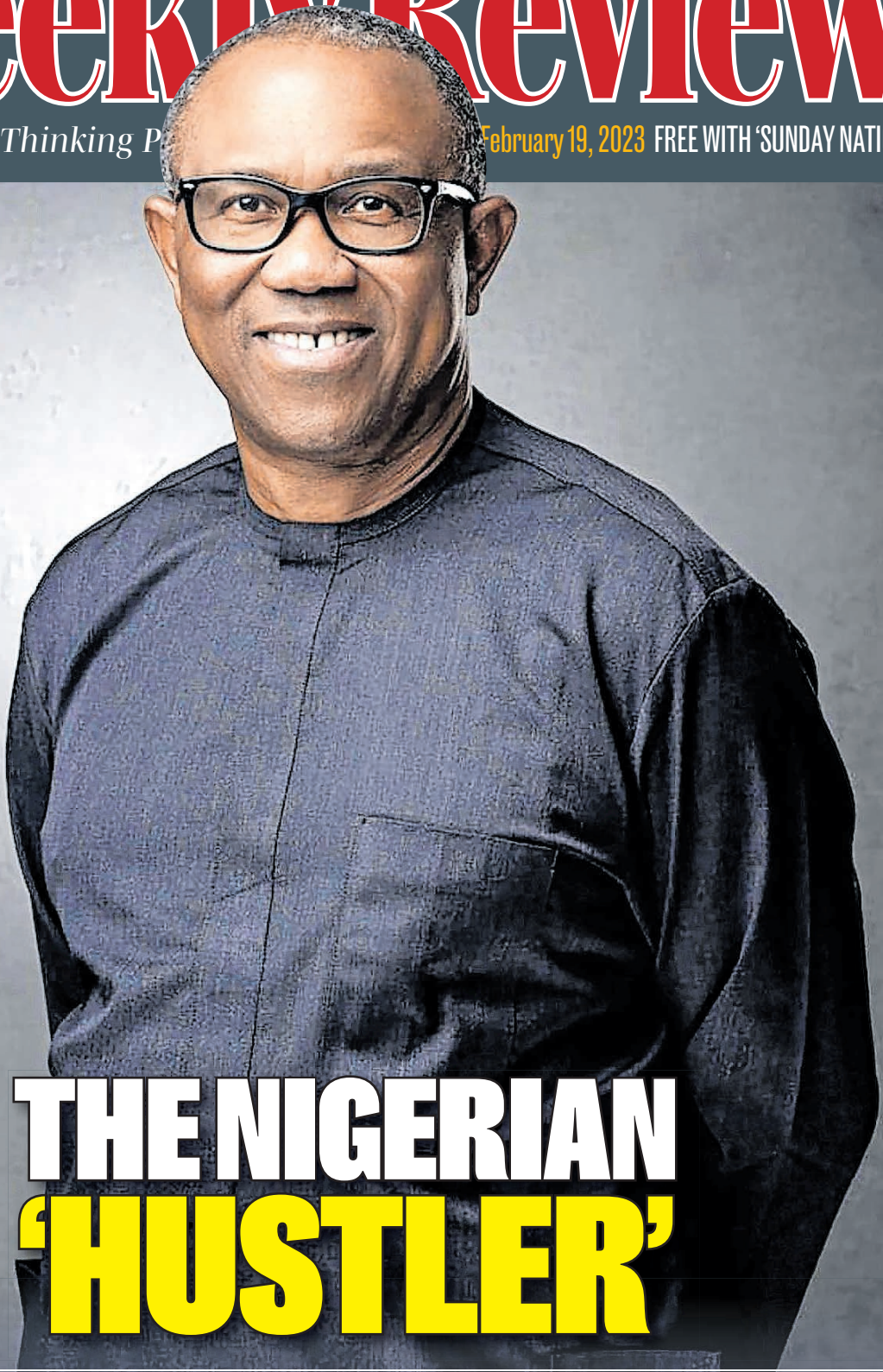


THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

February 19, 2023 FREE WITH 'SUNDAY NATION'



THE NIGERIAN 'HUSTLER'

Like President Ruto's campaign that swept him to power in 2022, billionaire Peter Obi is winning minds and hearts in their millions by selling hope as he cuts the image of the 'Messiah' of the poor, the marginalised and the downtrodden. Will he bring down the populous nation's political dynasties?

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letter from the editor

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Nigeria. The bigness and importance of this populous African country comes to mind as soon its name is mentioned. It's the largest economy and a top oil producer in the continent. Can we think of Africa as a continent and forget Nigeria? Can we forget the population of some 220 million souls and be honest about it?

This is a country with the highest number of Muslims and the largest gathering of Christians in Africa. Name any superlative in these climes, and Nigeria must feature. Isn't it the largest democracy in Africa? Positive or negative, Nigeria must take our attention fully this short season.

The West African nation is holding her presidential elections next Saturday. All focus must be on this reluctant giant because we know from the past how emotive elections in this country can become. Just like in the rest of Africa, it is bound to create anxiety and in Nigeria, it shall be of gigantic proportions.

President Muhammadu Buhari is finishing his second four-year term, meaning the country will welcome a new leader.

According to opinion polls, three presidential candidates stand out like sore thumbs: Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi.

Obi is a wealthy businessman who will fly the flag of the little-known Labour Party. He has excited the youth and the poor, who hope to wrestle power from the political dynasties that control the nation's wealth.

Like many other African countries, politics is a profitable sector in Nigeria. A position in government holds the key to power, which provides access to state's resources. Winners take all, and losers get nothing. That's why the stakes are always high dur-



Allan Buluku

Nigeria has grappled with civil war and threats of secessions for a long time; she has tasted political assassinations; she has wrestled successive military coups followed by military rule and periodic dictatorships; her constitution has been suspended several times but somehow, miraculously, she has gently gone back to democracy to the surprise of many western assumptions of a failed state.

ing elections and the fear of losing becomes an obsession, a ticking time bomb waiting for detonation.

Even though this is a democratic state, where elections are the only constitutionally recognised means of choosing leaders, Nigeria has grappled with civil war and threats of secessions for a long time; she has tasted political assassinations; she has wrestled successive military coups followed by military rule and periodic dictatorships; her constitution has been suspended several times but somehow, miraculously, she has gently

gone back to democracy to the surprise of many western assumptions of a failed state.

Nigeria is in election mode again. In this vein, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should conduct a free and fair poll that will be acceptable to all. It must ensure every vote counts to avoid political violence.

Violence is a recurrent feature of the West African country's electoral history since independence in 1960. It's in the continent's interest that Nigeria remains stable before, during and after the elections. Her sheer size and economy are crucial for the continent. Nigeria is too big to fail; if it fails, the continent will suffer.

Although the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east continues, and the tension between herders and farmers in 15 of the nation's 36 states remain a concern, the country is largely peaceful.

It is, therefore, essential for the INEC to conduct credible elections that shall represent the will of all Nigerians and lead the country on a path of good governance.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once remarked: "Elections are at the heart of democracy. When conducted with integrity, they allow citizens to have a voice in how and by whom they are governed. This is because while human beings need security and livelihoods, they also need freedom, dignity and justice." We hope that the people of Nigeria will exercise their democratic right by holding peaceful elections that will keep Africa on the path to greatness.

Make us proud, Nigeria.

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the telescope

■ Irene Masit's fate in Muchelule's team

IEBC tribunal set to release report

Suspended IEBC commissioner Irene Masit will this week know her fate when President William Ruto receives a report from the tribunal that was established to investigate her conduct.

The tribunal led by Court of Appeal Judge Justice Aggrey Muchelule is expected to hand over its report to the President after concluding its investigations on January 24.

The committee had reconvened on February 9, 2023 to receive final submissions from parties involved in the probe

before coming up with a final report.

Ms Masit, together with commissioners Juliana Cherera, Justus Nyang'aya and Francis Wanderi, rejected presidential results announced by Wafuka Chebukati declaring Dr Ruto as the fifth President of Kenya.

The other three resigned. However, Ms Masit stayed put and has challenged the process to remove her from office, saying she will not resign like her former colleagues. The tribunal began its proceedings on December 20, 2022.



IEBC commissioners Irene Masit and Justus Nyang'aya in Mombasa on September 17, 2022.

■ American golf star seeks his own late hurrah



Tiger Woods practices on the range prior to The Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, California, on February 14.

Tiger Woods lauds LeBron longevity

Tiger Woods reflected on LeBron James's NBA career scoring record, marvelling at the Lakers great's continued dominance even as he tries to prolong his own superstar career.

"That record, we thought it would never be surpassed," Woods said of James's move past Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to the top of the NBA's all-time scoring list — a spot Abdul-Jabbar had held for 39 years.

"What LeBron is doing, also the amount of minutes he's playing, no one's ever done that before at that age. To be able to play all five positions, that's never been done before at this level for this long."

Asked about a possible equivalent

in the golf world, Woods said perhaps the record 82 US PGA Tour titles he shares with Sam Snead.

At 47, with 15 major championships on his resume and after a litany of injuries that have left their marks on him, he's not giving up on adding to that tally — even if he knows his time is growing shorter.

Of course, he's been there before. Woods said he always felt he could power through the ruptured anterior cruciate ligament he suffered in 2007, which required surgery in 2008.

He soldiered on through a torn Achilles tendon and a neck injury and a knee sprain in 2011.

■ Nominee for position of Solicitor-General

MPs begin vetting Mose this week



The National Assembly's Justice and Legal Affairs committee will this week commence the vetting of former Kitutu Masaba MP Shadrack Mose for the position of Solicitor-General. President William Ruto

nominated him to take over from Kennedy Ogeto, who was appointed to the position in March 2018.

The committee chaired by Tharaka MP George Murugara has 28 days to conduct vetting and approval hearings for the nominee before tabling a report to the House.

This means that the team has up to March 9 to table the report to enable the House to consider the matter.

■ Minister says they violate local cultural norms

LGBTQ: Tanzania bans children's books



The Tanzanian government has banned a popular series of children's books from schools, claiming they violate local cultural norms. Education Minister Adolf Mkenda announced an immediate ban on *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and said

the government was monitoring libraries to make sure they were not on their shelves. It was not immediately clear what content in the series of illustrated books by US author Jeff Kinney that follow the life of a schoolboy had offended the authorities. The minister also listed other banned books, including *Sex Education: A Guide to Life*. The names he gave for two books appeared to be pages from *An ABC of Equality*, which included the terms transgender and LGBTQIA.

kenya lens

■ THE BIG QUESTION: WHAT WERE ITS MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS AND MISHITS?

