

# Kenya's Peace Diplomacy in Eastern Africa: Regional Hegemon?

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## ABSTRACT

Kenya's peace diplomacy in Eastern Africa has encompassed mediation, negotiations, peacekeeping operations, and complex peace restoration efforts in collaboration with other actors. The country has contributed significantly to peace initiatives in the region where most of the countries have suffered wars, civil strifes and general instability. These efforts have earned the country global accolades and recognition. They are anchored on the country's peace diplomacy pillar which seeks to consolidate her legacy in promoting peace and stability in countries within the region. This research paper based on the review of secondary data examines the application of Kenya's peace diplomacy to the resolution of conflicts in Eastern Africa. It surveys the elements of Kenya's foreign policy that have bolstered her peace diplomacy in the region, analyzes how the country has engaged herself in the pursuit of peace in a region beset by numerous and complex conflicts and questions whether this role and the nature of its execution is elevating the country into the status of a regional hegemon in Eastern Africa. The article concludes that Kenya has harnessed the combined strength of her imminent leaders and personalities, relative stability, regional economic dominance, and the expansion of the space for regional and continental diplomacy to play a major role in the resolution of conflicts and stabilization in the region. The country has consistently projected herself in her foreign policy stance as a peace-loving nation with solemn honor for the basic international norms of respect for the sovereignty of neighboring states, good neighborliness, the peaceful settlement of disputes and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The modest achievements in the peace processes combined with the continuing support for peace and state building efforts in neighboring countries are steadily propelling Kenya into the rank of a regional hegemon and a diplomatic powerhouse in Eastern Africa.

**Keywords:** peace, peace diplomacy, conflict resolution, regional hegemon, Eastern Africa

## INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Africa region encompasses two major zones in the African continent: East Africa and the Horn of Africa. It is made up of Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (International Peace Academy 2002). Most of the countries that make up Eastern Africa have been beset by conflicts, internal turmoil and general instability since the dawn of independence from the colonial powers with devastating consequences. These conflicts have been attributed to among other factors; the colonial legacy with its artificial boundaries and alien governance systems, competition for resources including pasture and water, poor governance, ethnic and tribal divisions and fragile state systems which are unable to cope with both internal and external pressures.

The conflict situation in the countries in the region cover a whole spectrum; from the relatively peaceful and generally stable countries such as Tanzania to the broken Somalia which is considered the world's classic case of a failed state. Some countries such as South Sudan are slowly emerging from decades of war and blood shed while others like Sudan have just plunged into a catastrophic conflict. Along this spectrum is

Kenya which despite of its occasional fissures and instabilities, is considered a largely peaceful country and an anchor state in the region. Kenya has striven to rise above its cyclic conflicts which happen mainly during election seasons and other internal challenges to being a beacon of hope and stability in a region beset by numerous and complex conflicts. The country has over the years projected good neighborliness and peace diplomacy as the core tenets of her foreign policy in the region. Right from independence through the reigns of Presidents Moi, Kibaki, Uhuru to the current administration of Dr. Ruto, the country has actively participated in the pursuit of peace in her neighborhood. Several internal and external strengths have worked in her favor over the decades. The achievements in these endeavors have been mixed. The question remains as to whether Kenya has progressively attained the status of a regional hegemon through the peace efforts. Hegemons commonly arise and use their strength to create a set of political and economic structures and norms of behavior that enhance the stability of the system at the same time that these structures and norms advance the security of the hegemon. Is Kenya a regional hegemon in Eastern Africa? This paper delves into this debate in the context of the shift in power dynamics globally occasioned by the end of the Cold War which saw the changing of the security dynamics of many regions globally including those in Africa. With the security void left by the great powers in Africa, regional hegemons have played significant roles in promoting regional peace and stability. Regional hegemons; Nigeria and South Africa have helped to sustain peace and stability in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) respectively in line with the postulations of the hegemonic stability theory (Nkumbe and Njie 2021). Is Kenya rising to take up this role in Eastern Africa? This paper, therefore, interrogates the factors that have bolstered Kenya's peace diplomacy in the region, examines how the country has engaged herself in the pursuit of peace in the region and questions whether this peace promotion role and the nature of its execution has elevated Kenya to the status of a regional hegemon in Eastern Africa.

