

# President Ruto's State Visit to the United States and its Implications for Kenya

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION REPORT



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**Roundtable Discussion Report**

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>ACSUS</b>	African Centre for the Study of the United States
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>BRICS</b>	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic Congo
<b>IDIS</b>	Institute for Diplomacy and International Studies
<b>NAM</b>	Non-Aligned Movement
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>SGR</b>	Standard Gauge Railway
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States of America





## Session **One**: Opening Session

**Moderator:** Winnie Rugutt

*Opening Remarks, Dr. Patrick Maluki, Director, Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies (IDIS)*

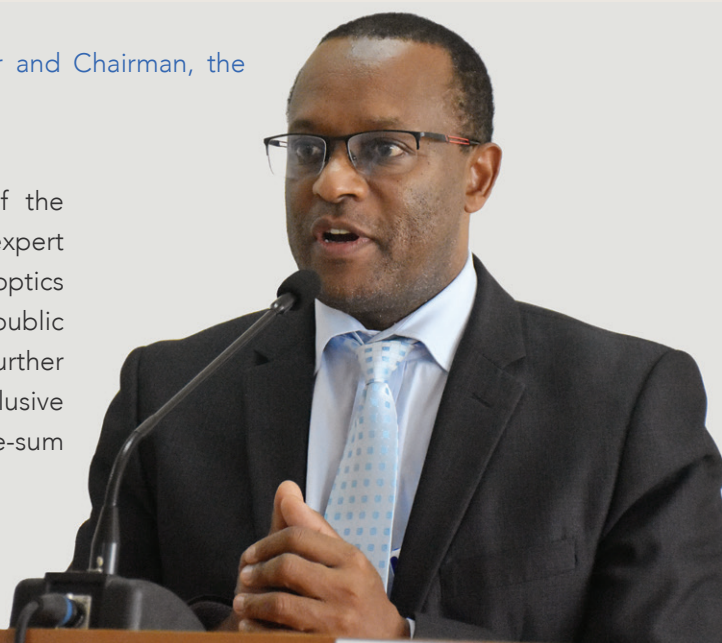


Dr. Maluki welcomed everyone to the roundtable and introduced the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS). He described the center as an important investment by the University of Nairobi and particularly the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies (IDIS), towards understanding the United States (US) as a society, economy and major actor in the international system. Dr. Maluki delved into the subject of the roundtable, Kenyan President William Ruto's state visit to the US. He cast the discussions of the day against the backdrop of 60 years of strong partnership and cooperation between Kenya and the US in trade, security, defense, economic development, healthcare, and technology as well as the contemporary global geopolitical competition and rivalry.

He argued that the state visit validates the strong relationship between the two countries and indicates the relationship's pivotal significance to Kenya's economic, technological, industrial and commercial prospects. He stressed that the visit signified Kenya's rising profile in international relations and strategic direction of its foreign policy to secure its strategic interests through such political, economic and security partnerships and cooperation. He concluded that Kenya is an important player in international and regional affairs hence the state visit holds significant strategic advantages for Kenya.

*Opening Remarks, Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali, Founder and Chairman, the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies*

Dr. Mustafa began by shading light on the importance of the roundtable. He stressed that the forum is an opportunity for expert analysts to move away from the ordinary debates around the optics and politics of the state visit as captured by the Kenyan media, public and politicians, to substantive framing of the real issues. He further described the state visit as signaling "**the Ruto Doctrine**" of inclusive prosperity and a paradigmatic shift from zero-sum to positive-sum strategies of engagement.



*Opening Remarks, Prof. Jack Odhiambo, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences*

The Dean in his speech, welcomed all the participants to the University of Nairobi, and expressed strong appreciation for the roundtable forum organized by the HORN Institute and ACSUS. He described the university as the best place to encourage intellectual debate and discussions which shape the philosophy, system, policy and ideas of society, government, country and economy as well as knowledge in general. He expressed belief in the roundtable's potential to unpack the state visit, in terms of Kenya's strategic interests and positioning, in its relationship with the US and the rest of the world.





