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Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

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Photo Credit: Sky News

Bolstering Kenya-Tanzania relations in the Samia Suluhu Hassan presidency

Tanzania's foreign policy in the era of President Magufuli could have confined her to an isolation room, locking her from close cooperation with major global powers, donor community, continental blocs and regional partners such as Kenya. Will President Suluhu reconcile Tanzania with the rest of the world, particularly her neighbour Kenya? Our research fellow for Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, Janet Kiguru, says there is a 'way out' which the 'will' can follow.

(Dr. K.O. Asembo, Editor-in-Chief)

Janet Kiguru

Abstract

The presidency of Samia Suluhu offers Kenya a new opportunity to reinvigorate Kenya-Tanzania relations as well as East African Community (EAC) integration. However, her era is likely to be influenced by the legacy of her predecessor, the late John Pombe Magufuli; the intricate politics of the ruling party and the Arab-Asian economic effect on Tanzania, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). This paper recommends that Kenya

can strengthen relations with Tanzania through diplomatic strategies targeting the trade wars, the COVID-19 pandemic and influential economic elites in the ruling party and Suluhu's deep state. President Kenyatta's recent presence in Dodoma to condole with Tanzanians offer a strategic platform for reinvigorating diplomatic engagements.



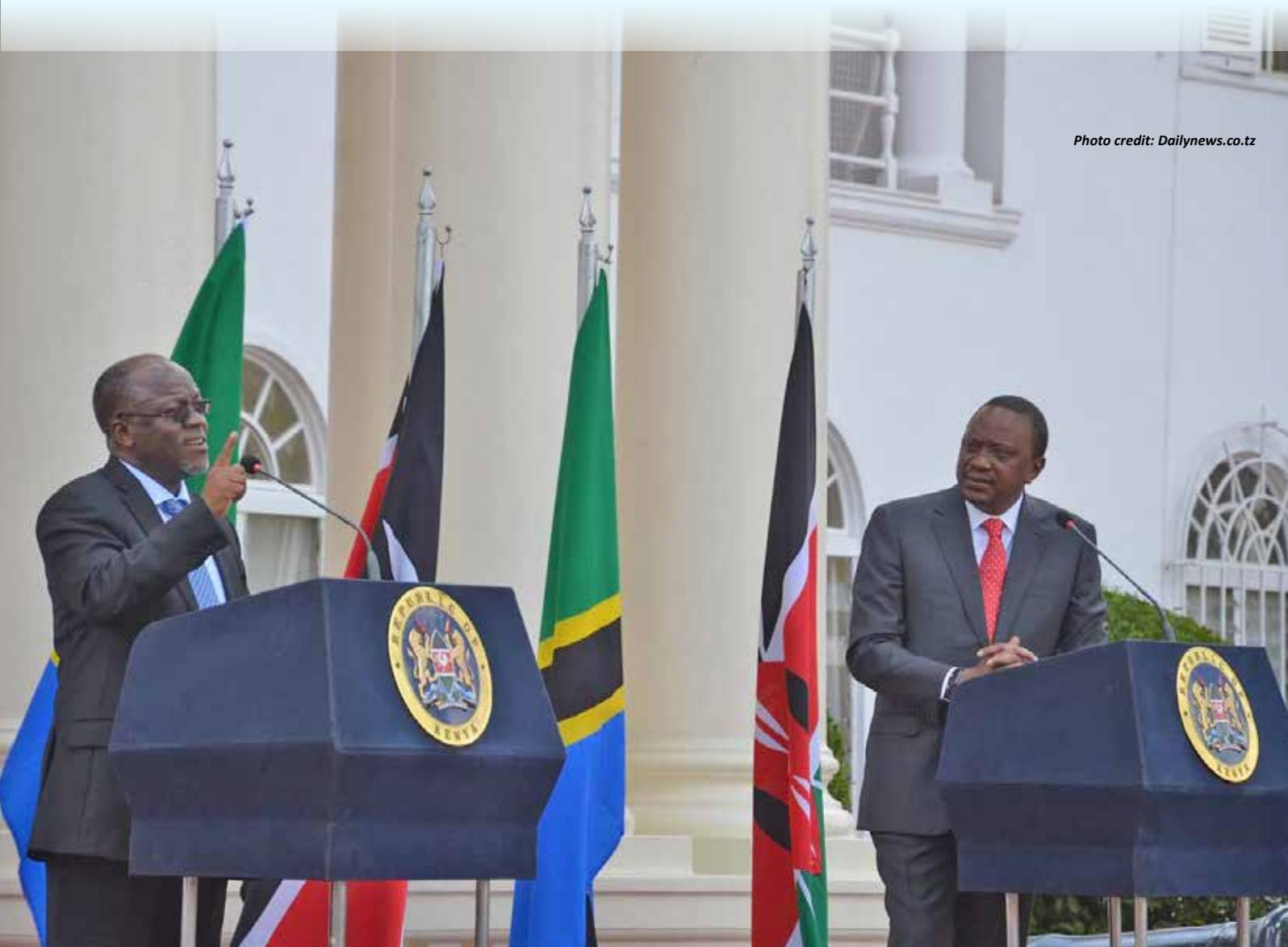
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Background

