



Kenya's UN Security Council bid: African Union members endorse Kenya to take the sole United Nations Security Council non-permanent seat reserved for the continent in 2021

## ALIGNING DEMOCRATIC PEACE TO DIPLOMACY: KENYA'S CAMPAIGN FOR UN SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT

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*On January 29, 2020, as part of its campaign for the UNSC seat, the Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a high-profile seminar on the "Global Political Trends and Implications for Peace and Security in Africa". Perhaps, echoing its Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) which is anchored along the line's regional security and stability, Kenya is seeking to ensure an inclusive global governance where "the UNSC works for all people."*

Kenya won the African Union endorsement for a seat in the all-powerful United Nations Security Council (UNSC). But the Horn is proving a tough and dangerous neighborhood.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), now facing an existential challenge from the newly formed Horn of Africa Cooperation (HoAC), failed to get Kenya and Djibouti to reach consensus on who should represent the region.

But Kenya defeated Djibouti in the ensuing secret ballot on August 20, 2019 in Addis Ababa, garnering 37 votes against Djibouti's 13. But Africa was struck mute when Djibouti reneged, jettisoning the African consensus and rescinding its earlier decision to respect the AU voting process in which it took part three times.

As part of its campaign for the UNSC seat, this week, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a high-profile seminar on global political trends and implications for peace and security in Africa, attended by scores of UNSC representatives from all corners of the globe in its port city of Mombasa on January 29, 2020.

Building bridges is top on a 10-point "manifesto" guiding Kenya's campaign, which include peace keeping; regional security; countering terrorism, the role of women and youth in peace and security; humanitarian action, justice, human rights and democracy; environment and climate change; and sustainable development.

Echoing BBI, Kenya is seeking to ensure an inclusive global governance where "the UNSC works for all people." It is calling for a rule-based international system and advancing the mandate of the UNSC in an inclusive, responsive and consultative manner.

Since the March 9 handshake with Kenya's opposition, Kenyatta has rejected the zero-sum imagination governance whose winner-takes-all dogma is perilous in Africa's divided societies. Instead, he has prioritized the pursuit of two universal freedoms the UN has earmarked as the basis of sustainable peace and security for all: "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear".

75 years ago, the architects of the United Nations as the custodian of global peace primarily "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" created a 15-member UNSC, five as permanent members and ten as non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the

General Assembly. Africa has three seats, currently occupied by South Africa, Niger and Tunisia.

To be sure, Kenya is not a newcomer to the UNSC, charged with the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, having served twice previously as a member of the Council – in 1973-74 and 1997-98. Its return 26 years after would maintain a record of serving in 24-year intervals.

This time around, it brings to the table its invaluable experience in supporting unstable governments in Somalia and South Sudan, and in assisting refugees in the region, and a huge peace support training capacity and infrastructure.

But Kenya seeks a UNSC the kind of thinking that shaping global political trends continues to pose great risks to peace and security in Africa and beyond? Kenya's diplomats must prepare to navigate this thinking, which as progressed historically over four distinct phases. In the first phase (1945-1989), global political trends reflected the imperatives of the Cold War when humanity was seen in binary form as either west or East leaning. Africa is yet to recover fully from the effects of this ideological war, which was "cold" in the West, but extremely hot and deadly in the battle fields of the developing world.

In the second phase (1989-2001), global political trends reflected the liberal triumphalism dramatized by Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* (1992). The world and humanity are imagined as "liberal" and all civilizations melting away giving way to liberalism: Capitalism, market and democracy. In Africa, democratization was characterized by the collapse or withering away of states, civil wars and genocides.

In the third phase (2001-2014), trends were characterized by a sharp "cultural turn" and doomsday scenarios in Global politics.

This is amplified by Robert D. Kaplan's *"The Coming Anarchy"* (1994) and Samuel Huntington's *"Clash of Civilization"* (1996), where civilizations are cast as armor-plated marching into battle fronts.

In the current phase (2014-2020), trends are shaped by the return of geopolitics of the Cold War era. Response to the resurgence of Russia, the rise of China and the global South has given rise to populism, protectionism, and isolationism, signified by anti-migration sentiments, signified by trade wars and anti-globalization especially in the West.

But what exactly are the implications of these trends for peace and security in Africa? First, Kenya has to come into terms with a world order where African opinion and voice is increasingly pushed to the margins of global politics. As the case of Somalia and Libya has shown, this has increased the continent's vulnerability to power politics and interests of global powers especially in the context of the new Scramble for its resources.

Second, Kenya is bearing the brunt of a declining Pan-African consensus as a result of geopolitics. This is reflected in Djibouti's decision to rescind

its earlier decision to respect the AU vote and challenge Kenya's endorsement as Africa's candidate. If Djibouti, the only French-speaking country in the Horn, beats Kenya, Africa will be represented by three Francophone countries, total total exclusion of English-speaking Africa.

Finally, the pivot in Western capitals from countering violence extremism to countering China will pose risk to Kenya's on-going efforts to defeat Al-Shabaab terrorists in Somalia.

Despite these challenges, Kenya's "building bridges" approach to diplomacy is likely to advance efforts by the UNSC to create a multi-faceted security framework able to provide *just, equitable and sustainable* global security.

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