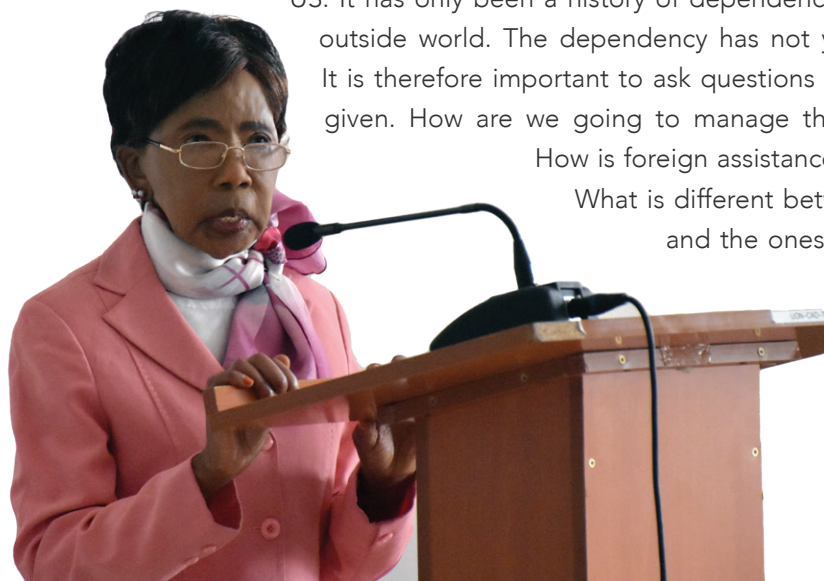
## Session **Two**: History and Diplomacy

**Moderator:** Dr. Hassan Kanneje

### Question

What are the milestones in the evolution of the Kenya - US relations?

**Answer:** Prof. Maria Nzomo



Having been active in the academia in the era 1970s – 80s at the height of the Cold War, till now, there is nothing that has changed significantly in favor of Kenya in its relations with the US. It has only been a history of dependency of Africa and Kenya, on the outside world. The dependency has not yielded impressive outcomes. It is therefore important to ask questions on the aid we get the money given. How are we going to manage these resources we are given? How is foreign assistance helping the African nations? What is different between the current government and the ones before in terms of managing such an opportunity as the state visit and its benefits?

### Question

What are the US interests in Kenya?

**Answer:** Caroline Gray

The visit is worth celebrating given that of the 60 state visits President Biden has had, Kenya is the only African state visit. As such, Kenya is a partner of choice for the US in Sub-Saharan Africa, given challenges in Nigeria and South Africa which have degraded their profile in US - Africa policy.

Kenya is specifically important in the US strategy to prevent over-reliance on China and India's semi-conductors for example, as well as their industrial capacity and supply chains. The US wants to boost Kenya's industrial and technological capacity, hence the drive to first ensure a friendly investment and business environment in Kenya. So, we expect to see a lot of US companies and investments flowing to Kenya in the coming years.



## Question

Kenya's foreign policy has been oscillating between the West and the East or neutrality to pragmatism. Where are we now and what are the achievements? Also, are the US – Kenya agreements Trump proof?

**Answer: Dr. Fatuma Ali**

Generally, Kenya's foreign policy has long been characterized by the lack of a clear strategy which serves its national interest. The current level of Kenya – US strategic engagement has changed the scope of Kenya's policy beyond regional issues to global ones. As Kenya, we have to realize that this is our time, we focused so much on domestic politics and now we need to move away to now being a visible and active actor regionally and internationally.

However, there is risk for the continuity of US – Kenya relations, given the potential regime change in the US. The imminent election of Donald Trump may lead to policy change where the US shifts focus to perhaps Asia or Eastern Europe. Kenya has to develop on its part, a clear long-term strategy focused on national interest to secure all agreements and ensure engagements serve national interest.

We under-estimate ourselves as Africans yet we are a partner of choice! All we need is to position ourselves with a clear strategy, firm basis for continuity and focus on national interest, to be able to tap into the opportunities of engaging capital bases such as the US, China, European Union (EU) and others. We can partner with many players for our interests such as industrialization and economic development.



## Question

National interest is the currency of foreign policy. In the deployment of Kenya's security agencies in Haiti, what would be Nairobi's interest? Is it just Kenya's traditional peace diplomacy?

**Answer: Prof. N.X. Iraki**

Kenya has a history of peacekeeping in countries such as Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It would be a national pride to lead a multinational force in stabilizing Haiti and restoring security in that country. We [Kenya] shall be more welcomed because we are blacks, but less welcomed because of the language barrier.

However, Haiti is a few miles from the US, which has the most powerful military globally. So, why not the US [to intervene in Haiti]? Why Kenya? It is because Kenya is willing to help. My opinion is we should start with our neighbors first before going out to far-flung regions; we have problems in Somalia, DRC, South Sudan and Sudan among others.





**Question**

From a regional standpoint, how is Tanzania looking at the current relationship between Kenya and the US?

**Answer: Dr. Nicodemus Minde**

Kenya is a perceived regional hegemon and plays a significant role in terms of regional security as a pacifier. From an economic standpoint, we [Tanzania] look at what Kenya will bring to the continent. However, we [Tanzania] also view the state visit as part of the larger major power rivalry. Is the US making up for the lost time to emerging powers especially China and Russia?