The ascendance of Samia Suluhu Hassan to the presidency of Tanzania marks a new era that can be exploited to improve Kenya-Tanzania relations. It presents Kenya with an opportunity to strategically influence political dynamics in the post-Magufuli epoch in order to protect national interests. The era was characterized by strained relations between the two countries over bilateral trade, the politics of EAC and regional supremacy. While Magufuli leaned

more towards Southern African Development Community (SADC), his hands were still stretched out to dominate EAC affairs. Tanzania's attempt to challenge Kenya's dominance led to face-offs on trade tariffs, infrastructural projects, treaty ratification and migration policies. This legacy, coupled with CCM politics and the Arab-Asian influence, will have a profound impact on foreign policy of President Suluhu.

Photo credit: Dailynews.co.tz

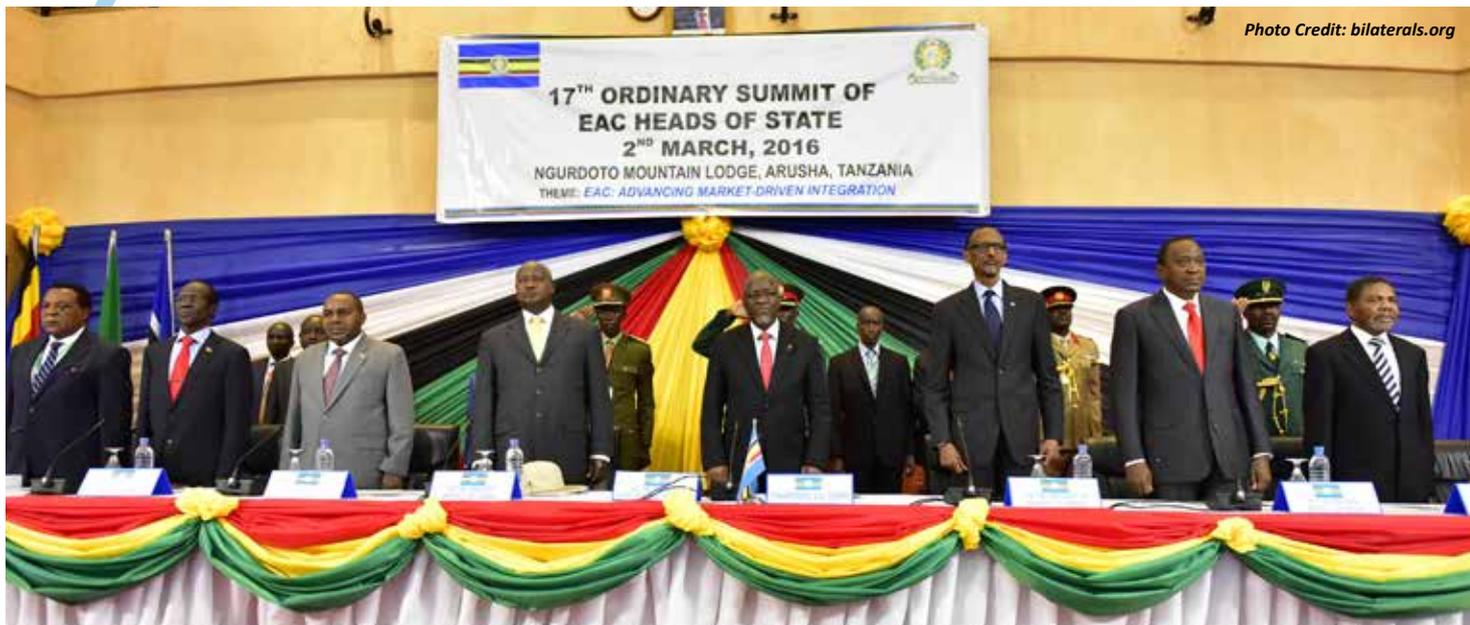


Key Issues

The following issues are significant in defining Kenya-Tanzania relations in the post-Magufuli era.



The legacy of President Magufuli



The presidency of Magufuli was preoccupied with the implementation of a socio-economic blueprint that led to rapid economic growth of Tanzania leading to a standoff in the EAC. The country began to challenge Kenya's politico-economic dominance in the bloc as both countries embarked on mega-regional infrastructure projects. These included: Tanzania's port of Tanga project; the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) and; the Uganda-Tanzania Crude Oil Pipeline (UTCOP). Kenya, on the other hand, initiated the Lamu Port and Lamu- Southern Sudan- Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor and the SGR.

This sparked competition between the two countries on who would serve their landlocked neighbors in the EAC: Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Magufuli managed to win over the three countries on the SGR, port and pipeline projects thus rendering Kenya's projects white elephants. Kenya's 'coalition of the willing' which had roped in Rwanda and Uganda to counter Magufuli's anti-EAC and anti-Kenya machinations was thus dismantled.

