



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dynamics under Two Regimes

The Diplomatic Relations between Kenya and Somalia

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of Kenya-Somalia relations between 2014 and 2025, a period spanning two Kenyan presidencies (Uhuru Kenyatta, 2013-2022, and William Ruto, 2022-present) and two terms of the Somali presidency held by Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, interrupted by that of Mohamed Abdullahi “Farmaajo” Mohamed (2017-2022). Drawing on twelve peer-reviewed academic sources and four policy and news reports, the paper analyses the foreign policy behaviour of both states across five thematic domains: the transition from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and, subsequently, the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM); the 2021 International Court of Justice maritime boundary judgment; the Jubaland dispute and the 2019-2021 diplomatic rupture; Somalia’s 2024 accession to the East African Community; and the entangled question of refugees and the Kenyan-Somali diaspora. The paper’s central claim is that the bilateral relationship has moved from a security-dominated, adversarial-legalistic register under Kenyatta toward a more transactional, institutionally embedded, but still fundamentally asymmetric register under Ruto and Mohamud’s second term a shift driven less by resolved mistrust than by structural pressures.

Keywords: Kenya; Somalia; foreign policy; ATMIS; AUSSOM; maritime boundary dispute; East African Community; Jubaland; regime transition.

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1. Introduction

Kenya and Somalia share a land border of roughly seven hundred kilometres and a maritime frontier whose delimitation was, until 2021, the subject of contested claims before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Since Somalia's state collapse in 1991, the bilateral relationship has oscillated between securitised suspicion and pragmatic cooperation, shaped by the presence of a large ethnic-Somali population in Kenya's north-east, by cross-border militancy associated with al-Shabaab, and by Kenya's deployment of troops into southern Somalia since 2011 under Operation Linda Nchi. The decade between 2014 and 2025 is analytically significant because it spans two distinct Kenyan presidencies Uhuru Kenyatta (2013-2022) and William Ruto (2022-present) and two Somali administrations, those of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (2012-2017 and 2022-present), interrupted by Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmaajo" Mohamed (2017-2022), while also encompassing four events of first-order structural importance: the 2014 filing, and 2021 judgment, of *Somalia v. Kenya* at the ICJ; the 2019-2021 diplomatic rupture over Jubaland; the phased withdrawal of African Union forces from AMISOM through ATMIS to AUSSOM; and Somalia's accession to the East African Community (EAC) in 2024.

This paper asks two linked questions. First, what has changed in the conduct of Kenyan and Somali foreign policy toward one another between 2014 and 2025, and how far can that change be attributed to the two Kenyan regimes and the intervening Somali administrations, as opposed to structural or exogenous pressures that neither government fully controlled? Second, why has the change occurred that is, which drivers (legal, military, economic, or leadership-specific) best explain the trajectory observed? In answering these questions, the paper advances a central claim, tested against the literature: that the relationship has shifted from a predominantly security-dominated and adversarial-legalistic register under Kenyatta toward a more transactional, multilaterally embedded, but still fundamentally asymmetric register under Ruto and Mohamud's second term, and that this shift is driven less by any resolution of underlying mistrust than by structural pressures external to either leader's preferences.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the analytical approach. Section 3 sketches the pre-2014 antecedents necessary to contextualise the period under review. Section 4 examines Kenyan foreign policy across the Kenyatta and Ruto presidencies. Section 5 examines Somali foreign policy across the Mohamud-Farmaajo-Mohamud sequence. Section 6 undertakes a thematic analysis of five domains in which change is most visible. Section 7 synthesises the drivers of that change. Section 8 states the paper's claim explicitly, and Section 9 evaluates its validity from the Kenyan and Somali sides in turn, concluding that the claim holds to a substantial but not unqualified degree on both sides.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Approach

The paper adopts a qualitative, document-based comparative foreign policy analysis, situated broadly within a realist-institutionalist framework that treats states as unitary actors pursuing security and material interests while acknowledging that those interests are refracted through domestic political economy, federal fragility, and leadership style (Yigzaw & Mengisteab, 2024; Nalo, 2020). Foreign policy behaviour is treated here as a dependent variable shaped by three sets of independent factors: (a) structural-legal constraints, such as ICJ jurisprudence and African Union mission mandates; (b) domestic political imperatives, including regime legitimisation strategies and clan- or region-based constituencies; and (c) leadership-level variables, including individual presidents' diplomatic style and personal networks. Nalo (2020) develops a "presidential personality" framework for the 1963-2013 period; the present paper extends that logic forward to 2025 while giving greater weight to structural and institutional variables that Nalo's earlier period did not yet register.

