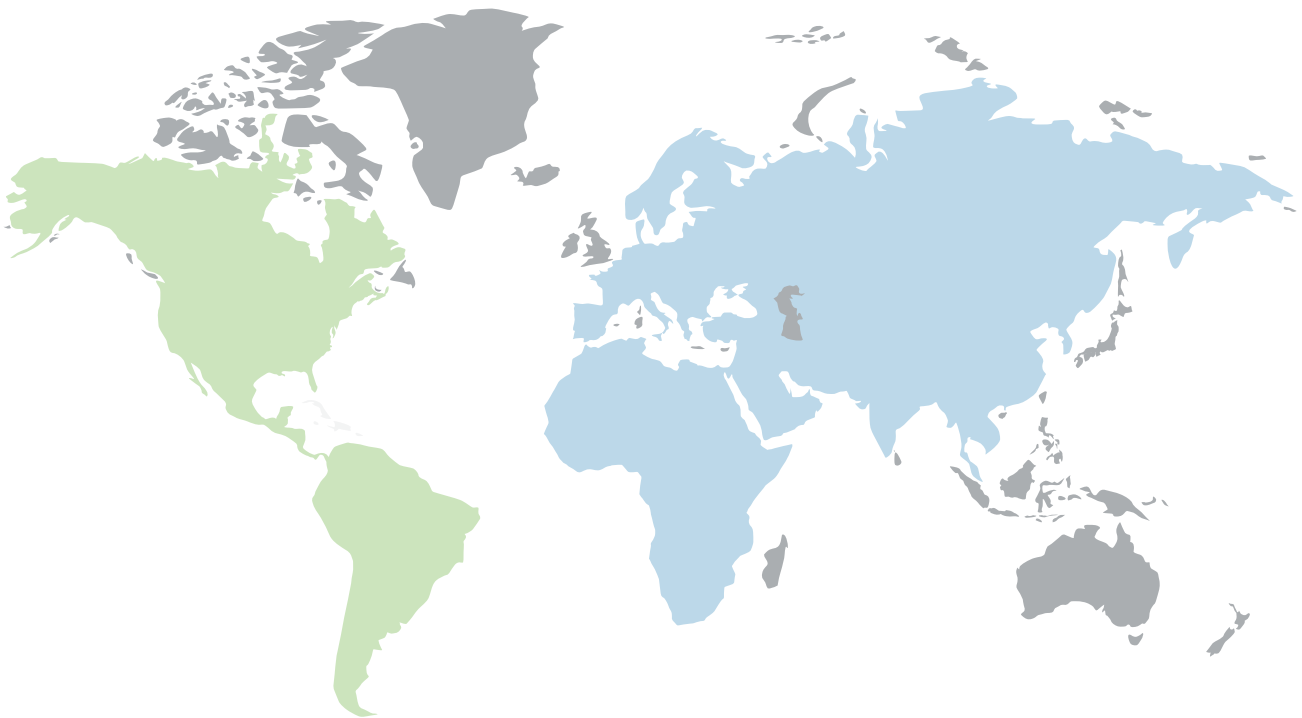
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