### **Kenya's foreign policy and peace diplomacy in Eastern Africa**

From independence, Kenya's foreign policy has consistently been tailored to suit her domestic aspirations and to boost her international position. The preservation of her nationhood has been a prime goal and sits at the core of her national interests. This ambition combined with the desire to promote her security, economic and social interests have largely influenced the country's foreign policy stance at the global, continental and regional levels. The superpower rivalries characterizing the global cold war situation that the country was born into at independence led to the pragmatic adoption of a non-aligned policy in international affairs. This was a posture by which Kenya sought to assert and protect her independence and sovereignty. Consequently, the new state espoused the principle of positive independence which underscored the country's resolve to be an active actor in world affairs and her opposition to imperialism, neo-colonialism, racialism and all other forms of foreign or national oppression (KANU Manifesto, 1960). Conspicuous also in Kenya's immediate post-independence foreign policy cornerstones was the support for the U.N and its principles key of which is international peace and mutual co-existence.

At the continental level, the country joined the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – now the African Union (AU) – and subsequently identified with the continent's aspiration for the complete liberation of African countries from colonial rule and the promotion of African unity (Okumu 1971, Howell 1968). The country through the acumen of its first president joined the leadership ranks of the OAU in the pursuit of continental goals key of which were territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of African countries. Connected to these was the quest for other middle range objectives including economic, cultural and commercial relations, diplomatic representations and political influence. Kenya's perceived neutrality in African affairs, a result of being a member of neither the 'radical' group of states nor the 'moderates' or 'conservatives, accorded her prestige and importance in African diplomatic circles (Howell 1968). Kenya had not been involved in the old quarrels and ideological divisions in the OAU between the radical Pan-Africanists headed by the late President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and the gradualists led by the late Sir Abubaker Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria. This prestige combined with Kenyatta's towering image as one of the

fathers of the Pan-Africanist movement thought capable of bringing quarrelling sides together, and Kenya's foreign policy stance enhanced her perceived capacity and consequently elevated the role of the country in the resolution of conflicts in the region (Okumu 1971).

Kenya's approach to regional relations largely mirrored her stance at the global and continental levels. Having shunned imperialistic and adventuristic ideals, the country effortlessly adopted a status quo approach in her dealings with countries in the East African region from which the good neighborliness policy was derived. She has generally pursued policies informed by the need for a more politically stable Eastern Africa through pacific means of conflict resolution, and adoption of both unilateral and multilateral approaches in combating terrorism, violence and conflicts in the region (Kaburu 2020). In line with her espoused view of global and continental affairs coupled with her domestic aspirations, it has always been in the country's interest to pursue and maintain a peaceful and stable neighborhood. This has further been shaped by the need to attract more foreign capital, the desire to maintain commercial links with neighboring states, the necessity of ensuring the security of her borders and the wish to consolidate her domestic power base. Consequently, the country's most significant international affiliations are with the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Organization of African Unity/African Union. It is through these multilateral organizations (and occasionally through bilateral efforts) that Kenya has deployed one of its most important diplomatic tools – peace diplomacy – in seeking to resolve the regions conflicts and promote regional stability in Eastern Africa.

### **Kenya's Engagement in Conflict Management in Eastern Africa**

Kenya has dominated the conflict resolution and management landscape in Eastern Africa since the early years of her independence. Guided by her good neighborliness policy and grounded on her peace diplomacy pillar, the country has embarked on the promotion of peace in the region, mitigating violent situations and the resolution and management of conflicts with admirable resilience, dedication and commitment. All the four administrations that have been at the helm of Kenya's leadership have demonstrated continued consistency in the pursuit of peace in a neighborhood that has been manifestly conflictual and unstable.