The Magufuli policies further waged a trade war on Kenyan companies by increasing tariffs on Kenyan goods and services, banning Kenyan tour operators, Kenyan flights and even limiting export of Tanzanian produce to Kenya. As a result, Kenya's exports to Tanzania dropped from KSh42.7 billion in 2015 to KSh29.4 billion in 2020. At the same time, the President had taken advantage of the EAC customs union to increase Tanzanian exports to Kenya from KSh17.2 billion in 2015 to KSh26.1 billion in 2020. Kenya became second to the UK in multinationals operating in Tanzania. While she also made retaliatory moves on Tanzania by banning selected imports, flights and increasing non-tariff barriers on Tanzanian goods, this rivalry generally weakened the latter and the EAC integration.

The trade wars heightened when Kenya banned maize imports from Tanzania and Uganda, just a week before President Suluhu came into office. Even though the ban has since been lifted, President Suluhu is still facing the daunting task of salvaging the worsening EAC economic relations.



President Kenyatta's declaration of seven days of mourning in Kenya following the death of President Magufuli and his presence at the memorial service in Dodoma, as the only EAC head of state, is an indication of his readiness to improve Kenya-Tanzania relations.

Magufuli's anti-Kenya blueprint gave political mileage to many of his supporters. They were able to accentuate more sentiments hostile to Kenya and EAC and drive economic nationalism ideology among the citizenry. It is popular knowledge that anti-Kenya sentiments unify Tanzanians and any attempt to engage the reverse gear will have a negative influence on Sulu's legacy. While Kenyan imports have reduced, Chinese and South African imports have increased in the Tanzanian market, an indication that the economic nationalism ideology had been crafted to target Kenya. In fact, in 2019, Uganda and Tanzania signed three bilateral agreements to increase bilateral trade, remove non-tariff barriers, streamline immigration, and offer tax incentives.

A defining moment of President Sulu's diplomatic prowess will be her ability to reroute Tanzania from COVID-19 isolation policies of Magufuli to solidarity with the world. Magufuli's handling of COVID-19 pandemic made him be christened 'a COVID-19 denier', a tag Sulu is likely to carry over. The late President denied the existence of the virus and asked Tanzanians to pray to God to fight it. He downplayed the scientific evidence and measures put in place by the international community to curb the spread.