Evidence is drawn from twelve peer-reviewed journal articles, selected for direct relevance to Kenya-Somalia bilateral relations, Kenyan or Somali foreign policy, the AMISOM/ATMIS/AUSSOM transition, the ICJ maritime judgment, Somalia's federal and regional-integration trajectory, and the refugee and diaspora dimension of the relationship. These are supplemented by four policy and news sources the International

Crisis Group, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) Megatrends Afrika programme, and contemporaneous wire reporting used chiefly to establish chronology and to corroborate claims for very recent events that the peer-reviewed literature has not yet fully absorbed.

The period 2014-2025 is treated as a single analytical unit but disaggregated at two points that the literature treats as natural break-points: the December 2020 rupture in diplomatic relations ([International Crisis Group, 2021](#)), and the 2022 leadership transitions in both countries (Ruto's inauguration in August; Mohamud's re-election in May). This affords a structured "before-and-after" comparison while avoiding the assumption that leadership changes alone drive outcomes, an assumption the evidence reviewed below does not support.

3. Historical Antecedents: Kenya-Somalia Relations before 2014

The relationship's contemporary tensions have deep roots. [Chau \(2010\)](#) traces the "awkward uneasiness" between the two states to the colonial-era transfer of the Northern Frontier District, predominantly Somali-inhabited, to the incipient Kenyan state at independence, and to the subsequent Shifta insurgency of the 1960s, in which ethnic-Somali Kenyans sought union with a "Greater Somalia." [Nalo \(2020\)](#) shows that the personalities and threat perceptions of successive Kenyan and Somali heads of state, from Jomo Kenyatta and Siad Barre onward, shaped the territorial-integrity dimension of the relationship well before the state collapse of 1991 introduced a new set of dynamics centred on refugee flows, cross-border militancy, and, eventually, direct Kenyan military intervention.

The 1991 collapse of the Somali state produced the Dadaab refugee complex in north-eastern Kenya, which by the early 2010s hosted several hundred thousand registered refugees and became, in Kenyan security discourse, both a humanitarian obligation and a perceived vector for al-Shabaab infiltration ([Muhumad & Jaji, 2023](#)). Kenya's October 2011 deployment of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) into southern Somalia under Operation Linda Nchi, later subsumed into AMISOM, marked a shift from a policy of containment to one of direct military engagement a shift explained in the literature partly as a response to a wave of cross-border kidnappings and partly as an assertion of Kenya's own buffer-zone ambitions around Jubaland ([Chau, 2010; Nalo, 2020](#)). It is against this background, an unresolved land-border legacy, a still-contested maritime boundary (Somalia filed its ICJ application in August 2014), a securitised refugee population, and a direct Kenyan military presence on Somali territory that the period under review in this paper begins.

4. Kenya's Foreign Policy toward Somalia: Two Regimes

4.1 The Kenyatta Presidency (2014-2022): Securitisation, Litigation and the Jubaland Gambit

Under Kenyatta, Kenya's approach to Somalia combined continued and expanded KDF operations within the AMISOM framework, a strategy of consolidating influence over the semi-autonomous Jubaland administration under President Ahmed Madobe, and, increasingly, resort to international legal process to resolve the maritime dispute that Mogadishu had brought before the ICJ in August 2014. Domestically, this period saw repeated large-scale al-Shabaab attacks on Kenyan soil Mpeketoni (2014), Garissa University (2015) and, later, Dusit D2 (2019) which entrenched a security-first framing of the bilateral relationship and licensed extensive securitisation of the Somali refugee population, including repeated, and at times reversed, attempts to close the Dadaab camp complex and to accelerate "voluntary" repatriation under the November 2013 Tripartite Agreement between Kenya, Somalia and UNHCR ([Muhumad & Jaji, 2023](#)).