KENYA SCORECARD@UN



President William Samoei Ruto addresses the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly at the UN headquarters in New York City on September 21, 2022. PHOTO | AFP

As a member of the powerful United Nations Security Council, Kenya demonstrated its unwavering commitment to multilateralism and readiness to throw its middleweight behind the foundations and principles of international relations as reflected in Chapter 2 of the Charter of the UN

● BY SAMUEL MUE, GABRIELLA ZUKU, ELIZABETH RADINA AND JAMES NYAWO

Kenya joined Ghana and Gabon as African representatives at the iconic horseshoe-shaped table of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – the principal organ of the UN for the maintenance of international peace and security – for a two-year term between 2021 and 2022.

In the UNSC, Kenya had an opportunity to contribute to multilateralism, and draw the attention of the international community to the challenges faced by states in the Horn and East of Africa – ranging from political instabil-

ity, climate change and terrorism to post-Covid-19 recovery issues.

This was Kenya’s third stint in the UNSC. She first served from 1973 to 1974 during President Jomo Kenyatta’s tenure, followed by a second term from 1997 to 1998 during President Daniel Arap Moi’s administration.

It secured the third term after garnering 129 of 193 votes, defeating Djibouti during the June 18, 2020 General Assembly second round voting.

Additionally, Kenya’s term coincided with its three-year term in the African Union Peace and Security Council, a critical mechanism of the African Peace and Security Architecture aimed at preventing, managing and resolving security issues on the continent. These concurrent memberships provided Kenya a pow-

erful and opportune moment to represent African issues and ethos, and pan-Africanism at an international level, enabling it to deliver the agenda it set for its tenure: shaping the global security agenda and making Kenya safer.

Kenya had a chance to assert its credentials as a rising regional hegemony in East Africa and a true defender of international order stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations. Its presence in the UNSC complemented sub-regional and regional engagements in securing peace and stability in the Horn, East, and Central Africa. The question is, how did Kenya perform in the UNSC? What were its main contributions and mishits during this period? What is next for Kenya outside the

Continued on Page 6

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How Kenya performed at the UN Security Council

Continued from Page 5

UNSC? It is obvious that the jury is still out on Kenya's performance. That said, there is reasonable evidence to suggest that Kenya demonstrated its unwavering commitment to multilateralism and readiness to throw its middleweight behind defending the foundations and principles of international relations as reflected in Chapter 2 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Multilateralism, a deliberate action by a state, in concert with others, to realise objectives in addressing global collective action problems including war, epidemics, terrorism, overfishing, environmental protection, protection of civilians and climate change, was not only envisaged by the founders of the United Nations, it is also at the core of African wisdom and diplomacy as captured in the Swahili proverb *Umoja ni nguvu, utengano ni udhaiifu* (Unity is strength, disunity is weakness), in the AU's Constitutive Act and Uzilwini Consensus, and in Kenya's own foreign policy.

During the period Kenya was in the UNSC, more than 150 draft resolutions seeking to address issues threatening international peace and security were considered. Although many of the resolutions were on recurring issues such as renewal of peacekeeping missions, the Middle East and peace and security in Africa, new and contentious matters requiring the UNSC's leadership and intervention also emerged. African states dominated the UNSC agenda, at least until the eruption of an international armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation in February 2022. Some of the African states discussed in the UNSC included Somalia, South Sudan, Libya, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic, Western Sahara and Mali. Ethiopia featured in informal discussions.

Kenya's contributions and voting patterns on such issues confirm its growing assertiveness in international diplomacy and unwavering commitment to the respect for international norms, customs and laws. This emerging image of Kenya reached its zenith in February 2022, after the Russian Federation launched what it labelled 'special military operations' in Ukraine. On this occasion, Ambassador Martin Kimani, Representative of to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations, denounced the Russian Federation's actions and highlighted what his delegation described as the "grow-

ing trend of powerful states violating international law with little regard".

It is possible that his remarks referred to previous violations of international rules by other permanent members of the UNSC – such as when the United States and United Kingdom invaded Iraq in 2001. In other words, in Kenya's opinion, what was unfolding in Ukraine was not unique or isolated behaviour by the Russian Federation.

It was a continuation of the practices and attitude of powerful states toward international rules and norms — a real life affirmation of the maxim 'Laws are spider webs through which the big flies pass'. Kenya and fellow African members Ghana and Gabon based their rejection of the Russian's actions and irredentism on their own historical experience with colonialism. The three states affirmed Africa's general preference for an international rule of law-based governance.

Kenya's voting patterns on res-



Kenya's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Dr Martin Kimani. FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

olutions related to the Western Sahara confirmed its firm respect for the principle of self-determination as a human right, compliance with AU common positions on regional and international matters and its effective diplomatic balancing act.

During Kenya's term, Western Sahara was discussed twice in the UNSC. The purpose of the discussions was to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). On both occasions, MINURSO's mandate was extended.

Kenya voted in favour of the first resolution, UNSC/2602 (2021) but abstained from voting on Resolution 2654 (2022). In explaining its decision to abstain from the vote, Kenya stated that it was disappointed by the fact that the MINURSO's mandate was gradually shifting from its original purpose to provide for "the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara". Kenya felt that the UNSC was renegeing on its commitment to the people of Western Sahara's right to self-determination. The Russian Federation joined Kenya in abstaining from voting.

In 2021 and 2022, Kenya abstained from voting on two draft resolutions seeking to extend the sanctions and arms embargo imposed on South Sudan. Kenya's position was consistent with that of the African Union Peace and Security Council, which in January 2022 called for the lifting of "arms embargo and other sanctions imposed on South Sudan to enable the country to build the required capacity of the unified armed forces and for them to more effectively discharge their constitutional mandate of defending the territorial integrity of their country". Although the resolution was adopted, China, Gabon, India and the Russian Federation joined Kenya in abstaining from voting. Ghana was the only member of the A3 that voted in favour of the resolution.

Kenya's voting pattern on the sanctions regime against Somalia was inconsistent with how it voted on South Sudan, and the rationale it gave reflects real politic. For Somalia, Kenya voted in favour of the renewal of sanctions unlike in South Sudan, where it abstained. Somalia has been campaigning for the removal of sanctions and arms embargo since 1992.

Kenya's voting pattern and its justification for voting in favour of the renewal of stations reflects the diplomatic dynamics between Kenya and Somalia and the sacrosanct position of security in Kenya's foreign policy. The UNSC met and discussed the Somalia sanctions regime on two occasions during Kenya's term. The first discussion was held in November 2021, at a time when the diplomatic relations between Kenya and Somalia were under considerable strain due to, among other factors, the International Court of Justice

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judgment on the maritime border dispute between the two countries, accusations and counter-accusations of interference in each others' domestic affairs and Somalia's criticism of Kenya for using cluster munitions in air strikes in 2019. Kenya rejected the criticisms as baseless. On this occasion, Kenya voted in favour of resolution S/Res/2607 (2021), renewing and expanding the sanctions imposed on the Somalia since 1992.

The second occasion, in 2022, was after Somalia had conducted its elections and was under a new leader, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. On this occasion, Kenya again voted in favour of the resolution, a move inconsistent with the position taken by Gabon and Ghana, which abstained from voting on the grounds that they wanted to see the sanctions regime, and arms embargo in particular, removed altogether.

Explaining his country's position, the head of the Ghanaian delegation said the decision to abstain was based on the fact that resolution 2662 (2022) did not provide for the "total lifting of the arms embargo in line with the expectations of the Somali government. We believe that the total lifting of the arms embargo is in the best interest of the government".

For sure, Kenya also expressed the desire to see the arms embargo on Somalia lifted. However, it saw this as the task of the incoming group of elected members to the Council, which Kenya said should "stand alongside the government in its demand that its every step lead directly and promptly to the lifting of any part of the arms embargo that negatively affects it".

Of great interest is the fact that it seems Kenya's decision to vote in favour of the resolution was motivated by its national security interests in fighting al-Shabaab. Ambassador Kimani justified the affirmative vote, saying it was to "demonstrate our backing for the resolution's tougher measures against the al-Qaida affiliate in Somalia. Our vote accords with our security concerns..." The resolution was adopted after receiving 11 votes in favour, none against and four abstentions. For a UNSC resolution to be adopted it needs 9 votes and none against from any of the veto powers.

Even if Kenya had voted against the resolution, it would not have been adopted. However, what one understands from Kenya's voting pattern on the Somalia issues in the UNSC and the accompanying justifications is that state survival and security influence the decisions and choices made by Kenya in the contemporary anarchic international system.

Kenya's involvement in trying to find sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo dates back to the early days of Independence. Founding President Jomo Kenyatta was appointed the chairperson of an Organisation of African Unity's ad hoc com-

mission on Zaire in the early 1960s. Six decades later, Kenya finds itself at the center of trying to secure a peaceful solution to the Great Lakes state. Its involvement is on two fronts: first, former President Uhuru Kenyatta is leading the East African Community initiative on peace in the DRC.

Second, Kenya is one of the troop-contributing countries to the East African Standby Force in the DRC. It was therefore natural that whenever the DRC was discussed in the UNSC, Kenya appeared to have a special interest in ensuring that a sustainable solution was found and enforced. In June 2021, Kenya along with Gabon, Ghana, China and the Russian Federation, abstained from voting on a draft resolution seeking to renew the 5133 DRC sanctions regime. Under this regime, the DRC government is required to give advance notification to the UN sanctions committee of any shipment of arms and related material, or any provision of assistance, advice or training related to military activities. Kenya's position pointed to the fact that the DRC needed the freedom to procure and secure its military assets independent of the UNSC.

More precisely, the notification requirement was unnecessary and was infringing on the DRC's ability to exercise its sovereign duty to monopolise the use of violence within its territory. It was giving the rebel movements an upper hand over the government, since they could still procure arms without much censorship. Kenya and other African States' position which was shared by the other Africa States in the Security Council and is consistent with the African approach to international relations, which is based on the re-

spect of sovereign equality of states and also the principle of territorial integrity. Perhaps it is due to the fact that, during the colonial period, Africans lost to colonial powers the ability to make their own decisions that sovereignty is so jealously guarded in Africa; it is a shield used to fend off external interference. As long as the DRC could not independently acquire military support, its ability to fight the rebels and other foreign fighters in its territory was comprised. Kenya's desire for the removal of the notification requirement was granted towards the end of 2022, when the Security Council adopted Res/2667. The resolution decided that the notification requirements would no longer apply in the DRC.

Kenya ascended to the presidency of the Council in October 2021, providing a strategic platform for it to shape and influence the council's proceedings and agenda as the chair for the month. As an African hegemony and guarantor of a number of Peace Support Operations within the region given its expertise in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, Kenya was the perfect state to ensure African security issues were prioritised and there was more Global North to Global South Cooperation. This was evidenced by the high-level open debate that was chaired by former President Uhuru Kenyatta on the cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations, specifically the African Union, under the theme "Renewing Solidarity to Successfully Deliver Peace and Security in a Changing Conflict Environment".