This isolation policy made western nations issue travel advisories on Tanzania claiming that it was COVID-ridden. The same pressure is mounting on Kenya authorities to close the Kenya-Tanzania border due to increased COVID-19 cases. But in the run-up to 2020 elections, the isolation strategy presented a political mileage for Magufuli as he claimed that it was an economic war being waged by the west against Tanzania. The citizenry believed him, claiming that he was their 'Messiah' thereby re-electing him. The climax of his isolation approach saw him further ban foreign travels for Tanzanian civil servants. He personally visited only EAC member states and a few SADC states.

His COVID denial perspective, however, eased out later as he advised Tanzanians to wear masks, but only those made in Tanzania. So far, Sulu has not made any pronouncements on how Tanzania will approach COVID-19, despite calls from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Africa Centre for Disease Control (ACDC) to scale up public health measures against COVID-19 and prepare for vaccination. Instead she has begun with a purge on corruption in government just like her predecessor, perhaps to win the confidence of Tanzanians and the donor community.



Photo Credit: Voice of America

Yet, Magufuli's change of standpoint presents her with a rider to reverse the COVID antagonism and pursue pro-WHO policies in managing the pandemic. A pro-COVID policy would influence the EAC states, particularly Kenya, to join her in fighting the pandemic and improve the weakening relations. Reiterating these last



Photo Credit: France 24

wishes to Tanzanians will enable her to not only retain Magufuli's populism if she decides to seek re-election in 2024 but also attune Tanzania to the global rhythm of fighting the pandemic. This will be beneficial to improving relations between Kenya and Tanzania.

President Suluhu further faces an arduous undertaking as she towers over the dominant patriarchal Tanzanian politics which was evidenced in Magufuli's anti-women rights' sentiments. Tanzanian women, who make a majority of the population, will be looking up to her for promotion of their rights. President Suluhu has affirmed the need for women to be given opportunity to lead. To this end, Kenya has an opportunity to rally behind her in this quest given its good record in upholding women's rights in the region.

Magufuli's anti-western policies were particular in promoting his popularity and Tanzanians would expect more of them during Suluhu era. The regime was quite vocal on the influence of the West on African politics. He led vicious campaigns against his Western-leaning political opponents; the pro-West media; the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBTG) community and; pregnant underage girls. This led to sanctions from the US and freezing of donor aid from the West, making him turn to China for loans. Suluhu's perpetuation of these policies may make Tanzania to be blacklisted further in the region and globally thereby complicating any bid to amend relations with the West-aligned Kenya.



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Photo Credit: Daily News

The Arab-Asian Economic Effect on Tanzanian Politics

The influence of the economically dominant ethnic-Arabs and Indians has remained strong in Tanzanian politics due to their ability to bankroll the indigenous African political class. In fact, Magufuli cracked down on Arab and Asian business kingpins such as Harbinder Singh Sethi and Said Bakhresa who were believed to be funding the opposing CCM factions and the opposition party, CHADEMA. This brought jitters to the Arab-Indian community. These economic moguls dominate the key sectors of mining, energy manufacturing, real estate, telecommunications, tourism and major transport sectors, while the Africans are confined to provision of labor to the industrialists, small scale agriculture and informal sector employment. Their influence is bound to sway Suluhu's foreign policies.

The effect of these entrepreneurs on Tanzania's foreign relations has been significant. They managed to push Magufuli to renegotiate economic agreements such as the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with their eye focused on protecting their interests. In particular, the Tanzanian iron and steel produce pushed for the retention of the tariffs on their products. This got the support of the nationalistic political elites,

who have always rejected market-based policies and foreign investment as they aggressively rent-seek 'donations' from the business class.

Magufuli and the political class termed the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) as a neo-colonial arrangement and a tool for de-industrialization that would benefit Kenya more than other EAC states. He was categorical on not ratifying it unless amended. This has forced Kenya to bilaterally seek arrangements with the European Union (EU) and United Kingdom (UK) as she awaits Tanzania to reconsider.