The Jubaland relationship deepened significantly in this period. Kenya's military and diplomatic backing of Ahmed Madobe was central to securing Kismayo and the southern border corridor, but it also became the proximate cause of the most serious rupture in the bilateral relationship examined in this paper: in December 2020, Mogadishu severed diplomatic ties with Nairobi, accusing Kenya of "blatant interference"

in Jubaland's regional elections and of according a red-carpet reception to the president of self-declared Somaliland ([International Crisis Group, 2021](#)). Relations were nominally restored in May 2021 following Qatari mediation, but hardened again as the ICJ ruling approached, with President Kenyatta presiding, in September 2021, over the symbolically charged upgrading of a KDF military post in the contested border area ([International Crisis Group, 2021](#)).

Kenya's handling of the maritime dispute during this period was overwhelmingly legalistic and, ultimately, ambivalent about the very forum it had helped to construct: having engaged with proceedings for several years, Kenya withdrew its legal team from the ICJ in March 2021, alleging bias linked to the Somali nationality of the Court's outgoing president ([International Crisis Group, 2021](#)). When the Court ruled in October 2021 in Somalia's favour awarding the greater part of the roughly 100,000-square-kilometre disputed area to Somalia ([Bekker, Schofield & van der Poll, 2022](#)) Kenya rejected the judgment's legitimacy outright, a stance that left the boundary legally settled from Mogadishu's perspective but practically unresolved from Nairobi's.

Read cumulatively, the Kenyatta-era pattern combined three elements: expanding but increasingly costly military commitment to AMISOM; deepening, semi-autonomous ties to Jubaland that generated recurrent friction with the federal government in Mogadishu; and a legal strategy toward the maritime dispute that ended in outright rejection of an adverse ruling. [Kamais, Okoth and Kimokoti's \(2024a\)](#) assessment of AMISOM's transition-era implications for Kenyan national security captures the underlying dilemma: Kenya's presence in Somalia was simultaneously a source of the country's regional security leverage and a source of chronic vulnerability, since any drawdown or diplomatic rupture threatened to expose Kenya's own north-eastern border. By the end of the Kenyatta presidency, this dilemma remained unresolved, and diplomatic relations, while technically restored, remained fragile.

4.2 The Ruto Presidency (2022-2025): Pragmatic Re-engagement and Multilateral Repositioning

William Ruto's foreign policy since August 2022 has been widely characterised, in both academic and policy commentary, as personalised, transactional and outward-facing, prioritising Kenya's positioning within a "multipolar" international order and Ruto's own profile as a climate- and reform-minded African statesman ([Eickhoff, 2024](#)). Applied to Somalia specifically, this has translated into a markedly less confrontational posture than that of his predecessor. Ruto inherited a relationship still marked by the unresolved consequences of the ICJ judgment and by the residue of the Jubaland-related rupture, but he moved quickly to normalise the day-to-day security relationship: border crossings closed since 2011 were reopened, and bilateral security and counter-terrorism cooperation intensified markedly from August 2022, coinciding with the launch of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's own offensive against al-Shabaab in central Somalia ([ACLED, 2023](#)).

The defining structural challenge of the Ruto period, however, has been the AMISOM-to-ATMIS-to-AUSSOM drawdown, a calendar-driven rather than condition-driven process that Ruto himself publicly criticised as premature. Kenya's roughly 3,500 troops were drawn down in phases through 2023-2024 alongside Burundian, Ethiopian, Djiboutian and Ugandan contingents, even as al-Shabaab intensified attacks along the vacated border corridor, including a raid on a former KDF-held forward operating base at Geriley in Jubaland State ([ACLED, 2023](#)). Ruto's public warning that "the moment ATMIS exits, al-Shabaab will take over" reflects continuity with the Kenyatta-era threat perception even as the diplomatic tone toward Mogadishu itself softened considerably ([see Kamais, Okoth & Kimokoti, 2024b, on the national-security stakes of the transition for troop-contributing states generally](#)).

