

# WEBINAR BACKGROUND NOTE

## Kenya's 2024 Foreign Policy Outlook: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects

### 1. Background

Kenya has maintained a consistent foreign policy approach over the years, focusing on key national interests such as national security, economic growth, and regional stability. The country's foreign policy has been guided by a few core principles, including non-alignment, multilateralism, pan-Africanism, and regional cooperation. Presidents like Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi, and Mwai Kibaki have shaped Kenya's foreign policy landscape, each leaving their unique imprint on the country's international engagements. Under President Uhuru Kenyatta's leadership, economic diplomacy has been central to Kenya's foreign policy agenda, emphasizing the expansion of national wealth through international engagements. Kenyatta's proactive approach in advancing Kenya's core interests globally, particularly in economic and security matters, has contributed to the country's improved status and influence in the region.

As Kenya transitioned to a new leadership under President-Elect William Ruto, there was an expectation of continuity in key foreign policy objectives, with a potential reordering of priorities to align with the current needs of the nation. Under President William Ruto, Kenya's foreign policy priorities have undergone a significant shift towards a more proactive and assertive stance on the global stage. Ruto's administration has demonstrated a keen interest in reorienting Kenya's foreign policy approach towards Africa and its diaspora, aiming to position the country as a leader on the continent and in the Global South. Notably, Kenya's proposed mission to Haiti, in response to escalating gang violence and security threats following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, exemplifies this new direction. The decision to lead a multinational mission in Haiti underscores Ruto's commitment to playing a more active role in regional and international politics, aligning closely with his foreign relations agenda. Additionally, Ruto's emphasis on environmental and economic diplomacy, exemplified by initiatives like the Africa Climate Summit and visa waivers for visitors, reflects a strategic focus on economic growth and global engagement, especially in light of challenges such as high external debt, inflation pressures, drought, and unemployment.

The shift in foreign policy priorities under President Ruto signals a departure from traditional approaches employed by his predecessors, emphasizing a more dynamic and proactive engagement with regional and international affairs to advance Kenya's interests and influence. This has seen Kenya emerge as a key player in the African continent and a valuable contributor on the global stage. As Kenya navigates a complex geopolitical landscape in 2024 through a strategic and dynamic foreign policy approach, the country faces a wide range of challenges and opportunities, from regional integration efforts to security concerns and economic challenges, that will shape its future foreign policy outlook. As Kenya positions itself in the global arena, understanding its foreign policy imperatives for 2024 and beyond is essential for fostering dialogue, cooperation, and strategic partnerships. This webinar provides a platform for stakeholders and observers to gain insights into Kenya's diplomatic priorities, engage in critical discussions on prospects of its foreign policy agenda, and undertake an analysis of the opportunities and challenges facing Kenya's foreign policy decision makers in 2024 and explore strategies for addressing them.

## 2. Introduction

Kenya's foreign policy serves as a cornerstone of its national strategy, shaping its diplomatic engagements, international relations, and pursuit of national interests on the global stage. Rooted in principles such as the sanctity of territorial integrity, peaceful coexistence, and adherence to international law, Kenya's foreign policy framework has evolved since gaining independence in 1963, reflecting the country's strategic positioning and evolving priorities. This evolution has been marked by a commitment to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity both regionally and globally, underpinned by a steadfast dedication to upholding the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The country's foreign policy imperatives have been instrumental in fostering robust diplomatic relations at bilateral, multilateral, regional, and international levels, with far-reaching implications for peace, stability, and economic prosperity across the region and the continent.

Over time, Kenya's foreign policy orientation has expanded to encompass a diverse range of pillars beyond peace and economic diplomacy, including engagement with the Kenyan diaspora to leverage expertise and knowledge, environmental diplomacy to address critical sustainability issues, and cultural diplomacy to showcase the country's rich heritage on the global stage. These five pillars underscore Kenya's multifaceted approach to foreign relations, emphasizing the interconnectedness of peace, security, and prosperity in the national and international context. Additionally, Kenya's involvement in global debates on sustainable development, the blue economy, and reforming international organizations highlights the country's proactive stance in addressing contemporary global challenges and shaping the future of international relations.

Kenya's foreign policy priorities are influenced by a myriad of factors including regional dynamics, economic interests, security concerns, and global partnerships. In recent years, Kenya has demonstrated a commitment to regional integration, peacekeeping efforts, and fostering economic cooperation within the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union (AU). Moreover, Kenya's strategic location in East Africa positions it as a key player in regional stability, trade facilitation, and counterterrorism efforts, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. The country's engagement with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) underscores its commitment to addressing global challenges and advancing its national interests on the international stage.

With foreign policy serving as a key tool for achieving these development objectives, understanding Kenya's diplomatic engagements, trade relations, and security cooperation in the context of regional and global dynamics is essential for stakeholders, diplomats, policymakers, and international observers alike.

## 3. Objectives:

- a) **Reviewing Policy Priorities:** Examine Kenya's key foreign policy objectives for 2024, including its emphasis on regional integration, economic diplomacy, and security cooperation within the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union (AU).
- b) **Assessing Regional Dynamics:** Analyze the evolving regional dynamics in East Africa and the implications for Kenya's foreign policy outlook, particularly in light of emerging security threats, trade relations, and diplomatic engagements.
- c) **Exploring Global Partnerships:** Evaluate Kenya's engagement with key international partners, including the United States, China, European Union, and African countries, and assess the implications for its foreign policy strategy, trade relations, and development cooperation.
- d) **Identifying Opportunities and Challenges:** Identify challenges and opportunities facing Kenya's foreign policy agenda in 2024, including economic diversification, climate change, regional conflicts, and diplomatic tensions, and explore strategies for addressing them.

#### 4. Outcome

- a) **Increased awareness and understanding:** Participants will gain insights into Kenya's foreign policy priorities, objectives, and strategies for 2024.
- b) **Enhanced knowledge:** Attendees will acquire a deeper understanding of the geopolitical context, regional dynamics, and global trends influencing Kenya's foreign relations.
- c) **Exchange of ideas:** The webinar will facilitate dialogue and exchange of perspectives among policymakers, diplomats, scholars, and practitioners involved in foreign affairs.
- d) **Presentation of actionable insights:** Experts present actionable recommendations and policy suggestions to strengthen Kenya's position and engagement in global affairs.

#### 5. About IRSK

IRSK is the professional body for the international affairs and diplomacy fields in Kenya. The Society serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, networking, and programmatic initiatives among those involved in the study, teaching, and practice of international relations and diplomacy. IRSK works to promote policy dialogues on international affairs and diplomacy between various parties, carry out pertinent and substantial research, and engage in conversation and collaboration with various actors at national, regional, and international levels.