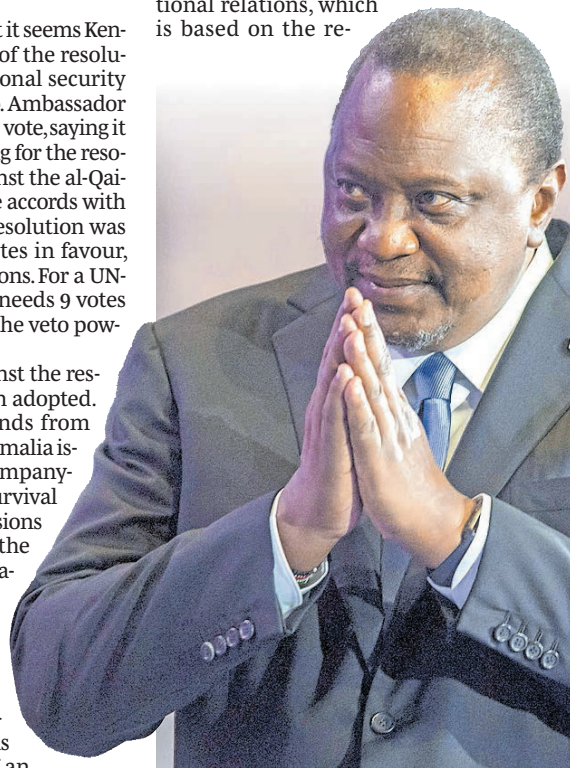
The Security Council Presidential Statement that was adopted after the debate highlighting the key priority areas and action points were articulated aimed at advancing the cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union, a win for Africa and for Kenya's October 2021 presidency.

One of the highlights of Kenya's presidency that was deemed to be the successful prioritisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda to promote the realisation of Resolution 1325 on the ground.

Through the Golden Thread initiative, a coalition between Ireland, Mexico and Kenya to promote the agenda in their presidencies of the council, which that followed each other from September to November 2021, substantive progress was made to promote the inclusion of diverse women in essential meetings, to incorporate gender analysis in UN Briefs, and to promote the visibility and advancement of implementation of the agenda. Forty-nine per cent of women civil briefers for 2021 made their presentations during the trio presidencies, a significant increase from previous years.

Furthermore, the Golden Thread initiative had a profound impact as the presidencies between December 2021 to September 2022, as eight more countries agreed to prioritise the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

— Strathmore University, School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS)



Former President Uhuru Kenyatta

kenya lens

■ MILLIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS 'OBIDIENTS'

HUSTLERS: KENYA TO NIGERIA

Obi is banking on ordinary folks to deliver themselves from bad governance, corruption, the harsh economy and insecurity. Like the Kenyan 'hustler-in-chief', he insists he has the people as his rivals deploy well-oiled campaign machinery anchored on party structures in cities and villages

● BY HARRY MISIKO AND MOHAMMED MOMOH

In Kenya-like fashion, another David-vs-Goliath political battle is shaping up in Nigeria ahead of the country's February 25 presidential election.

A 'hustler' movement, akin to the euphoria William Ruto rode on to State House, Nairobi in August 2022 is taking Africa's most populous nation by storm.

A billionaire who made his fortune in business and banking is winning minds and hearts in their millions by selling hope as he cuts the image of the 'Messiah' of the poor, the marginalised and the downtrodden.

Peter Gregory Obi, the Labour Party flag-bearer, has been elevated to earthly sainthood and is waging a war of political and economic deliverance against septuagenarian heavyweights — Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a former vice-president, and Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), the former governor of Lagos.

Like Dr Ruto, the 62-year-old former governor of South East Anambra State has fashioned himself as anti-dynasties and old order, and believes he is the antidote to godfather politics that has dominated the former British colony since its return to civilian rule in 1999.

In his trademark black native attire, "two pairs of shoes", and with just a few aides walking beside him during campaigns, Obi's

public image is not that of a typical Nigerian politician: swanky, flashy, extravagant and demigod-like.

Yet he belongs to the very class he has turned his back on. A philosophy graduate from the University of Nigeria, he made his fortune importing virtually everything from salad cream to beauty products, champagne and baked beans. He also operated a brewery and holds major shares in several commercial banks.

Running on a fringe party ticket with no single sitting governor, senator or member of the House of Representatives, Obi is banking on ordinary persons to deliver themselves from bad governance, rank corruption, harsh economy and runaway insecurity.

Like the Kenyan 'hustler-in-chief', he insists he has the people, as his rivals deploy elected leaders and a well-oiled campaign machinery anchored on

party structures in cities and villages.

"The 100 million Nigerians who live in poverty will be the structure. The 35 million Nigerians who don't know where their next meal will come from will be the structure," he says in a near echo of Dr Ruto, whose freshly minted United Democratic Alliance nearly took control of both the National Assembly and the Senate.

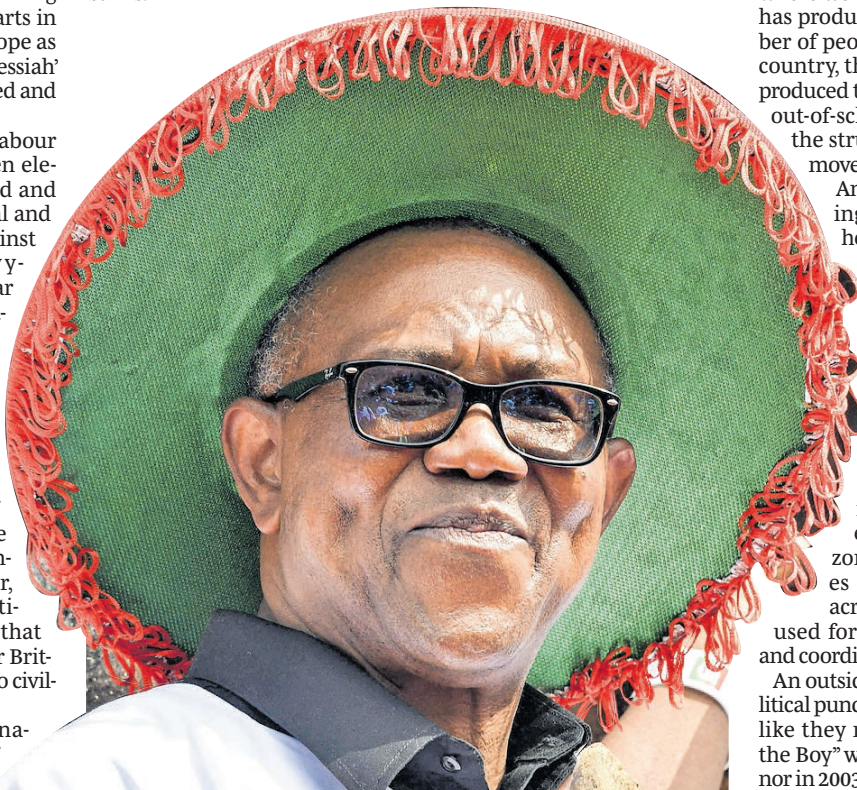
"The structure that has kept us where we are, the structure that has produced the highest number of people in poverty in any country, the structure that has produced the highest number of out-of-school children; that is the structure we want to remove."

And Nigerians are listening, with millions both home and abroad identifying themselves as "OBIdients", and going ahead to use their own resources to launch campaigns for their man online and offline.

They have taken to the streets, flying the Labour Party flag over Lagos, funded billboards emblazoned with Obi's images and donated offices across the country to be used for campaign planning and coordination.

An outsider candidate that political pundits had dismissed, just like they nicknamed him "Obi the Boy" when he ran for governor in 2003, the banker is causing major upsets in the race.

The latest opinion poll by NOI Polls Limited shows both



Labour Party presidential candidate Peter Obi PHOTO | AFP

kenya lens



Supporters hold a placard that reads 'We Are The Structure' to support the candidate of the Labour Party, Peter Obi, and running-mate Datti Baba-Ahmed during a campaign rally of the party in Lagos on February 11. PHOTO | AFP

Abubakar, 75, and Tinubu, 70, trailing him in the contest to succeed President Muhammadu Buhari.

In the survey, 21 per cent of participants said they would vote Obi compared to 13 per cent proposing to back Tinubu and 10 per cent in favour of Abubakar. However, more than 50 per cent of respondents were either undecided or refused to answer — with the pollster saying Obi's lead is "significant but not sufficient to separate him from" the pack.

So far, Obi has been able to break the ethnic politics that had dogged the country since independence, having penetrated the major ethnic groups that are in the forefront of the campaigns to the consternation of his rivals and onlookers.

A devout Catholic from eastern Nigeria, the choice of Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed, a Muslim from the North, as his running-mate has boosted his chances of becoming the first Igbo indigene to lead the fractured federal republic.

And with his reputation for good governance and disdain for the trappings of office, he has become a hit with the youth and represents a far more plausible candidate for change than Abubakar and Tinubu, whose candidatures are tainted with corruption allegations.

"It's time to take your country back," Obi often says in his rallies. He has succeeded in harnessing the youth vote where many failed, managing to bridge religious, regional, ethnic and digital divides.

Seventy per cent of Nigeria's



Candidate of the opposition People's Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar PHOTO | AFP

population is under the age of 30 and the energised constituency that is keen to turn the tables on the old guard has proved to be his single biggest asset in the campaigns. Like Ruto in Kenya's election, to the youthful Nigerian voters Obi represents a break from the past, fresh hope and the Nigerian dream that has proved elusive for a majority of the country's 219 million people.

"(This election) is the old against the new," he recently told the BBC in an interview.

Online and offline, the young

army of Labour Party campaigners amplify his messages of prudence and accountability as their candidate promises to replicate his successes as governor — saving public money, heavy investment in education and boosting workers' morale.

"We don't give *shishi* (money)," for instance, has become a buzzword among Obi's diehards as they sell his manifesto for prudent management of government funds. Analysts say the mostly urban youth are keen to replicate their 2020 success when

they stood up and won against the dreaded Special Anti-Robbery Squad, a disbanded killer police unit that was notorious for illegal detention, torture, extortion and killings.

They are using the same mobilisation and fundraising strategies and structures they employed during the anti-police riots to stage a leadership coup at the ballot. The dogged fighters, with the support of most of Nigeria's social media influencers, have taken their mainly online campaigns to every nook and cranny of the 36 states and the federal capital territory.

"This is the first time that the youth, largely in their 30s, are taking over the political landscape in an election that is woven around three major political parties against the two the country had witnessed since 1999, when the nation returned to civil rule," says Alex Ogedengbe, political analyst, who sees Obi as the "light that will lead the wealthiest African nation out of its present doldrums".

Most of the youth are restive, worried and want Nigeria bailed out of oppression, brutality, corruption, criminality, violence, terrorism, debt and economic mess. "These youth are soldiers marching to liberate Nigeria through the election of Peter Obi," says Hakeem Fashoro, a rights activist.

Despite his popularity, his detractors say Obi has no strong structure to win the presidential election, which requires simple majority votes plus 25 per cent votes in at least 25 states.