Two further developments distinguish the Ruto period analytically. First, Kenya facilitated and actively supported Somalia's long-sought accession to the East African Community, formalised in March 2024 after Somalia's application had been pending, with one prior rejection, since 2011 ([Mohamed, 2024](#)). Kenya's advocacy for Somalia's EAC membership a marked departure from the zero-sum, security-dominated

framing of the Kenyatta years signalled a strategic bet that institutionalised economic integration could do more to stabilise the relationship, and to secure Kenyan commercial access to the Somali market, than continued military containment alone. Second, Ruto's government absorbed the fallout of the ICJ ruling without reopening the legal dispute, instead pursuing what one recent policy-oriented analysis terms a "blue rebalancing" strategy: shoring up Kenya's position through non-militarised instruments legal-diplomatic manoeuvring within the ambiguities of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, economic statecraft and narrative reframing around Somalia's governance weaknesses rather than confrontation ([Sun, 2025](#)).

Yet the Ruto period has not been without renewed strain. The Jubaland question re-emerged in acute form from late 2024, when Mogadishu's arrest warrant for President Ahmed Madobe and the subsequent clashes at Ras Kamboni saw Somali federal troops retreat into Kenyan territory to be disarmed by the KDF an episode that again implicated Kenya, however passively, in Somalia's internal federal contestation ([see Kiplagat, Okoth & Kimokoti, 2025, for the broader argument that unresolved border and territorial disputes continue to condition, and periodically destabilise, the bilateral relationship even amid formal rapprochement](#)). The overall picture under Ruto is thus one of pragmatic, multilaterally embedded re-engagement operating alongside rather than in place of the older security dilemma inherited from the Kenyatta years.

5. Somalia's Foreign Policy toward Kenya

5.1 Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's First Term and the Farmaajo Interlude (2014-2022)

Somalia's foreign policy toward Kenya across this period must be read against the far more turbulent condition of Somali state-building itself. [Ali's \(2021\)](#) critical review of post-2012 Somali federalism argues that the federal project adopted in 2004 and implemented from 2012 has been beset by constitutional ambiguity, unresolved federal member-state boundaries and contested fiscal arrangements, conditions that structurally constrain Mogadishu's capacity to conduct a coherent, centrally directed foreign policy toward any neighbour, Kenya included. During Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's first term (2012-2017), Somali policy toward Kenya was largely one of dependent cooperation: welcoming AMISOM's KDF contingent as a bulwark against al-Shabaab while resisting what Mogadishu perceived as Kenya's tendency to deal directly, and preferentially, with Jubaland rather than with the federal centre.

This tension sharpened under President Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmaajo" Mohamed (2017-2022), whose administration pursued a more centralising and, at times, more assertively nationalist foreign policy, including closer relations with Eritrea and a harder line on federal member-state autonomy. It was under Farmaajo that the December 2020 rupture with Kenya occurred, precipitated by Kenya's perceived interference in Jubaland's regional politics and by Nairobi's reception of Somaliland's president read in Mogadishu as an affront to Somali sovereignty and territorial unity ([International Crisis Group, 2021](#)). Djibouti's subsequent IGAD-mandated fact-finding mission, which found insufficient evidence of Kenyan interference, was itself rejected by Mogadishu, drawing Djibouti into the dispute and illustrating how the bilateral rupture propagated outward into wider regional diplomacy ([International Crisis Group, 2021](#)).