Noticeable in the country's foreign policy objectives is the need to promote and safeguard national, regional and international peace and security by supporting the work of regional, international and multilateral organizations in finding lasting solutions to conflict and terrorism activities for a free and secure world. This is informed by Kenya's strong belief that her future is inseparably connected to the stability and security of the immediate sub-region which is the mainstay of her nationhood, prosperity, and livelihoods of her citizens. Peace diplomacy has therefore emerged as a major strategic response to widespread civil wars, the implosion of the state, radicalism and other forms of extremism threatening national and regional peace, security, stability, and prosperity in Eastern Africa and beyond (Republic of Kenya 2014).

Almost from the outset of independence, Kenya found herself in the forefront of African diplomacy and conflict resolution. In 1964, as the continuing civil strife in the Congo created the prospect of a new cold-war battleground, there were strong demands within Africa for a negotiated solution through the OAU. The setting up of the OAU Congo Conciliation Commission in Nairobi, under Kenyatta's chairmanship, showed that Kenya was considered to be one of the very few who could possibly have brought the Congo crisis to an end (Howell 1968). During his tenure as the Chair of the Conciliation Commission, Kenyatta was able, though unsuccessfully, to implore the Americans and the Chinese to refrain from supplying war materials to the Congolese. The conflict in the DRC has persisted for decades with Kenya recently resuming her conflict resolution mission in the country. She has in recent times hosted peace talks and provided leadership on the resolution of conflicts that have been raging for decades in the Eastern part of the DRC.

Consultative deliberations on the peace and security situation in the DRC, or what was dubbed as the inter-DRC peace dialogue were started in April, 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya. At the time, close to 30 Congolese

armed groups engaged in consultations aimed at finding lasting solutions to the insecurity problem in their country's volatile Eastern region where more than 130 local and foreign armed militia groups have wreaked havoc for decades. The regional initiative was an outcome of the first and second EAC Heads of State conclaves on the peace and security situation in the DRC under the chairmanship of President Kenyatta held on April 8 and 21 2022, respectively, at State House Nairobi. President Kenyatta was latter appointed by East African Community (EAC) Heads of State during their 22<sup>nd</sup> Ordinary Meeting held on July 22, 2022 in Arusha, Tanzania as a facilitator of peace talks in the DRC. He was expected to especially focus on promoting peace and security in the region which has been ravaged by conflicts and violence between armed groups such as the M23 and government forces (FARC). This appointment was made possible after the Summit decided to mainstream the Nairobi process on peace in the DRC into the EAC by invoking the provisions of article 4 of the EAC protocol on peace and security. It was during the same Summit meeting that the EAC leaders decided to expeditiously deploy a joint regional force in eastern DRC to restore peace and security with Kenya as part of the force contributing countries. Under the umbrella of the East Africa Community Regional Force (EACRF), Kenya troops were deployed in eastern DRC on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022. Other troop-contributing Partner States which have so far deployed their contingents to Eastern DRC include the Republics of Burundi, South Sudan and Uganda. Despite numerous setbacks, the EACRF has continued to ensure observance of ceasefire and in addition oversaw the withdrawal of armed groups who have handed over to the EACRF most of the areas that were under their control.

Apart from this initial debut and continued engagement in the DRC, Kenya's active involvement in regional conflicts resolution has been witnessed during the leadership of all the subsequent political administrations in the country. Kenya has augmented her activities within the continent by playing important roles in the resolution of regional conflicts within East Africa as well as the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (Oweke 2019). Kenya has contributed significantly towards conflict resolution in Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and Ethiopia.