The Arabs and Asians have sought to control the CCM due to the likely threat to their economic survival in the event of racial populism. They consider joining CCM healthy to their business ventures and they will still be seeking to control the Suluhu presidency by financing CCM factions with influence on her. This gives Kenya a leverage to align with the Arab-Asian business community with influence in Suluhu's deep state for favorable trade relations.

Navigating through the intricate political dynamics of CCM



Photo Credit: Diaspora Messenger



Photo Credit: Voice of America

The Suluhu presidency is settling on a divided and polarized nation with multiple factions of independence party CCM in stiff competition for political dominance. Magufuli came to power with just 58% of the popular vote, the lowest a CCM president has ever earned since independence. The popularity of CCM seems to be waning as strong opposition parties such as Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) take the stage. The factions have become so strong that they have weakened the party, increased 'indiscipline' and competition by rent-seeking politicians, making it hard for the agenda of any faction to sail through.

Magufuli, who was considerably a weaker candidate, was a beneficiary of the vicious competition between the Jakaya Kikwete and Edward Lowassa factions. This allowed him to crack-down on any perceived opponents since he did not owe allegiances to either camp. Though Lowassa's faction has been considerably weakened by Magufuli's onslaught on the benefactors, they may reorganize and cause jitters within CCM to the detriment of Suluhu policies.

She has an obligation to reconcile and unite Tanzania as she crafts her legacy. The influence of former President, Jakaya Kikwete, may play a big role as she first served as his Minister for Union Affairs. Therefore, her domestic and foreign policy agenda is likely to get support from the Kikwete faction whose influence is still strong within CCM.

The Kikwete regime had employed diplomatic charm to strengthen the EAC and align Tanzania with great powers such as China and US. Kikwete (whose friendship with Kenya during his leadership was in exuberance) has reiterated his availability to assist Suluhu's government if called upon. If Kikwete allies gain prominence, Suluhu will most likely reorient Tanzania's foreign policy towards her neighbours and the global community. Analysts describe President Suluhu, as open, amicable, calm and rational, unlike Magufuli, and is expected to downplay the historical rivalry and nationalistic sentiments against Kenya. However, her 'soft' approach on Kenya is likely to be frustrated by overbearing CCM factions resistant to change and the economic class.



Conclusion

President Suluhu faces an uphill task of implementing her predecessor's blueprint to the letter. She has already chosen the finance minister of Magufuli, a former senior World Bank economist with previous academic ties to Nairobi-Kenya, Dr. Philip Mpango, as her Vice President. This is an indication of her desire to focus on the economic legacy of Magufuli while winning the donor community and perhaps understanding Nairobi. She has also the obligation to stabilize

her campaign and guide Tanzania out of the COVID-19 pandemic as she delivers the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) campaign manifesto. But removing Tanzania from the geopolitical isolation room means she has to reinvigorate strategic diplomatic relations and balance the political dynamics in Tanzania. This provides Kenya with possible avenues to swiftly engage cooperative ventures to improve relations.

Recommendations

1. Both Kenya and Tanzania should commit to strengthening EAC economic bloc and reduce trade tariffs and barriers that have increased in the last five years.
2. Kenya should reach out and encourage Tanzania's business class to invest and expand their market reach into Kenya so as to induce more liberal policies from Tanzania.
3. Kenya should take advantage of any possible reverse signs by President Suluhu on management of Covid-19 pandemic and join Tanzania in confronting the dire situation in the country. This could be achieved through donation of personal and health protective equipment and vaccines to Tanzania.
4. Being the Chair of EAC, Kenya should reach out to other member states including Tanzania for an East African Covid-19 response strategy meant to mobilize resources to help all the people of East Africa confront the pandemic.

Janet Kiguru is GLOCEPS Research Fellow for Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Pillar. She has previous experience in research and teaching at the University level. Her particular areas of expertise include international development, regional integration, bilateral relations, multilateral relations, and diplomatic strategy. Janet is currently a PhD candidate at the United States International University-Africa. She holds a Master's degree in Development Studies and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Political Science from the University of Nairobi.



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Off Kiambu Road, Nairobi Kenya
P.O. Box 27023-00100, Nairobi.
Telephone: 0112401331
Mobile: +254 700 279635
Email: info@gloceps.org
Web: <https://www.gloceps.org>