5.2 Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's Second Term (2022-2025)

Mohamud's return to office in May 2022 initially promised, in his own words, a Somalia "at peace with itself and abroad." His government launched a major offensive against al-Shabaab in central Somalia from August 2022 ([ACLEDE, 2023](#)) and pursued EAC accession as a flagship diplomatic achievement, secured in March 2024 with active Kenyan support ([Mohamed, 2024](#)). [Mısırlı \(2025\)](#) argues that this period also saw a renewed, if still tentative, recognition in Mogadishu of the potential role of the Kenyan-Somali diaspora and cross-border kinship networks in underwriting a more durable bilateral normalisation, moving beyond state-to-state security transactionalism toward a hybrid, identity-sensitive model of reconciliation.

Nonetheless, Mohamud's second term has also been marked by renewed federal-regional contestation that has drawn Kenya back into difficult terrain. From late 2024, disputes with Jubaland over electoral timelines and federal authority escalated into the Ras Kamboni clashes, with Jubaland forces retaining control of the contested area and several hundred federal soldiers retreating into Kenya. Parallel disputes with Puntland which by early 2025 had moved toward de facto disengagement from federal structures together indicate a federal government whose domestic authority remains contested even as its international diplomacy, including toward Kenya, has become more confident and multilaterally engaged. The net effect for Kenya is a Somali interlocutor that is simultaneously easier to deal with multilaterally, through the EAC and the African Union, and harder to manage bilaterally on the specific, recurring flashpoint of Jubaland.

6. Thematic Drivers of Change, 2014-2025

6.1 From AMISOM to AUSSOM: The Security Relationship in Transition

The single most consequential structural driver of change across the whole period is the African Union mission's own institutional evolution from AMISOM (2007-2022) to ATMIS (2022-2024) to AUSSOM (from January 2025) because its calendar-based drawdown obliged both Nairobi and Mogadishu to renegotiate the terms of security cooperation independently of either leader's preferences ([Kamais, Okoth & Kimokoti, 2024a, 2024b](#)). Whereas AMISOM had allowed Kenya a largely durable, semi-permanent military presence anchored in Jubaland, ATMIS's fixed exit timetable forced a shift toward explicit bilateral security agreements and border normalisation from 2022 ([ACLEDE, 2023](#)), while AUSSOM's uncertain financing has since pushed both governments toward hedging through bilateral, rather than purely multilateral, arrangements, a trend [Kamais, Okoth and Kimokoti \(2024b\)](#) identify as a broader risk across all AMISOM/ATMIS troop-contributing states, not a Kenya-specific development.

6.2 The Maritime Boundary Dispute and the 2021 ICJ Judgment

The maritime dispute illustrates a driver of change that is exogenous to either state's leadership: an international judicial ruling. [Bekker, Schofield, and van der Poll \(2022\)](#) demonstrate that the ICJ's methodology in *Somalia v. Kenya* was itself technically contestable. The Court declined to adjust its provisional equidistance line to account for several circumstances Kenya had argued were relevant, yet its outcome was final and binding regardless of Kenya's objections. The judgment's effect was to redistribute strategic leverage decisively toward Somalia, compressing Kenya's naval operating depth and exposing existing Kenyan oil and gas concessions to legal challenge ([Sun, 2025](#)). Kenyatta's outright rejection of the ruling and Ruto's subsequent turn toward non-militarised "blue rebalancing" ([Sun, 2025](#)) together show how a single exogenous legal event reshaped the terms of engagement across both administrations, even though the two responded to it in markedly different registers.

6.3 The Jubaland Question and the 2019-2021 Diplomatic Rupture

Jubaland is the thread connecting the Kenyatta-era rupture, the Ruto-era Ras Kamboni crisis, and the deeper structural weakness of Somali federalism identified by [Ali \(2021\)](#). Kenya's reliance on Ahmed Madobe to secure its southern border corridor has proved durable across both Kenyan and Somali leadership transitions precisely because it serves a Kenyan security interest that is independent of who occupies Villa Somalia; but it is equally durable as a source of friction because it is read in Mogadishu under Farmaajo, and again under Mohamud's second term as Kenyan interference in an unresolved internal contest over the very structure of Somali federalism ([International Crisis Group, 2021; Kiplagat, Okoth & Kimokoti, 2025](#)).