Soon after independence in 1956, a civil war erupted in Sudan between the largely Christian and animist South and the largely Muslim North. Experiences of state building and the spread of Islam and Arab identities over centuries in northern Sudan, in contrast to the comparative isolation of the south; and Britain's 'Southern Policy'— administering the south as a separate region, regarded as African rather than Arab and where Christianity was encouraged are identified as the root causes of the Sudanese conflict (Woodward 2007). IGAD's involvement in Sudan began in 1993 with the establishment of the Standing Committee of Foreign Ministers comprising Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, charged with reaching a negotiated settlement to the civil war (International Peace Academy 2012). The peace meetings and negotiations on the Sudanese conflict began in 1994 with Kenya playing host to the deliberations. However, little progress was made in the talks themselves, but the mediators eventually produced a Declaration of Principles (DOP). The DOP called for a secular state but indicated that, if this could not be agreed upon, then Southern Sudan should have a right of self-determination in a referendum with the option of independence (Woodward 2007). The IGAD peace talks continued over several inconclusive rounds and, by 2000, international interest had waned. The IGAD secretariat was reinvigorated under the leadership of Lazarus Sumbeiywo, a Kenyan General and the then government of Daniel Arap Moi actively influenced and facilitated the negotiation process. The contribution from Kenya and other countries in the region with sympathetic attitudes towards the SPLM/A, notably Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, was crucial in reaching the peace agreement. The Sumbeiywo led Machakos rounds of negotiation resulted in the unexpected and groundbreaking Machakos Protocol (signed on July 20, 2002); the referendum eventually taking place within six years of the signing of the agreement (Rolandsen 2011).

Kenya continued hosting and leading the Sudan peace process that eventually gave birth to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) – also known as the “Naivasha Agreement” – between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in 2005. She was endorsed to lead the mediation because of among other reasons, her accumulated and vast experience in managing conflicts at



regional and continental levels, Kenya's policy of non-interference in internal affairs of other states, internal political stability, and President Moi's special relationship with SPLM and the leadership of the government of Sudan (Juma 2011). The host and lead roles by Kenya were key in the later delicate negotiations of key elements of the CPA such as the disputed marginal territories (Southern Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains and Abyei), security, and wealth sharing. Immediately after the signing of the CPA, at a donor conference, Kenya pledged \$3.5 million for capacity building and technical assistance and by June 2013, a total of \$12 million had been disbursed. This capacity Building Programme benefitted over 4000 South Sudan civil servants with senior officers at the level of ministers and permanent secretaries, attending various training programmes at the Kenya School of Government.

Kenya's continued engagement in Sudan was evident during the run up to the independence referendum of 2011. She rallied the international community to ensure that the referendum succeeds and that the will of the people of South Sudan would be respected (Juma 2011). Kenya having played a leading role in mediating a politically negotiated solution to the Sudan conflict has continued to urge the two sides to implement the terms of the CPA in full in order to realize the full benefits of the agreement. The country is still involved in the South Sudan peace process through the platform of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) with peace support personnel stationed in South Sudan (Brereton & Ayuko 2016, Juma 2020, Ahmed 2017).

In the case of Somalia, the country has had a long history of conflict. It faced clashes and instabilities even prior to its formal independence occasioned by inter-clan competition over resources such as water and grazing lands. The Somali state emerged following the independence of two separate territories from British and Italian colonial rule in July 1960 (Eklow and Krampe 2019). After independence, competition shifted to the control of state power and government resources. Widespread corruption led to the overthrow of the first civilian regime of Prime Minister Abdirizak Haji Hussein by General Mohamed Siad Barre in 1969. In 1991, the autocratic and excessively repressive regime of the US-backed General was overthrown after two decades in power plunging the country into turmoil and civil war which led to the subsequent collapse of the Somali state (Ahmed 2017). The ensuing crisis in Somalia attracted significant regional and international attention over the subsequent years, with a myriad of actors intervening in a bid to help restore stability. Among these interventions are the UN led operations which were launched periodically from 1992 to 1995 including the first United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) launched in August 1992; Unified Task Force (UNITAF), the result of collaboration between UNOSOM I and the United States (US) in December 1992; and UNOSOM II which replaced UNITAF in 1993 (Miyandazi 2012). However, all these operations failed and since then, Somalia has operated without an effective central government with divisions along regional and clan lines. Somaliland, in the northwest, seceded from Somalia and despite the lack of recognition of its sovereignty by the international community, has enjoyed relative peace and stability. Puntland, in the northeast, also declared regional autonomy (International Peace Academy 2002).