Lastly, Kenya seems to be losing track from pushing the African agenda to now serving external interests.













## Session Three: (Geo)politics

**Moderator:** Dr. Patrick Maluki

### Question

What influenced President Ruto's trip to the US?

**Answer:** Prof. Fatuma Ali

Kenya has a lot to offer, and is actively involved in the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU). However, since the election of President William Ruto, Kenya has adopted an open-door policy which has involved actively reaching out to other states in the region and internationally. As such, this policy may have paid off and led to such a strategic milestone.

Secondly, Kenya is an anchor state in the Horn of Africa. The latter is an important region which is gaining attention globally given its geographical proximity to the Red Sea and the dynamic regional security and political situation in the region.

Thirdly, there is a regime factor given the upcoming elections in the US. It is possible that President Joe Biden's administration may have used the visit to deflect attention elsewhere and restore its image given its role in Ukraine and the Israel – Hamas conflict.





### Question

Was the designation of major non-NATO ally part of the US state visit? Did the President know before the trip and what would it imply for Kenya?

**Answer: Prof. Maria Nzomo**

Yes, the President must have been aware of the major non-NATO ally designation because he is properly briefed. Kenya's foreign policy is partly guided by ruling party manifestos and the foreign policy document of 2014, and the visit must reflect the strategic interests expressed in these instruments. We [Kenya] should be guided by our country's agenda.

Now, being a major non-NATO ally is very dangerous! It has militaristic characteristics; it may mean being an appendage of NATO and Kenya may become a victim of conditionalities.



### Question

Kenya and much of Africa, and perhaps developing world have traditionally been non-aligned. But are we [Kenya] really non-aligned? Does non-alignment help? Should we be non-aligned when countries which chose alignment benefited from investment capital and technology transfer such as the South East Asian economies? We need to take a position! How are we navigating the relations between the East and the West?

**Answer: Prof. N. X. Iraki**

Typically looking at the University of Nairobi, across this road is the American Wing built by the US and over there, the Confucius Institute built by China. That shows the benefits of non-alignment; the country can benefit from both sides of the divide and from the competition.

At the state level, we face economically to the East and politically and socio-culturally to the West. For example, we have the SGR, highways and the expressway from China. What we need is to identify a foreign policy strategy and adopt a multi-faceted approach where visits and engagement such as this, can be translated into meaningful sectoral programs.

**Answer: Dr. Nichodemus Minde**

We [Kenya] need to define our interests in every sector of the economy. The question to ask is, "what is in the East and the West for Kenya?". We thus can engage both sides through the soft balancing strategy. Taking a position will create the perception and perhaps reality, that Kenya might end up being a slave of the West. Both Haitians and Kenyans for example are not happy with the deployment of the Kenyan security agencies to Haiti.

**Answer: Leonard Wanyama**

I would like to propose *Pax Savanna* as a strategy for Kenya to embrace; to engage Africa first, then the rest of the world or engaging the world through the African lenses. Further, there is need to modernize the non-alignment policy and ride on the democratic credentials and a participatory process of foreign policy making through institutions such as parliament.

**Answer: Ann Kathurima**

We cannot honestly achieve our national interests such as industrialization, through non-alignment movement (NAM). We should inter-operationalize our foreign policy document 2014 and the Bottom-Up agenda of the current government. We should also avoid contradictions as in the issue of Palestine, we seem to speak from both sides of our mouths.

The other important question to ask, the elephant in the room is, "what is Kenya giving out, until today Biden is still talking about the visit to Kenya?"

**Answer: Steve Nyaga**

African countries lack clarity in terms of diplomatic contacts, the foreign policy towards regional and the future is in the BRICs in terms of the long-term policies.

**Answer: Paul Agina**

Today's international system is more multi-polar world order; it used to be a unipolar world for a long time. As such, Kenya's foreign policy strategy should be aligned with today's multipolarity.

Kenya can also position itself as an in-road into Africa which has a great economic potential and a youthful population. On non-NATO alliance, we are not going to be NATO members but we will be non-aligned members.



## Session **Four**: Bilateral Implications

**Moderator:** Ms. Winnie Rugutt

### Question

What are the implications of Kenya's major non-NATO ally status for regional security in the Horn of Africa?

**Answer:** Prof. Fatuma Ali

Kenya has been active in dealing with security issues in the region through AMISOM in Somalia for example. We [Kenya] are in a fragile region in terms of security. The theme of the state visit was not only focused on the economy but also on the peace and security.