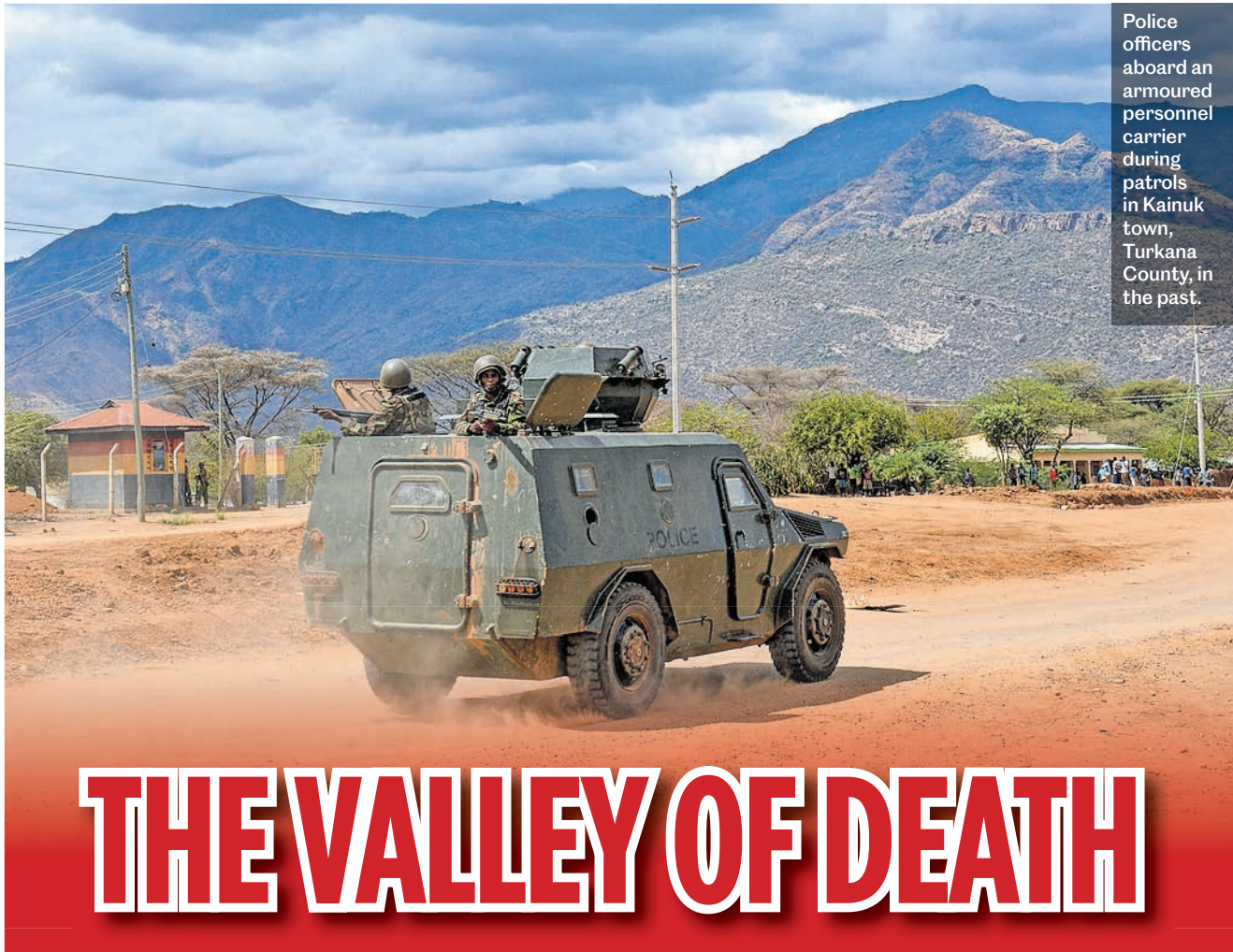
The ruling APC has grip and governors in 21 states; opposition PDP has 14 states; while the All Progressive Grand Alliance, Obi's former party, keeps one state.

His opponents also say he lacks the nationwide popularity to win the election and is an "unnecessary" distraction from the common goal of vanquishing APC, by splitting the opposition vote.

Others have poured cold water on his anti-corruption manifesto after his name featured in the leaked Pandora Papers in 2021, indicating that he failed to declare wealth hidden in offshore accounts. And while his victory is a matter of wait and see, the career banker can bank on the fact that if he wins, he will inherit a country besieged economically, politically and socially.

kenya lens

■ DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT INTO CATTLE COUNTRY



Police officers aboard an armoured personnel carrier during patrols in Kainuk town, Turkana County, in the past.

THE VALLEY OF DEATH

Rustling continues to thrive in the entire northern belt of Kenya, a region awash with small arms. As the Kenya Defence Forces and elite police units move into the region to disarm all militarised communities, experts say the situation needs a political solution

● BY JOHN KAMAU

In November 2012, some 42 officers were ambushed at the Suguta Valley in Turkana and killed. It was one of the deadliest attacks on the police within the northern Kenya cattle complex. While the army was sent to “finish banditry” in the region once and for all, it appears that cattle rustling continues to thrive in the entire northern belt of Kenya – a region awash with small arms.

This week, a former Rift Valley regional commander, George Nantembeya, alluded that political leaders of the regions prone to

“banditry” are not innocent bystanders in the organised violence. He told President William Ruto that this is complex territory – and that previous efforts to restore order were sabotaged.

Over the last week, armed clashes between South Sudan’s Toposa and Kenya’s Turkana took place in the Ilemi triangle over pastures. The clashes were also about the national border – left to the armed Turkana to secure from the Kenyan side.

As the military and police move into the cattle complex to disarm all the militarised communities, the complexity of the exercise

will emerge. If the Turkana, for instance, are disarmed, they will be overrun and impoverished by the Toposa – unless the military stays in the north to protect the community. But, on the other hand, if the Pokot are disarmed, and the Turkana are not – they will be impoverished within months by commercial rustlers.

The violence witnessed in the north is today no longer a show of cultural might. Instead, researchers have over the years said that what is commonly christened “banditry” are forms of ethnic cleansing, cultural cattle rustling, territorial mapping, criminal en-

terprise, political gerrymandering and struggles over diminishing resources.

President Ruto’s regime finds itself confronting an ancient gun culture in the north – and has to engage communities that have become the most militarised in East Africa. It is not the first time that such an exercise is taking place.

In the mid-1970s, the Jomo Kenyatta government decided to train some 250 police officers from the General Service Unit (GSU) for a new Anti-Stock Theft Unit. It was hoped that this unit, which is still in existence, would

the limelight



Kenya's Sabrina Simader competes during the Women's Downhill event of the FIS Alpine Ski World Championship 2023 in Meribel, French Alps, on February 11. PHOTO | AFP



This handout photo taken and released on February 14 by the New Zealand Defence Force shows the rescue of a sailor from a catamaran near the Northland city of Whangarei. New Zealand declared a national state of emergency as severe tropical storm Gabrielle swept away roads, inundated homes and left tens of thousands of residents without power. PHOTO | AFP



People sit by a bonfire near by the rubble of collapsed buildings in Hatay, Turkey, on February 13, waiting for news of their relatives following the earthquake in Turkey and Syria that left 35,000 dead. PHOTO | AFP



President Dr William Ruto, First Lady Rachel Ruto, Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and his spouse, Dorcas Gachagua, leaving Nyayo Stadium in Nairobi on February 14 after a prayer meeting. DENNIS ONSONGO | NATION



Opposition leader Julius Malema is removed by security officers as South African President Cyril Ramaphosa attempts to deliver his 2023 State-of-the-Nation address at Cape Town City Hall on February 9. PHOTO | IAFP



Barbadian singer Rihanna performs at the Super Bowl LVII between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, on February 12. PHOTO | IAFP



A bull tries to gore a rider during the Corralejas Festival in Guaranda, north-east Colombia, on January 28. Colombian senators are studying a bill to ban shows in which animals are likely to suffer. PHOTO | AFP

The **Arena**

BOLDLY AND BRAVELY

Brian Muchiri finds great satisfaction in helping other people with special needs



OPEN SPACE

■ MIND SPEAK



Nelly Agola

Arid and semi-arid regions have been experiencing drought for more than 40 years. Lack of knowledge by the people on malnutrition, small-scale farming and growing of drought resistant crops is a major cause of death and poverty. The people should be educated on these matters for them to make do with what they have. The government should improve infrastructure to facilitate businesses.

— Construction Manager



Claire Murage

The government should prioritise afforestation in arid and semi-arid areas. The government should distribute food to the most vulnerable regions. Let's also create water reservoirs during the rainy seasons. The government should connect small-scale farmers with correct seed varieties that perform even under dry conditions, to maintain sustainable agriculture for the country's food security.

— Marketing Consultant



Movine Ochieng

Strategic grain reserves and warehouses should be built to store surplus production during harvesting. Farmers should also move away from agrarian methods of cultivation and adopt the modern way of farming. Through irrigation and green houses, more food will be produced. It will aid in continuous flow of food in our markets. The government must also fight distribution cartels.

— KCA Students Union



Collins Ouma

The government should ensure fertiliser and other key inputs are easily accessible to farmers as well as improve and expand nutrition programmes. The government should invest in borehole drilling and/or rehabilitation projects. Water storage from the available sources should be prioritised and stored. We should protect rain water.

— Student

Youth groups: What to do before starting a business

The uncertainty of the law is feeding corruption and keeping the involved officers belching with satisfaction

• BY MOSES OJUANG'

Some hardworking young men formed an investment group and worked for a whole month seeking to see just what business niche they might fill to grow their outlay. They focused on the provision of fuel to their town and perched upon the simplest and least time-consuming venture — the charcoal business.

The entrepreneurial lads sourced for funds from their encouraging parents and the Hustler Fund. They procured the charcoal, found out about the cost of transporting their bags, sourced for a good spot where they could store their merchandise, and obtained the necessary forestry department and county licenses.

What they never checked out was the ambiguity of charcoal burning and commercial sale of charcoal in this country. This was their greatest undoing and it has thoroughly demoralised them and put a smudge on their ambitions.

The young men proceeded to hire a lorry and set out for the rural parts of Kilifi County, where bands of country youth were camping in the bushes burning charcoal. It took them five days to collect enough bags of charcoal to fill their lorry. The bags were very cheap in the bush — they cost only Sh200 per bag. Knowing that the same product cost Sh1,400 to Sh1,600 in Mombasa town, they were seeing heaven in terms of profits. Their plan was to cut down the price and stay ahead of their competitors, whom they met on the roads ferrying a few bags of charcoal dangerously on motorbikes.