The IGAD summit of 2001 requested Sudan to lead the peace process in Somalia. However, the Somali Transitional National Government (TNG) refused to cooperate as Sudan had signed new protocols of friendship and strategic cooperation with Ethiopia, which the TNG saw as its leading enemy. At the same time, the TNG was seeking to distance itself from accusations of links to Islamists and thought Kenya would be better in the eyes of the international community than tainted Sudan. Thus in 2002 IGAD agreed that Kenya take over responsibility for the peace initiative (Woodward 2007).

In January 2002, the IGAD Summit commissioned President Moi of Kenya to start a joint initiative with Ethiopia and Djibouti to bring the warlords of the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC) into negotiations with the TNG (Ahmed 2017). Kenya hosted and facilitated the Somalia peace process that established the Transitional Federal Government and the subsequent election of a president in 2004 (Bryden 2013, Dersso 2009). The talks began in October 2002, initially being held in Eldoret, before later moving to

Nairobi (Mbagathi) led by IGAD and mediated by Kenyan diplomats. Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia formed a frontline states technical committee in which Djibouti backed the TNG, Ethiopia backed the SSRC and Kenya held the role of mediator. Thus, began IGAD's Somalia National Reconciliation Conference, a Kenyan-led negotiation conducted with the financial support of European development funds (Ahmed 2017). It proved to be the longest Somalia peace conference, lasting a full two years, during which the mandate of the TNG expired (Interpeace 2009). In spite of the problems in the various committees, many of which remained unresolved, by June 2003 the conference was moving towards an agreement on a power-sharing government with a 275-member parliament and over 80 ministers (Woodward 2007). Eventually, a Transitional Federal Charter was adopted and a Transitional Federal Parliament was selected, which duly chose Abdullahi Yusuf as the president in October 2004 for a five-year transitional period (Interpeace 2009).

From its inauguration in December 2004, the TFG won immediate international recognition and substantial financial support was also anticipated with the inauguration of a World Bank and UNDP Joint Needs Assessment of the country's rehabilitation and development requirements. The TFG relied heavily on sustained international financial and military support but, like its predecessor, the TFG fell short of serving as a national government. A Mogadishu-based coalition, comprising dominant clans from the capital, Islamists, leaders of the previous TNG, and warlords, formed an opposition to the TFG and blocked it from establishing itself in the capital. In 2006, the ascendant Islamic Courts Union (ICU) defeated rival militia leaders in Mogadishu and spread its authority across most of south-central Somalia. In late December 2006, Ethiopian forces swept the ICU from power, and installed the TFG in Mogadishu. Efforts by the TFG and Ethiopia to impose their authority through force provoked violent resistance from a mixture of Mogadishu-based clan militia and the remnants of the militant wing of the ICU – al Shabaab al Mujahidiin ('the Mujahideen Youth Movement'). After 2007 the Islamist extremist group al-Shabab became the most significant contestant for government power on the national level. The absence of a functioning state and the high level of corruption provided an entry point for the network, which maintains ties to al-Qaeda. This led to the internationalization of the conflict, by linking it to the 'global war on terrorism' (Eklow and Krampe 2019). In early 2007, a small contingent of African Union peacekeepers (AMISOM) was deployed to Mogadishu as an advance team of a proposed UN peacekeeping operation to protect the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs). The AMISOM force, however, was deployed with a confusing and contradictory mandate and was ill-equipped to intervene (Interpeace 2009).