6.4 Somalia's EAC Accession: Institutionalising the Relationship

Somalia's accession to the EAC in March 2024, thirteen years after its first application, represents the clearest institutional embedding of the bilateral relationship achieved in the period under review ([Mohamed, 2024](#)). Crucially, it was substantially a Kenyan-brokered outcome: negotiations were hosted by the Kenyan government, and Nairobi's advocacy proved decisive in overcoming the 2011-2023 pattern of

rejection. This marks a genuine departure from the Kenyatta-era pattern of managing Somalia principally as a security problem, toward treating Somalia as a prospective economic partner and market though the accession has also attracted caution from within the region as premature, given Somalia's continuing governance and security fragility, a caveat that applies with particular force given the federal contestation described in Section 5.2.

6.5 Refugees, Borderland Communities and the Kenyan-Somali Constituency

The refugee and diaspora dimension of the relationship displays perhaps the least change over the period, notwithstanding shifts in official rhetoric. Kenya's approach to the Dadaab population has remained persistently securitised across both presidencies, oscillating between camp-closure threats and incremental, UNHCR-brokered repatriation under the 2013 Tripartite Agreement ([Muhumad & Jaji, 2023](#)). What has begun to change, more subtly, is recognition evident in [Misirlı's \(2025\)](#) analysis of Kenyan-Somali citizens and cross-border kinship networks as potential agents of normalisation rather than purely as a security liability, a reframing that remains more prominent in scholarly and diaspora-facing discourse than in the operational conduct of Kenyan refugee policy itself.

7. What Is Changing, and Why

Drawing the threads of Sections 4 through 6 together, three patterns of change and three explanatory drivers can be distinguished.

First, in terms of what has changed: the tenor of bilateral security relations has shifted from a Kenyan posture of quasi-unilateral military presence, buttressed by litigation, toward a posture of negotiated, calendar-constrained bilateral cooperation; the terms of the maritime dispute have shifted from open contestation to a settled-but-contested judgment that both sides now manage rather than relitigate; the institutional architecture of the relationship has shifted from almost purely bilateral and security-focused to increasingly multilateral and economic, via the EAC; and, more modestly, the discursive framing of the Kenyan-Somali population has begun to shift from liability to potential asset.

Second, in terms of why: three drivers dominate the literature reviewed here, and none of them reduces neatly to "which president is in office." The first driver is structural-legal: the ICJ's 2014 filing and 2021 judgment operated on a timetable and logic entirely independent of either country's domestic politics, yet reshaped the strategic calculus of both the Kenyatta and Ruto governments ([Bekker et al., 2022](#); [Sun, 2025](#)). The second driver is institutional-mandate-based: the African Union's own calendar for AMISOM's transition to ATMIS and then AUSSOM forced bilateral renegotiation of security arrangements regardless of either government's stated preferences ([Kamais, Okoth & Kimokoti, 2024a, 2024b](#)). The third driver is Somalia's internal federal trajectory: the persistent weakness of the 2012 federal settlement ([Ali, 2021](#)) means that Kenya's Jubaland relationship a constant across the period periodically erupts into crisis whenever Mogadishu's own relationship with its federal member states deteriorates, as it did in 2019-2021 under Farmaajo and again from late 2024 under Mohamud's second term.

Leadership-specific factors matter, but principally as a style variable layered atop these structural drivers rather than as an independent cause of the underlying trajectory. Kenyatta's more legalistic, security-dominant style intersected with the run-up to the ICJ judgment to produce confrontation; Ruto's more personalised, transactional and internationally oriented style ([Eickhoff, 2024](#)) intersected with the post-judgment, post-AMISOM-drawdown environment to produce a more accommodating posture. Had the leaders' terms been reversed Ruto managing the ICJ endgame, Kenyatta managing the ATMIS drawdown the evidence reviewed here suggests the underlying structural pressures would likely have produced a broadly similar sequence of events, even if the diplomatic tone had differed.