The grim reality sank when, driving on the dirt roads before they could get to the highway, they were accosted by forestry officials who educated them on the crimes they had committed just by ferrying charcoal from the forest. They confidently showed their licenses and were laughed off. The only way out was to bribe the foresters. After that, the police were waiting for them at every turn and roadblock and to their shock,

they found out that there is a standard price to be paid to each stop; when they reached the county borders, the county *askari* were waiting for them to pay cess and also to oil their palms. The agricultural department officers were everywhere; chiefs and their assistants were smiling at them suggestively. The boys paid until they were too tired to argue anymore.

They reached Mombasa town crestfallen and after computing the net worth of their charcoal, they realised that they could only break even if they sold their cargo at KSh1,800 shillings way much higher than the competition. To make a profit, they had to sell the consignment at no less than KSh2000.

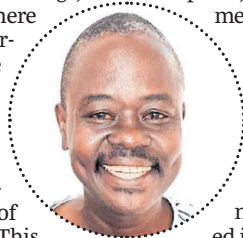
These poor boys are still stuck with their charcoal and hungry government officials continue to soar by their depot like vultures seeking free gain. It is dreadful. The charcoal business in Kenyan law is shrouded in ambiguity. It is neither legal nor entirely illegal. This uncertainty of the law is feeding the corruption and keeping the involved officers belching with satisfaction.

To save the environment, the government banned illegal charcoal burning and transportation; at the same time, almost 90 per cent of urban households rely on his form of fuel to cook their food. It is a tricky situation that requires a lot of soul searching by the lawmakers and environmentalists in order to come to an amicable solution.

Burning and transporting of charcoal remains a business for those ready for hide and seek games with law enforcers and as such a no-go zone for the law-abiding youth. We must take this opportunity to console this group and wean them out of this business. We also take this space to warn other entrepreneurial lads to thoroughly research any business undertaking before burning their fingers in like manner.

Mr Ojuang' comments on social issues. (mosesojuang@gmail.com)

Any feedback on topical issues? We would like to hear from you. Send your views to: weeklyreview@ke.nationmedia.com



MY TAKE

LET'S FIGHT OUR OWN WARS

Kenya should recall its soldiers from the DRC, stop interfering in other people's internal conflicts and instead concentrate on solving our own problems



• BY WAGA ODONGO

It's hard to blame Kenya's new administration for the decision to send soldiers to the Congo.

The decision was made by EAC Heads of State and predates the current government. As a nation not bordering the DRC, Kenya was seen as a clean pair of hands and was therefore put in command of the mission.

Kenyan presidents seem saddled with their predecessors' military misadventures. Uhuru stuck with Kibaki's Somalia incursion and Ruto is sticking with Uhuru's sending of troops to eastern Congo. It seems like good form to stick with your predecessor's decisions, particularly when they consist of joint military operations. However, it seems like a costly mistake.

We are now fighting enemies on two different fronts, across wars with no tangible objectives. Operation Linda Nchi has largely been a failure. We have lost blood and treasure trying to machine-gun democracy in our eastern neighbour, Somalia. Since our incursion into that country, attacks on Kenyan soil by al-Shabab militants have only gotten grander, deadlier and more complex. After grenade attacks all over Nairobi, the group lay siege to our malls, killed scores in our universities, torched high-end hotels and overran military bases. We are still getting needled by hit-and-run attacks in the vast expanse that is northern Kenya. We are no safer now than we were in 2011, when Operation Linda Nchi began.

In the past 12 months, after a lull in its activities, al-Shabab has risen from its ruins to overrun an Africa Union military base in El-Baraf. It struck a Somali military base last month with a car bomb, killing tens. Although Kenya's top general was feted at the Pentagon for the amphibious assault that dislodged al-Shabab from the port of Kismayu, the group seems as strong as ever.

As the Kanaky people of New Caledonia said about their French invaders, "they have the



Chief of Defence Forces General Roobert Kibochi bids farewell to the first batch of KDF troops heading to the DRC.

clocks; we have the time." You can't outlast a home-grown insurgency. If you think you have won, it means the fighting isn't over. Afghanistan, Vietnam and Iraq are all testaments to this fact.

Somalia needs to find its own level and we must learn to live with intolerant Sheikhs. After ten years of intervention, whatever government we have propped up has been a corrupt dependency paid in American taxpayer dollars and riven with interneine fighting between senior officials. The Somali government still requires US-led airstrikes and foreign boots on the ground to maintain a semblance of order.

After this disaster on the east we are keen on repeating the mistake out west. Two months into the DRC incursion, residents of Goma were seen on *Voice of America* demanding the withdrawal of Kenyan troops. To echo former US Vice-President Dick Cheney, the people in Goma have not welcomed us as "liberators". To lose the host population is not a good sign. A study into the El Adde attack found that the reason the assault was so successful was that the local population conspired with the militants to attack our soldiers.

DRC has a tragic history. It is as large as Western Europe and the

treasures under its ground would make the pharaohs in their gold-lined sarcophaguses blush. It's size and bounty have made it fertile ground for all manner of militants. Around it are neighbours with their hands deep in its soil. A UN report found that Rwanda is one of the world's largest exporters of coltan despite having very little reserves of its own. Uganda and Rwanda also squared off for the rights to Congolese minerals in a war that so quickly spiralled out of control that it is known as 'Africa's World War'. The death toll from that conflict was 5.4 million, which was the largest number of dead in a conflict since WWII. This is the blood-soaked ground our troops have gone to pitch their tent in.

Getting involved in DRC risks getting us entangled with the mess that is the Great Lakes region. The Congo is the site of a political struggle where combatants do not wear uniform; they mingle with the people and battle for hearts and minds as much as they fight for victory.

We now risk finding ourselves squaring off against M23. The group's job has always been to protect Congolese Tutsi from what they describe as persecution by the Kinshasa government. There have always been persis-

tent claims that Rwanda's military leadership is the Svengali behind the rebels.

Being the most densely populated country on the continent means that Rwandan wars travel. We have seen police as far afield as Brussels scrambling to stop assassination attempts on Rwandans, exiles getting strangled in Johannesburg and, famously, their exiled former Minister of Interior, Seth Sendashonga, getting shot dead in Nairobi.

We risk getting into conflict with a friendly country that already stands accused in our courts of violently settling its internal differences on our soil.

Meanwhile our economy is in terrible shape: The shilling has fallen and can't get up, the Treasury CS is warning that this year might be the most austere, and our debts are due. We can't afford to fight other people's wars. We have no dog in the fight. Goma is one country removed from Kenya; whatever fallout will occur there will take a while before washing over to our shores. If KDF wants a country riven by ethnic strife that accuses another (Uganda) of messing with its internal affairs, they could always try Kenya.

Mr Odongo is a Software Engineer
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CONQUERING GREAT ODDS

• BY EDDY ASHIOYA

What's the cost of a rowdy night of fun? Maybe a night at the police station. Or choice words from a scorned parent. Or, if you are Brian Waihenya Muchiri, losing your legs.

Unlike many people who swear by beginner's luck, 'Brayo Wheels', as he is now popularly known, had seemingly run out of his before spending it — his first time going out for a night of fun, potentially his last. The year was 2014, the date February 8. He lost three friends in that unforgiving accident, and in an instant his life was completely upended.

"I was in my third year doing Procurement Science. My friend invited me to go club-hopping one night, and it was while driving back home that the accident happened." Three people died, and only he and a female passenger survived. At a cost of C5 and C7 spinal cord injuries. "I have no movement nor sensation below my armpits, including my fingers. But I have been able to adapt to doing basic things like write, brush my teeth and eat."

Carl Jung may well have known what he was on about when he said: "Life is an incurable disease with a very bad prognosis, which lingers on for years and invariably ends with death. Everything you do is bad for you."

Death holds up a mirror to everything in life — moments of love, stretches of strife, and memories that punish and exalt. But it's only by keeping death nearby that one can truly live. Brian knows all about that, having made peace with the uppercut sucker punch life served him. For some, that would have been a knockout blow. But Brian dusted himself off, spit the blood out and went in for another round. He is not one to feel sorry for himself, nor let his condition define him. He is fazed by little, or nothing. He betrays not a flicker of nervousness. He is not the sort to worry that he does not belong. He doesn't hide anything, or he does the more complicated trick of hiding everything by seeming to hide nothing. Despite that — or, maybe at this point, be-

BOLD STEPS FORWARD

Brian Muchiri finds great satisfaction in helping others and has not let disability rob him of the zest for life



Brian Muchiri and Israel Wanjiru in Nakuru. Wanjiru's wheelchair was donated by a family from Australia late last year through Muchiri's initiative, 'First Chair'. PHOTO: IPOOL

cause of it — he's learned to be comfortable, at ease, just about anywhere.

It's why he refused the offer when his friends from an online community suggested they raise money to take him to India for his treatment. "I wasn't interested in that because I know of such cases. I might go and jeopardise the little control I have." The next best thing was a motorised wheelchair, which is very expensive. "A new one costs between Sh300,000 and Sh500,000." They bought him one.

One good turn, so they say, deserves another. Seeing how the wheelchair changed his life, in 2018 he decided to hold the elevator door for others by creating his own outfit, Strong Spine Foundation. At that time, he was writing his experiences on social media and started talking adult diapers, confessing that he also uses them, a basic need till death.

Shame is a blanket that easily suffocates under a thick carapace of embarrassment. Didn't he feel a bit of shame? "That boils down to acceptance," he says. "You can be very comfortable in your skin about being a disabled person but not comfortable enough to share your experiences, whether publicly or with a select group. There was a time I felt a lot of shame, I felt people saw a big vulnerable person incapable of being productive or even attractive. But with time, I have come to learn that these are just walls in my mind."

Strong Spine creates awareness about spinal injuries and empowers people with various disabilities.

"We also provide some aid for those who are in dire need of it, because disability is quite expensive: from adult diapers, catheters and medication to wheelchairs and crutches, it can lead to financial ruin. Through crowdfunding and our partners such as Safaricom, we are able to offset some of these costs.

The Foundation, he says, has made him a different person. "Gradually, people started seeing disability as I saw it through my eyes. I wanted to donate a spare wheelchair and educate people through social media." In 2022, Strong Spine received a pledge for support from the Safaricom Foundation, worth up to Sh500,000. "They asked me whether I wanted money or diapers and I said diapers be-



Brian Muchiri with Josphat Maina, a friend of Strong Spine who was given Sh70,000 worth of second-hand clothing to boost his small business. Through crowd funding, Maina was also offered capital to place a deposit on his shop, which he has been running successfully since last year. PHOTO: IPOOL

cause I wanted them to see how expensive they were. A packet of ten averages Sh1,000. They wanted to use a lorry but once they bought them, they realised a Noah would do."

To give you context, Brian, on average, uses one packet of diapers every week. Do the Math and that is Sh52,000 — give or take — yearly. "On top of that, I need to use catheters because I experience incontinence, which is when you lose your ability to go to the toilet. I use my diapers for number two and catheters for number one." A catheter is like a condom that has a bag attached to it. When you pee it goes directly to that bag. For women, they have to insert a 15cm long tube straight to the bladder. "It's very painful," he says.