Kenya's traditional low-risk, non-interventionist approach to peacebuilding and peacemaking, which is grounded in good neighborliness and respect for national sovereignty, shifted dramatically in October 2011 with its unprecedented military operation in Somalia. This shift was underpinned by its growing confidence as an emerging East African power, coupled with a heightened interest in protecting its economic interests at home (Mc Evoy 2013). Kenya deployed its troops to Somalia in a mission dubbed "Operation Linda Nchi" to tackle the al-Shabaab terror group that had launched several incursions into Kenyan territory. The intervention was considered to have been both strategically prudent and inevitable: neighboring Uganda, Burundi and Ethiopia were all involved in Somalia militarily; there was a growing perception of heightened insecurity; Somali piracy was on the increase; the LAPSSET project needed protection; and Kenya had for several years been trying unsuccessfully to create a buffer zone between itself and Somalia (Ahmed 2017). As well as having concerns over border security, Kenya maintained that al-Shabaab's frequent kidnappings and killings of tourists in its coastal and north-eastern provinces had become a threat to trade and tourism, both of which are vital sectors of Kenya's economy. Kenya advanced the argument of the country's right to self-defense as embodied in Article 51 of the UN Charter, which clearly recognizes the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense in the wake of an armed attack against a member of the UN (Miyandazi 2012). In June 2012, Kenyan troops were officially absorbed under the African Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). Kenya's military approach to Somalia was unprecedented and, despite a shaky and expensive start, is broadly considered to have been successful. Al-Shabaab has been severely weakened, the key port of Kismayo has been liberated and held, and Kenya has gained influence in key areas of strategic

importance to its economy (Mc Evoy 2013). Kenya's involvement in the peace process in Somalia also extended to the hosting of talks on the political future of Somalia's Jubba land region (June 2012 and March 2013); the co-hosting of an international anti-piracy conference with the UN (February 2012); and attempts to mediate talks between Ethiopia and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (Mc Evoy 2013).

Uganda has been a beneficiary of Kenya's active engagement in conflict resolution in the region, albeit briefly and without any tangible results. During the tenure of Yoweri Museveni that began in 1986, Uganda's government has been battling two opposition forces: the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Uganda People's Democratic Movement/Army (UPDM/A). Tens of thousands of Ugandans had died and approximately 350,000 had been displaced by the war. In December 1999, in an effort to end this alliance, Uganda and Sudan, with Kenya's mediation, signed the Nairobi Agreement under which Sudan promised to cease assistance to the LRA. However, the Nairobi Agreement failed to resolve the conflict (International Peace Academy 2002).

Kenya's contribution to conflict resolution and peace building has also been witnessed in the amicable engagements with her immediate neighbors in East Africa for the resolution of border disputes and intercommunal conflicts. In September 2019, Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta and his Ugandan counterpart President Yoweri Museveni witnessed the historic signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for Cross border peace and development in the Turkana-Pokot-Karamoja region along the border of the two countries. The Kenya and Uganda Cross Border Programme is a joint initiative of the 2 Governments, with support from the United Nations Country Teams and managed by UNDP to accord communities on the border, opportunities for better co-operation, close coordination and peaceful co-existence. Targeted communities are the Turkana and the Pokot of Kenya and Karamoja in Uganda in a bid to improve their livelihoods and socioeconomic conditions for sustainable peace and development (UNDP 2019). The two states have also made several efforts to resolve the Migingo stalemate. In 2009, Kenya and Uganda launched a survey plan to determine the actual ownership of the island and to heal the festering diplomatic wounds (Ogenga 2019). In 2019, Kenya agreed to share the disputed Migingo island with Uganda even as she maintained that the land is in Kenya (Chepkoech 2019).

In November 2020, Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray was plunged into a civil conflict involving ethno-regional militias, the federal government, and the Eritrean military that quickly attracted international attention due to its severity. The conflict was triggered by the loss of power in 2018 by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the primary political party representing Tigray, which had dominated Ethiopian leadership coalitions and politics at the national level for decades to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali. Within a year, of these changes at the helm of the Ethiopian political leadership, ethnic relations in the country begun to deteriorate. Multiple delays of national elections and the extension of Abiy Ahmed's first term as prime minister in June 2020 led to discontent in the ranks of the Tigrayan leadership. The Tigray State Council chose to hold elections in defiance of federal orders which inflamed tensions. Tigrayan leaders further warned that they would consider intervention from the federal government a declaration of war. On November 4, 2020, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered an offensive by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) troops into Tigray in a military operation known as "the Mekelle Offensive". The offensive escalated in severity over the next few months as Tigrayan troops ramped up their military response and eventually degenerated into a bloody civil war also known as the Tigray War.