8. The Central Claim

The paper's claim, stated formally, is as follows: Kenya-Somalia relations between 2014 and 2025 have undergone a genuine but partial and structurally driven transformation from a relationship organised principally around unilateral Kenyan security assertion and adversarial litigation to one organised increasingly, though incompletely, around negotiated, multilateral and economic instruments and this transformation is attributable primarily to three exogenous structural pressures (the ICJ judgment, the AMISOM/ATMIS/AUSSOM drawdown timetable, and Somalia's federal instability), with the specific leadership styles of Kenyatta, Ruto, Farmaajo and Mohamud functioning as amplifiers or dampeners of those pressures rather than as independent causes.

This claim carries an important corollary: because the underlying drivers of change are structural rather than a product of resolved bilateral trust, the "normalisation" observed in the literature most explicitly theorised in [Misirlı \(2025\)](#) remains provisional. The persistence of the Jubaland flashpoint across four changes of national leadership (two in each country) within the period under review is the clearest evidence that structural sources of friction have not been resolved, merely managed with varying degrees of success depending on the wider strategic environment each leader inherited.

9. Conclusion:

Assessed from the Kenyan side, the claim holds to a substantial degree. The empirical record Kenya's advocacy for Somalia's EAC accession, its post-2022 border reopening and intensified but calendar-adjusted security cooperation, and its adoption of non-militarised "blue rebalancing" instruments in place of renewed litigation after the 2021 ICJ defeat ([Sun, 2025](#)) is difficult to explain as anything other than a genuine reorientation away from the Kenyatta-era combination of unilateral military assertion and adversarial legalism. The claim requires qualification, however, on two counts. First, this reorientation coexists with, rather than replaces, continuity in Kenya's core security interest in Jubaland, which resurfaced acutely in the Ras Kamboni episode of December 2024 ([Kiplagat, Okoth & Kimokoti, 2025](#)); the change is therefore one of instrument and register, not of underlying objective. Second, Kenya's refugee policy toward the Dadaab population has shown markedly less change than its diplomatic and economic policy, remaining securitised across both presidencies ([Muhumad & Jaji, 2023](#)) a reminder that "foreign policy" toward Somalia is not a single, internally coherent Kenyan posture but a bundle of only loosely coordinated policies security, legal, economic and humanitarian that have evolved at different speeds.

Assessed from the Somali side, the claim also holds, but with a different and, on balance, more significant qualification. Mogadishu's pursuit of EAC accession and its receptiveness to renewed security cooperation after 2022 ([ACLED, 2023; Mohamed, 2024](#)) are consistent with a genuine strategic reorientation toward regional integration as a state-building and legitimation tool under Mohamud's second term. Yet the more fundamental constraint on Somali foreign policy throughout the period has not been Kenya-specific at all: it is the unresolved, and if anything deepening, fragility of the federal settlement itself ([Ali, 2021](#)), which has made every Somali administration's Kenya policy hostage to a domestic federal-regional contest that Mogadishu has been unable to resolve. On this reading, the "normalisation" of Kenya-Somalia relations is, from the Somali vantage point, less a change in how Mogadishu regards Kenya than a change in how much bandwidth successive Somali governments have had to manage that relationship coherently at all, given competing and often more urgent domestic crises Puntland's drift toward disengagement and the Jubaland stand-off chief among them.

The two assessments converge on a single overall conclusion, valid to a considerable extent on both sides but not fully on either: the period 2014-2025 has produced real, structurally driven change in the instruments through which Kenya and Somalia manage their relationship moving from unilateral assertion and litigation toward negotiation, multilateralism and economic integration without producing a comparable change in the underlying sources of bilateral friction, chief among them the unresolved status of Jubaland within Somalia's own federal architecture. Future research, building on [Misirlı's \(2025\)](#)

diaspora-centred model of normalisation, might usefully test whether the deeper social and kinship ties connecting the two states' Somali-speaking populations can, over a longer horizon, achieve what state-level diplomacy during this decade has so far only partially delivered: a resolution, rather than a mere management, of the relationship's structural sources of friction.

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