"Don't forget logistics, which is one of the top things when you have a disability. It's very expensive to be a disabled person."

When people see disability, I say,

they tend to look at it as a loss. What does he think he gained through this experience? "That is very important but it is not the entirety of the experience," he responds. You lose a lot of abilities but what you gain is life, which is crucial. You also get to see a part of yourself that you didn't know you had in you, especially if it is an acquired disability, one that you didn't get born with. I can't identify with the person I was nine years ago, before my accident. Do you let it tie you down or do you weather the storm and play with the cards life has dealt you?"

He adds: "I try to do what I can with what I have. People have a curiosity to learn how similar or different we are. I write online, especially on Facebook and TikTok. Yes, I am like this but there is another side to the story, is the message I want to pass."

Now 28, he says this experience has shown him the importance of

having people around you whom you can lean on through the hardest times. "I can't do something as basic and personal as going to the shower and you need someone you can trust to show up for you." His message to us is to learn to be compassionate. A disabled person will never have enough assistance. Be compassionate. Which reminds me, is there a question that people ask that irks him? "How I bathe. How I go to the toilet. There are even those who want to know how I have sex, or if I can get children, some very intrusive questions that add no value. I try to respond in a non-combative manner."

When he talks about Strong Spine Foundation, he speaks with the marked pride of a parent talking about their baby. He is proud of the awareness he has created, proud of the lemonade he has squeezed from life's lemons, proud that he is who he is. He won't slather you with fake charm

while contempt clouds his eyes.

His eyes are now fixated on creating a recovery centre, especially for people with mobility issues. "The most important time for someone with a disability, especially an acquired disability, is the first two years. Are you going to commit to physiotherapy? Physio helps you regain confidence and movement and self-esteem. We want it (the centre) to be affordable and accessible. We also want to pioneer actual bills into law. Do you know we have no law that mandates NHIF to offer assistive devices? Or bills concerning accessibility to public spaces and education.? I had to defer in my third year because the school had no wheelchair access."

Possibilities bring a smile to his face. "Every new year is an opportunity to see the good things that are always in the horizon. The things that are meant for you will find their way to you. I am looking to spreading my wings. I am interested in film and TV, and especially directing."

Disability, I ponder, is like a foreign country. You think you know it through what you've read in history books, or what you've heard in the streets — until you get there and experience it. It's a country of contradictions — there's the idea of what it is supposed to be, and what it really is. Guilt and fear are residents of that country, but so are joy and peace, acceptance and ability. This leads me to ask, does he ever blame himself for what happened? "No. I feel if my friend was the one who had survived, he would have been blaming himself even more because he was the one who invited me. What I get, however, is survivor's guilt: why did I survive? The guilt that hurts most is seeing how much this has altered my parents' lives. They are my primary caregivers and I can see the impact it has had on them and my close family members."

Not many people get to have a before and after with a life-altering situation. And I would do myself no justice if I didn't get to ask what it's like to be Brian Muchiri. "It's a concoction of things. At the core of it, I am a good person, not perfect. I have my self-inflicted flaws and sometimes just bad habits. I see and enjoy life for what it is. Many people struggle with living in the present, but not me. I recognise that everything plays itself into a bigger picture. I am a simple man, with simple pleasures. And I am proud of the person I am."

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LOCAL LEATHER INDUSTRY

STITCHED TO PERFECTION

• BY SINDA MATIKO

It is fascinating to watch Kwak Sangmin Kwak deliver a masterclass on leather and saddle stitching. It is even more fascinating to learn that the 23-year-old is the Chief Executive Officer of Nashipai Leather, a Kenyan luxury brand.

Cindy, as she is simply known, came to Kenya as a nine-year-old with her missionary parents.

“Nashipai means joy in Maasai. When my parents and I first came to Kenya in 2008 as missionaries from South Korea we interacted a lot with members of the Maasai community in the villages in Kajiado doing ministerial and community work,” she offers.

In 2009, her parents would go on to set up El Toto Children’s Centre in the heart of the Dandora informal settlement in Nairobi. El Toto has so far taken care of 250 physically challenged children from poor families.

“I have grown up with them,” says Cindy. Now an adult, she comes across as a jack of all trades: she is a proficient sign language interpreter, a marketer and a singer who debuted her first solo last year, an acoustic-jazz fusion single, *Broken Couch*.

Her siblings from the centre also needed to earn a living once they finished school.

“We needed a way to help my siblings from the centre, especially the deaf ones, to be able to sustain themselves once they were out of school, and so we came up with the idea of building a leather brand inspired by the Maasai,” says Cindy.

Besides settling on Nashipai as the brand name, Cindy and her parents wanted the high-end products to be inspired by the vibrant Maasai culture.

“We noticed that the majority of them were interested in fashion and so we created a platform to train them as artisans. The ultimate goal is for the children from El Toto to sustain themselves and their families,” she explains.

The workshop is in Kabati, Murang’a County, where the missionary headquarters are located. Once the bags are made they are displayed at the Artisanal

Nashipai Leather seeks to empower deaf artisans through production of high-end hand-made bags that are making a mark in the South Korean fashion industry



Cindy Kwak cuts a piece of leather at the Nashipai Leather workshop in Kabati, Murang’a County, on February 11.

FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

Gallery in Gigiri and Fairmont The Norfolk luxury hotel in Nairobi.

The production is done by five artisans, two of whom are deaf. Cindy’s mother, Judy, leads the team as founder and Creative Director, while Cindy handles the marketing and CEO portfolios.

Everlyne Awino, 23, is the newest member, having joined the team last year after finishing her high school studies. Awino is deaf.

“This project has provided me with an avenue to express myself through fashion and demonstrate my talent. It’s difficult for people like us to interact with the majority of people because very few speak sign language, but through this craft I am able to interact with a few to some degree,” Awino explains as Cindy translates. But even with the passion, mastering the art has not been an easy ride.

“It took me a year to grasp the basics,” she continues. “Saddle stitching is all handwork and keeping it flawless isn’t easy. The down side of that is sometimes you end up wasting material but that’s the only way you can learn.”

Mary Muthoni is the oldest of the artisans. She’s a member of the El Toto management team.

“I have been married for 15 years. My husband and I are both deaf. I began taking an interest in stitching during our interaction with the El Toto and Kabati centres. I watched the young artisans doing their thing and asked if I could be part of it, and the management obliged,” says Muthoni, 55.

Another deaf artisan, Caroline Nduta, 24, left the team recently after getting married.

“Nduta left us two weeks ago after her wedding. We have plans to begin training a new cohort as the brand grows and demand increases. Training in itself is an expensive venture,” Cindy explains.

Last December, Nashipai held its first anniversary fashion show at The Artisanal Gallery in Gigiri, Nairobi, to celebrate the brand’s milestone of creating slightly over 500 leather bags, all saddle stitched, with a huge number exported to South Korea and the United Kingdom.

“The saddle stitching technique is basically hand sewing, a primeval



From left: Everlyne Awino, Cindy Kwak and Mary Muthoni with some of their products at Nashipai Leather workshop in Kabati, Muranga County, on February 11. FRANCIS NDERITU | NATION

craft that is highly appreciated by top brands globally. Instead of using machines, artisans are employed to do the work.”

Coming from a country that highly appreciates fashion, Cindy says that their intention was to develop a brand that will easily

capture the South Korean and other foreign markets and grow its popularity in Kenya.

“Competition in the fashion industry in South Korea is super stiff; it is very difficult for one brand to dominate because everybody is trying to do something unique.

The beauty about this is that it has helped the industry to grow. We have been able to sell most of our products in South Korea because of the saddle stitching technique, the African print and the fact that it is Grade A leather, which is extremely expensive in South Korea,” Cindy

observes.

“Settling on the saddle stitching technique was intentional. We didn’t want to mass produce. Using this technique ensures that every item produced is different from the other, even if the same template is used, because it’s hand-sewn, unlike those made using a machine.”

And contrary to the popular belief in Kenya that machines provide quality, says Cindy, saddle stitched items are more durable.

One hand-sewn bag takes up to two days to complete. A Grade A full grain leather Nashipai laptop bag goes Sh24,000, a shepherd cross bag Sh20,000, a Safari bag Sh27,000 and an Eskoma clutch bag with cowhide finish Sh2,600.

Nashipai’s signature leather is cowhide, sourced from Sagana Leather tannery.

“Cowhide leather is a rare find,” explains Cindy, “because it does not go through the process of being sanded, buffed or snuffed like the other smooth leather. This gives it a raw look. In 200 cows, a tannery may only be able to process two to three Grade A full grain leather hides, which makes the product expensive.”

As the masterclass comes to an end, Cindy discloses that Nashipai will this year produce pocket-friendly products to cater for the middle-class Kenyan who, she hopes, will appreciate and embrace the timeless craft of saddle stitching.

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The FLIP SIDE
With John Nyaganyaga
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WOMAN POWER

CONGOLESE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST JULIENNE LUSENGE HAS BEEN RECOGNISED FOR HER ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC), AT THE FELIX HOLPHOUET-BOIGNY UNESCO PEACE PRIZE CEREMONY IN YAMOISSOUKRO, COTE D’IVOIRE. THE CEREMONY, WHICH RECOGNISES INDIVIDUALS OR INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS PROMOTION, RESEARCH OR MAINTENANCE OF PEACE, HONOURABLY MENTIONED MS LUSENGE FOR HER WORK TOWARDS ENDING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE. WE CELEBRATE YOU, MADAM LUSENGE.

STAR OF THE WEEK



KENYA’S NOAH KIBET WON THE MEN’S 800M AT THE MILROSE GAMES IN 1:44.98, A PERSONAL BEST AND EARNING HIM THE FASTEST TIME OVER THE DISTANCE THIS SEASON. THE 18-YEAR-OLD, A 2022 WORLD INDOOR RUNNER-UP, BEAT AMERICAN ISAIHA HARRIS BY .66 OF A SECOND. IT IS A FANTASTIC START FOR THE 2021 WORLD UNDER-20 CHAMPION WHOSE DEBUT IN THE SENIORS LAST SEASON DIDN’T GO ACCORDING TO PLAN, BUT HOPES THE START CAN INSPIRE A BETTER PERFORMANCE THIS SEASON, WITH THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS SET FOR JULY. WE WISH YOU THE VERY BEST AS YOU SET OFF TO CONQUER THE WORLD!

opinion



■ Paternal and maternal love cannot be an excuse for criminal conduct

You are setting your children up for failure

Fresh from allegations of massive cheating during last year's Form Four examination, the Ministry of Education is now having to counter another form of cheating in which parents are registering Grade Seven pupils for the KCPE exam done by Standard Eight candidates, with the sole aim of ensuring that the pupils are not examined under the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC).