The response of the international community was swift and robust due to among other reasons the severity of the conflict and the politico-security significance of Ethiopia in the region and globally. The EU suspended most of its budget support to Ethiopia, a country long considered a cornerstone for EU relations with the Horn of Africa and the United States characterized the conflict as ethnic cleansing against Tigrayans because of the harrowing reports that were documented on the prevalence of mass atrocities. In March 2021, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights announced a joint probe with the

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to investigate alleged abuses and rights violations in Tigray. A UN Security Council proposal to condemn the parties to the conflict initiated by Ireland in early 2021 was quickly abandoned due to push back from India, Russia, and China (Council on Foreign Relations 2023).

In a mediation effort that underscores Kenya's role in conflict resolution and management in the region, the TPLF and the Ethiopian central government signed a cessation of hostilities agreement on November 2, 2022 in Pretoria, South Africa. This was followed by implementation negotiations in Nairobi, Kenya. Uhuru Kenyatta, the immediate former president of Kenya, and Olusegun Obasanjo, the African Union's appointed envoy and former President of Nigeria facilitated the Pretoria and Nairobi agreements. President Kenyatta had previously been appointed by his successor, Dr. William Ruto as the country's lead peace envoy in the region. In the agreement, there were provisions for the disarming of Tigrayan troops, the return of the control of the Tigrayan region to the Ethiopian government, end of the Mekelle Offensive, and full permission for humanitarian access to Tigray.

Kenya's leadership in peace efforts in Eastern Africa is also evidenced by her involvement with the multidimensional Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF). The EASF's secretariat and planning center, EASBRICOM (Eastern African Standby Brigade Co-ordination Mechanism) is based in the outskirts of Nairobi and is a priority for Kenya, giving it both status and visibility as one of the most experienced countries on the continent in terms of peacekeeping (Mc Evoy 2013). The Eastern Africa Standby Force is a regional organization whose mandate is to enhance peace and security in the region. It is one of the five regional multidimensional Forces of the African Standby Force (ASF) consisting of Military, Police and Civilian components. EASF was established as a regional mechanism to provide capability for the rapid deployment of forces to carry out preventive deployment, rapid intervention, peace support/stability operations and peace enforcement following the decision of the Summit of the African Union held in July 2004 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to create the Eastern Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG). The MOU signed in April 2005 (and as amended in January 2011) expressly establishes the EASF as a constituent organization of the African Standby Force (ASF). The establishment is based on past experiences of conflicts in Africa, including the Eastern Africa region which continues to be faced by challenges of conflict and internal problems impacting on peace and security (EASFCOM 2020).

As one of the founding members of the East African Community (EAC), Kenya in signing the treaty establishing the community committed herself to "foster and maintain an atmosphere that is conducive to peace and security through cooperation and consultations on issues pertaining to the peace and security of the Partner States with a view to prevention, better management and resolution of disputes and conflicts..." (EAC 2002). Together with other EAC partner states, Kenya undertook to promote and maintain good neighborliness as a basis for promoting peace and security within the Community. This was further reinforced in 2012 by the enactment of the East African Community Conflict Management act which seeks to prevent internal, cross border, and regional conflicts affecting partner states; bring together conflicting parties for mediation; encourage the parties to a conflict to resolve conflict amicably; encourage cooperation among partner states in conflict management; and coordinate post-conflict management (EALA 2012).

### **Is Kenya a Regional Hegemon in Eastern Africa?**

In her almost six decades of independence, Kenya has evolved into a sub-regional leader through her positive engagement in numerous initiatives within the Eastern Africa region, in the African continent, and in global affairs. Conflict resolution and the pursuit of peace within the region and beyond has consistently dominated the country's foreign policy agenda. She has managed to remain relatively peaceful and stable, a considerable achievement bearing in mind the tumultuous regions of which the country resides in and is in close proximity to; Eastern and Central Africa respectively (Oweke 2019).