The designation of major non-NATO ally may upset regional peers and security arrangements. Two years ago, Kenya made a pact with Ethiopia and Somalia to combat violent extremism and terrorism; how will they interpret Kenya's status?

With Kenya taking the center stage of US security assistance in the region, how will Kenya's security partners in the region receive the new development? And will it not trigger arms race of some sort?

Nonetheless, it is a great opportunity for Kenya to play a larger role in the region's peace and security. However, to do it safely, Kenya should not employ unilateral strategies but multilateral strategies which bring together regional actors in combined or joint efforts. Hopefully, Kenya will play a role in the Sudan peacekeeping.

### Question

What is in it for Kenya, the deployment of its [Kenya's] security agencies to Haiti.

**Answer:** Prof. Maria Nzomo

On the matter of Haiti, my personal view is that before you solve the issues in Haiti, let us [Kenya] solve out the issues of our region and in our state. Since the US troops were killed in Somalia in 1993, it seems the US is averse to intervening in Haiti and they [the US] would rather provide direct financial and material assistance to Kenya to do so. As such, Kenya may get financial assistance for the mission.

### Question

What are the economic and trade opportunities for Kenya from the US state visit?

**Answer:** Prof. N.X. Iraki

To answer the question, we should start at the fundamentals. Kenya has a manufacturing deficit and a surplus in services hence a service-based country. So, the question is, "what can we get from the US and what are we good at here in Kenya?" that should help us define our strategic interests. The US can be a new frontier market.

Further, in the matters of trade, we should trade with our neighbors because they are some of our leading trade partners.



## Vote of Thanks

**Dr. Mustafa Ali**, Founder and Chairman, the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies, appreciated the contributions of the panelists to the roundtable discussions. He acknowledged the practical and strategic relevance of the insights gathered during the roundtable discussions. He concluded by encouraging future partnerships with ACSUS in research and shaping policy dialogues.

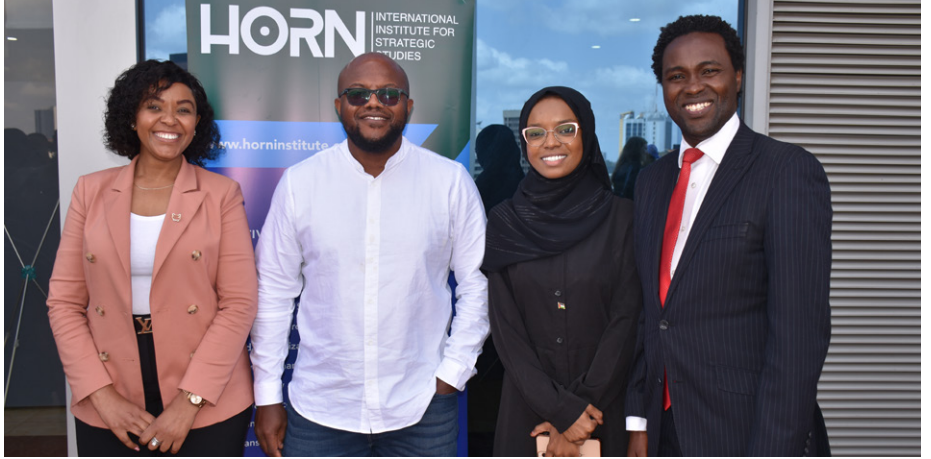


**Mr. Michael Were**, Deputy Head, Africa Center for the Study of the United States (ACSUS), thanked the visitors and everyone who joined in the round table discussions. He reiterated ACSUS vision and the timely relevance of the roundtable discussions on the US State Visit by Kenyan President, William Ruto.





# Pictorial









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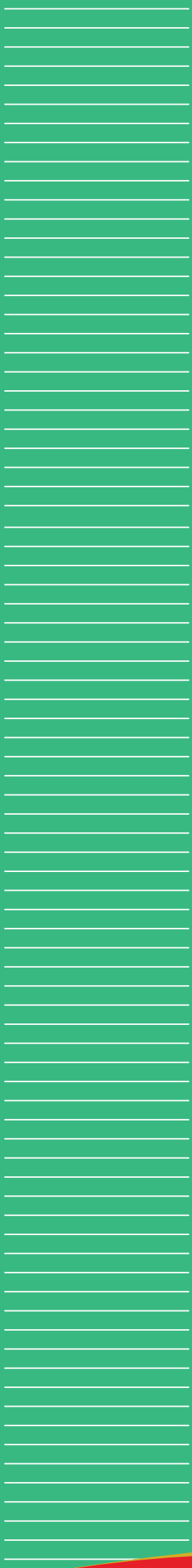
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