To do this, the parents are conspiring with primary school headteachers not only to falsify vital identification documents like birth certificates, but also to erase the children's history in the schools they currently attend.

It is reported that hefty sums of money have been changing hands in the process, thus compounding an obvious illegality with another, its perpetrators oblivious of the fact that the eventual loser will be the child.

What the corrupt parents and teachers fail to appreciate is that forcing a pupil to jump a class (Grade Seven), and forcing him or her to straddle two different curricula (from 8-4-4 system to CBC and back to 8-4-4), will inevitably disorient the learner. After all, education is a progressive aggregation of skills and knowledge, and any interruption is bound to be inimical to a child's cognitive development.

To make matters worse is the question of age. A child in Grade Seven is only 13 years old, while Standard Eight candidates are at least 14. How these parents and teachers hope to reconcile these age differences remains a mystery.



**MAGISHA
NGWIRI**

While the ministry is to be congratulated for not sitting on this scandal, one wonders how many children have been affected.

Granted, the primary duty of a parent is to look after the best interests of the child, but paternal and maternal love cannot be an excuse for criminal conduct. Going to the extent of altering a child's unique personal identifier which traces his or her educational progression from the first grade to Junior Secondary School is way out of line.

No parent can hide from such a child that some corners were cut so he could leave his classmates behind, join a new school, and register for an examination for which he was never prepared.

If we inculcate such shifty values in our children, why should they not grow up thinking that the only way to get ahead is to rig the system?

This is equivalent to those parents — and teachers — who abet exam cheating for myopic bragging rights ('My child got four A's and three B+') despite the fact that the said child may know next to nothing about

anything that really matters.

The truth usually comes out when such children proceed to higher classes and are unable to cope. If they do not drop out of school, they will have been conditioned to seeking the easiest way out of any difficulty by any means, however unethical. That is how you breed sociopathic misfits in society; people who believe that the end always justifies the means.

The introduction of the CBC by the last administration was always beset by teething problems, but the fact that the new administration decided not to scuttle it the way its opponents were urging means that CBC, with all its imperfections, is here to stay.

That is why those who are fighting it now through skulduggery are wrong, for they are setting up their children for failure in the real world. It is also why the ministry must smoke out — and punish — those who have been registering their wards for exams that will be the last under a curriculum that is already defunct for all practical purposes.

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opinion

■ Sending in the military will amount to nothing more than hypocritical publicity stunts

We need a 'Marshall Plan', not guns and mortars



MACHARIA
GAITO

It is good, on the one hand, that after issuing so many impotent warnings, the government has finally recognised the threats posed to national security by armed brigands in large swathes of the northern Rift Valley region.

But on the other hand, we must regret any situation where the military has to be called in to tackle domestic security issues. Such a measure serves as severe indictment of the police and other security organs, who are deemed to have utterly failed on the core mandate of ensuring safety and security for all within our borders.

The military is formed specifically to defend Kenya from external aggressors, and quite often the training and doctrine is not suitable for policing duties. Calling in soldiers to restore and maintain internal security carries very serious signals of a failed or failing state, where civil authority must give way to army boots.

The legal notice proclaiming Turkana, Pokot, Baringo, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Samburu and Laikipia counties as 'disturbed areas' where the Kenya Defence Forces are deployed internally follows what are now akin permanent proclamations of similar nature effective across the entire northern and north-eastern regions, down to the coast. It means that more than half of the country is effectively under a State of Emergency or martial law, where civil rights could be deemed suspended and the State can literally get away with murder.

While extreme situations will often call for extreme solutions, we must remain alert to the risks posed if the military is given free rein to ride roughshod over the civilian population. We must also bear in mind that there is no guarantee the army and other Defence Force units will succeed where the police have failed.

Security in the vast north-eastern region, comprising the former North-Eastern Province and contiguous districts, has been under military eyes almost since Independence. First, soldiers were required to tackle the shifita menace and the threat of Somali irredentism. And then came more recent threats of the al-Shabaab terrorism. The region is no safer today than it was when the military was first deployed 60 years ago.

And in parts of the Rift Valley scarred by activities of cattle rustlers, bandits and ethnic

militias, the military has been deployed occasionally over the last 40 years, often without the requisite legal instruments, but the security situation seems only to get worse rather than better.

Something clearly is not working. And this is probably because we prefer to address the symptoms rather than the root causes.

The military may move in with much more firepower than that available to the police. However, all the battle tanks, mortars, heavy artillery, helicopter gunships and fighter jets can be useless in the absence of enemy encampment to level to the ground.

They have to find an enemy to bomb, but where the enemy is not a rival conventional army but bands of irregulars who will lie low, hide their guns and mingle with the civilian population, superior firepower might have little effect.

In any case, it should be of concern that all the shrill noises coming from government are taking aim at the young warriors spreading mayhem across the region, rather than the command and control structures.

It is obvious by now that the cattle rustlers, bandits, militias or whatever one may call them are armed, financed and controlled by



KDF Soldiers arriving at Uhuru Gardens during Madaraka Day Celebrations on June 1, 2022. EVANS HABIL

Security in the vast north-eastern region, comprising the former North-Eastern Province and contiguous districts, has been under military eyes almost since Independence. First, soldiers were required to tackle the shifita menace and the threat of Somali irredentism. And then came to more recent threats of the al-Shabaab terrorism. The region is no safer today than it was when the military was first deployed 60 years ago.

wealthy and powerful people, some of whom may be at the very heart of national leadership.

We are not dealing here with traditional cattle raids or ethnic conflicts. We are dealing with big business controlled by personalities who, by day, will be respected leaders supping with their peers in Parliament, county and national government Executive suites, or corporate boardrooms, but by night are vicious ethnic warlords directing murder and plunder on industrial scale.

If President William Ruto really wants to end the menace once and for all, he must go beyond sending in the soldiers, and also direct that figures in leadership ranks around him who carry the slightest whiff of suspicion are removed and made to face the full force of the law. Some of these people are known. The state security machinery, and specifically the intelligence apparatus, knows which figures in the corridors of power are linked to insecurity in northern Kenya.

If the government will not act swiftly and decisively on the masterminds and financiers who profit from the mayhem, sending in the military to tackle young men executing the raids will amount to nothing more than hypocritical publicity stunts.

Deployment of soldiers in the theatre of conflict may provide temporary respite, but that will be nowhere near the long-term solutions required to pacify the affected region and restore peace and security for all.

Beyond the military solution, the government must also move with haste to address the very real issues that afflict the region. Put simply, it is not normal that young men are so easily enlisted into irregular fighting forces and the life of banditry and related violence, bloodshed and pillage.

That is a consequence of the neglect, marginalisation and under-development that vast tracts of Kenya have been condemned to since the colonial era.

Pacification must therefore be accompanied by a 'Marshall Plan' designed to pull that region into Kenya through development of the necessary communications and transport infrastructure, utilities such as electricity and piped water, as well as education, health and other basic social services.

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kenya lens

■ ALIGNMENT AND REALIGNMENT

POLITICAL BROTHERS FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

• By OSCAR OBONYO

Having lost power despite the advantages of incumbency, can Uhuru and Raila influence political events in their favour from the outside?

On July 20, 2021, Central Organisation of Trade Unions (Cotu) Secretary-General Francis Atwoli penned a lengthy letter to the feuding partners of the National Super Alliance – Raila Odinga, Kalonzo Musyoka, Musalia Mudavadi and Moses Wetangula – and Kanu party leader Gideon Moi, imploring them to swallow their pride and team up ahead of the following year’s polls or risk political oblivion.

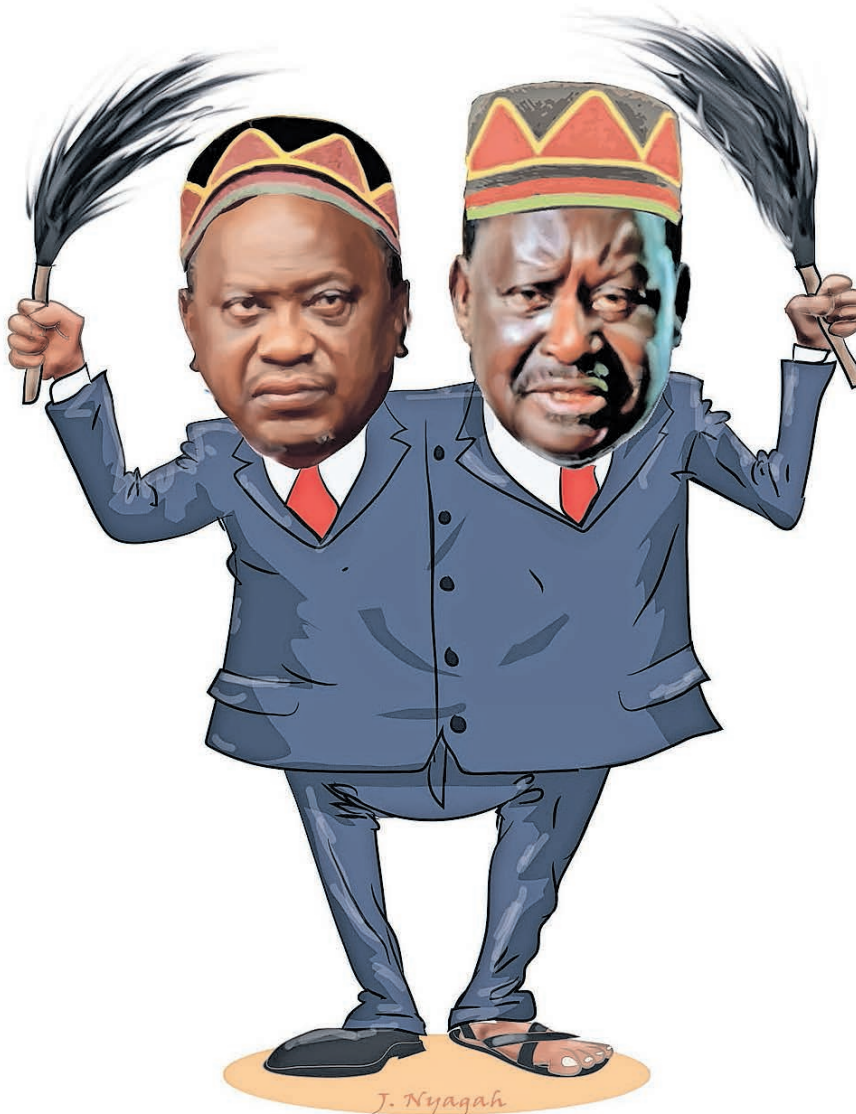
“If one of you will not have taken over the political leadership of this country, then the coming five years will witness all of you being fought over fiercely and your influence reduced to nothing because you are all men of very strong influence in our country and for whoever will be in power to survive, you will remain their targets,” he cautioned in the hard-hitting letter titled “Appeal for you to come together in the looming political dispensation”. Mudavadi and Wetangula, who instead bolted out of that arrangement, are today serving as Prime Cabinet Secretary and Speaker of the National Assembly respectively, while Odinga, Musyoka, Moi and former President Uhuru Kenyatta – who openly and solidly supported Raila’s presidential bid last year – are slugging it out from the opposition corner.