The debate on Kenya's hegemonic status in Eastern Africa continues among scholars and in diplomatic



circles. Some have attributed the country's hegemonic ascendancy to her economic dominance in the region marked by her higher GDP in the region and leadership in the scale of exports from the country. With her comparatively strong economy, her role as the region's financial nucleus and her infrastructural advantages, Kenya seems to be positioning itself as the dominant power in the region. Nairobi has been reinforcing its position as a gateway into East Africa and is seeking to wield greater political power within the Eastern Africa region (Stratfor 2013). For other scholars, however, Eastern Africa doesn't have a hegemon. According to them, there is no one country that exerts such an outsized influence on the others. This group of scholars, however, view Kenya as an emerging hegemon because she exerts a considerable pull over political and economic affairs in the region. They consider Kenya's economy as the largest in the region, and the fact that she also serves as an important access point for both goods and people in the region (Cheeseman 2022).

Regional hegemons are countries that are able to shape the fortunes of other countries through their greater economic power, military might, and political influence. They are countries that have dominant influence or authority over others. According to the hegemonic stability theory as articulated by Kindleberger, Keohane, Modelski, Krasner, Gilpin and Gadzey, one important function of a hegemon is the guaranteeing of international order by creating international institutions and norms that facilitate international cooperation. They purport that the creation of international regimes is often a function of the presence of a hegemon who is willing to act in a collectively beneficial manner which can ultimately produce stability and security (Nkumbe and Njie 2021).

The end of the Cold War saw a shift in power dynamics globally, changing the security dynamics of many regions globally including those in Africa. With the security void left by the great powers in Africa, regional hegemons have played significant roles in promoting regional peace and stability. Regional hegemons have greatly helped to sustain peace and stability in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Nkumbe and Njie 2021). This article hypothesizes that as a driving force within the East African Community and the greater Eastern Africa and her subsequent influence in the promotion of peace and tranquility in her neighborhood, Kenya is indeed a rising hegemon. From the foregoing discussion on her involvement and roles in conflict resolution and management in Eastern Africa, the country is evidently carving a niche for herself as a rising hegemon in the region. Kenya has been the base and host for international negotiations on regional conflicts. The country has also been involved in regional peacekeeping mandates and has led several regional peace mediations and negotiations as espoused in the preceding section of the article. The attention accorded to Kenya in times of internal crisis further underscores her importance in the region to continental and global actors. The United Nations Organization (UNO), world powers, AU, EAC, IGAD and other international and regional bodies consider Kenya a key partner in conflict, peace and security issues. Despite the occasional disturbances in the country, Kenya plays a crucial role in Eastern Africa and is vital for regional peace and stability. The relative strength and discipline of her military forces and frontline participation in regional peace and security missions, as well as her demonstrated capacity and commitment to confront terrorism, a neutral stance in the African continent, and successful use of multilateral platforms, all contribute to this position. Nonetheless, Kenya's turbulent political environment undermine her hegemonic ambitions. Consequently, while Kenya has the basic credentials required of a regional hegemon, internal stability and a stronger economy will solidify her hegemonic status in Eastern Africa.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that Kenya has over the years committed herself to the resolution of conflicts and the promotion of peace in her neighborhood. From peace initiatives in the Congo immediately after independence to her involvement in conflict resolution efforts in the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Uganda, the country has demonstrated leadership in the Eastern Africa region. In line with the postulations of the hegemonic stability

theory, Kenya has not shied away from assuming conflict resolution and peace building duties at her own cost. The country has harnessed the combined strength of her imminent leaders and personalities, relative stability, regional economic dominance, and the expansion of the space for regional and continental diplomacy to play major roles in the resolution of conflicts and stabilization in Eastern Africa. It has consistently projected herself in her foreign policy stance as a peace-loving nation with solemn honor for the basic international norms of respect for the sovereignty of neighboring states, good neighborliness, the peaceful settlement of disputes and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The modest achievements in the peace processes combined with the continuing support for peace and state building efforts in neighboring countries are steadily propelling Kenya into the rank of a regional hegemon and a diplomatic powerhouse in Eastern Africa.

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