Indeed, the veteran unionist’s prophecy may have come to pass, if lamentations by allies of the ODM leader, Raila, and his Wiper counterpart, Musyoka, are anything to go by. Kenyatta, the presumed financial sponsor of Odinga’s campaign, is on the receiving end particularly, with President William Ruto’s administration tightening the noose around his neck over alleged non-payment of taxes by members of the larger Kenyatta family.

The former President is also suffering losses at the political level. On Monday, for instance, the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) ratified changes by the Jubilee Party’s National Executive Committee that kicked out Kenyatta-leaning officials, Vice-Chair David Murathe, Secretary-General Jeremiah Ki- ni and National Treasurer Kagwe Gichohi.

Although the controversial move by the ORPP is believably independent of the President’s influence, it demonstrates Kenyatta’s inevitable diminishing sway over and control of government entities. The situation is a product of what critics have described as the former President’s rather casual – if not lacklustre – approach to the August presidential poll, in which he had a preferred successor.

While the Kenyatta-Odinga axis “toyed around” with the power in their possession, Ruto approached the poll as one would the proverbial oasis – starved of water and keen to maximise on the little access accorded to him. To this day, supporters of the Odinga-led Azimio La Umoja-One Kenya outfit have yet to comprehend how the top seat slipped



SCIENCE & TECH

Hyundai and KIA update car software



Hyundai and Kia are offering free software updates for millions of their cars in response to a rash of car thefts inspired by a viral social media challenge on TikTok.

The so-called “Kia Challenge” on the social media platform has led to hundreds of car thefts across the US, including at least 14 reported crashes and eight fatalities, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Thieves known as “the Kia Boyz” would post instructional videos about how to bypass the vehicles’ security system using tools as simple as a USB cable.

The thefts are reportedly easy to pull off because many 2015-2019 Hyundai and Kia vehicles lack electronic immobilisers that prevent thieves from simply breaking in and bypassing the ignition. The feature is standard equipment on nearly all vehicles from the same period made by other manufacturers.

Hyundai and its subsidiary, Kia, are offering to update the “theft alarm software logic” to extend the length of the alarm sound from 30 seconds to one minute. The vehicles will also be updated to require a key in the ignition switch to turn the vehicle on.

The software upgrade modifies certain vehicle control modules on Hyundai vehicles equipped with standard “turn-key-to-start” ignition systems.

As a result, locking the doors with the key fob will set the factory alarm and activate an “ignition kill” feature so the vehicles cannot be started when subjected to the popularised theft mode. Customers must use the key fob to unlock their vehicles to deactivate the “ignition kill” feature.

‘ISTARI’: HOW TO BUILD THE PERFECT AI WAR MACHINE



Ukrainian soldiers train in Rivne region, near the border with Belarus, on February 11.

● LONDON

Expensive military hardware like a new tank undergoes rigorous testing before heading to the battlefield. A start-up called Istari, backed by Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google and chair of Alphabet, reckons some of that work can be done more effectively in the metaverse.

Ishtari uses machine learning to virtually assemble and test war machines from computer models of individual components, such as the chassis and engines, that are usually marooned on separate digital drawing boards. It may sound dull, but Schmidt says it can bring a dose of tech industry innovation to US military engineering.

“The Istari team is bringing internet-type usability to models and simulations,” he says. “This unlocks the possibility of software-like agility for future physical systems. It is very exciting.”

The company reflects

Schmidt’s unique position as a link between the tech industry and the Pentagon.

Virtual replicas known as digital twins are common in manufacturing and could help the Pentagon develop hardware more quickly. And Istari is a building block in a wider project in which Schmidt is attempting to bring Silicon Valley technology and thinking to the US military.

That quest has roots in the shock Schmidt experienced in 2016, when he first glimpsed the state of Pentagon technology up close. He was still chair of Alphabet but accepted an invitation from President Obama’s Defence Secretary Ashton Carter to chair a new Defense Innovation Board trying to modernise the DOD. Schmidt’s new post began with an eye-opening tour of US labs and bases.

“I got to run around with Eric and look at how the department was engaging on commercial technology,” says Will Roper, who was then an assistant secretary

of the Air Force focused on technology and is the founder and CEO of Istari. “It was evident that the entire Department of Defense was developing software the same way it was done in the 1970s and ‘80s,” Roper says.

He was one of many Pentagon leaders who were impressed by Schmidt’s diagnosis of the department’s problems and willingness to try to solve them.

Schmidt became CEO of Google in 2001, when the search engine had a few hundred employees and was barely making money.

He stepped away from Alphabet in 2017 after building a sprawling, highly profitable company with a stacked portfolio of projects, including cutting-edge artificial intelligence, self-driving cars, and quantum computers.

Schmidt now sees another opportunity for technological reinvention to lead to domination, this time for the US government in competition with other world powers.

africa lens

■ ANGER AND CHAOS OUTSIDE BANKS AS NATION RUNS SHORT OF CASH

NIGERIA'S NAIRA SHORTAGE



People queue early in the day to withdraw money from a cash dispenser at a bank in Kano, north-west Nigeria, on February 8. Africa's most populous country has been crippled by fuel shortages for weeks, and cash dispensers are running empty after a sudden currency swap two weeks ahead of Nigeria's presidential election.

A lack of newly designed naira notes has led to a cash shortage and a growing sense of anxiety among those desperate to get hold of their money

● LAGOS

People in Nigeria have taken to sleeping outside banks. They want to be among the first in line to get notes from the cash machine once it is loaded up in the morning.

A lack of newly designed naira notes has led to a cash shortage and a growing sense of anxiety among those desperate to get hold of their money in a country where 40 per cent of the population don't have bank accounts.

The Supreme Court has even become involved and has ordered that the deadline to hand in old notes be extended but this has made little difference.

People here have long been used to the periodic bouts of fuel shortages leading to long lines of cars snaking from the petrol stations.

But now long lines of frustrated, confused and angry people have become a common sight outside banks as the country builds up to a presidential election at the end of the month.

"I have not eaten today," says Abraham Osundiran, 36, as he stands in one of two queues at a bank in Ikoyi, a district in the country's main commercial hub, Lagos.

He has had to miss work at a construction company for a second day because he does not have the cash to pay the taxi fare. Some Nigerians have embraced digital payments, but many still rely heavily on cash.

"I don't have any cash. I've had to skip breakfast so I could come here, and I don't know what I will eat for the rest of the day"

It is a similar situation for many others.

"It's painful. I can't go to the market, because they want cash. Buses want cash - now I have

to trek everywhere," hairdresser Lilian Ineh, 26, tells the *BBC* from her salon.

"There's no money to buy stock, so I have less products to sell. There are even less customers. Usually on a Saturday I have a minimum of five." Last Saturday, she only had two.

Nigerians were told last October that the old notes were being replaced with new ones and they were encouraged to deposit any cash savings in the bank.

"They made us put all our money into our accounts, and now we can't access it. It's unbearable," says Osarenoma Kolawole, 40. She works in telesales, but has not been able to access her salary since getting paid last week.

"The last time I went to the shops, I had to buy eggs instead of fish — that really hurt

...Continued on Page 26

africa lens

CBK redesigns notes to replace dirty cash in circulation

Long lines of frustrated and angry people have become a common sight outside banks as the country builds up to a presidential election at the end of this month.

Continued from Page 25

me — not the food, but having to buy what I didn't want to, just because the banks won't let me get my money?"

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) said it redesigned the higher denomination notes — 200, 500 and 1,000 naira — to replace the dirty cash in circulation, to tackle inflation, curb counterfeiting and promote a cashless society.

It hoped the redesign would bring some of the money being hoarded by individuals and companies back into the financial system.

The reform has created something like a cashless society — but not in the way the CBN had planned. People have been finding it difficult to make online payments and transfers. Analysts say the infrastructure to support a digital system is not robust enough.

"The whole idea was to limit how much cash people have access to, in order to encourage them to make digital payments, so they (CBN) can monitor where money goes," says Paul Alaje, a senior economist at management consultants SPM Professionals.

"But Nigerian banks don't have the capacity or structure to make digital payments work seamlessly." The CBN has not said whether the shortages are deliberate. "The government has been trying to move the country into a cashless economy for ages," argues policy analyst and economist Dr Yemi Makinde.

"Its intention is good, but it is just not feasible. The banking systems were not ready and Nigeria is just used to cash."

When announcing the redesign, the CBN said the new notes would begin circulating from December 15 and the old notes would cease to be legal tender at the end of January.

The bank then extended the deadline to last Friday. The Supreme Court stepped in and suspended this deadline but the queues outside banks remain. "The only way this judgment would work is to release old notes back into system to meet the shortage [but] doing that will only take us back to square one," says economist Mr Alaje. Many have also blamed individual bank branches. Firstly, they were still giving out the old notes rather than new ones, even up to the week of the initial deadline, thereby keeping them in circulation.

Secondly, agents from the country's anti-fraud body, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, raided some bank branches and arrested managers who were accused of hoarding the new notes in vaults rather than putting them in cash machines and giving them to customers.

"The banks are not doing a good job distributing the money. Bank managers have been keeping a lot of the money aside for people with connections and for the rich, misusing the central bank's policy," Makinde says.

As a consequence, the lack of new naira notes has hit those who primarily deal with cash day-to-day, like market sellers and hawkers.

Iya Ruka, 52, sells plantains at a market in Ojodu Berger, Lagos. She has had to adapt by accepting bank transfers — but this has not helped her when she needs money.

"All my customers are saying they don't have cash, they will pay using a bank transfer, but I go to the bank and there's no cash for me to collect. So what do I do?"

Further down the street, Kingsley, who only gave his first name, sells mobile phone accessories. The 27-year-old told me he has hardly sold anything in the last few days.

"People only pay (by) transfer. If I want to get home, I need to go to a Point of Sale to get money and they charge a lot now."

POS vendors are individuals standing at street corners who have a card machine and can make transfers for people, but often charge a commission. They have been accused of fleecing ordinary people by charging extortionate amounts for cash withdrawals.

One vendor, who spoke on condition of anonymity, defended the need to charge extra.

"I queued for an entire day at a bank to get new notes and old notes. That's why they must pay, because we queue," says the 25-year-old, who runs a kiosk in Lekki. She adds that she is not sure how much longer she will be able to keep up the business, as the banks run dry.

"Some customers can get angry and nearly violent - I just avoid looking up at them. They forget I'm suffering as well, like now, I have to trek for an hour home, and I have only been eating garri (cassava flakes)." CBN Governor Godwin Emefiele has said he has taken steps to get more of the new notes into the system with the aim of easing the situation.

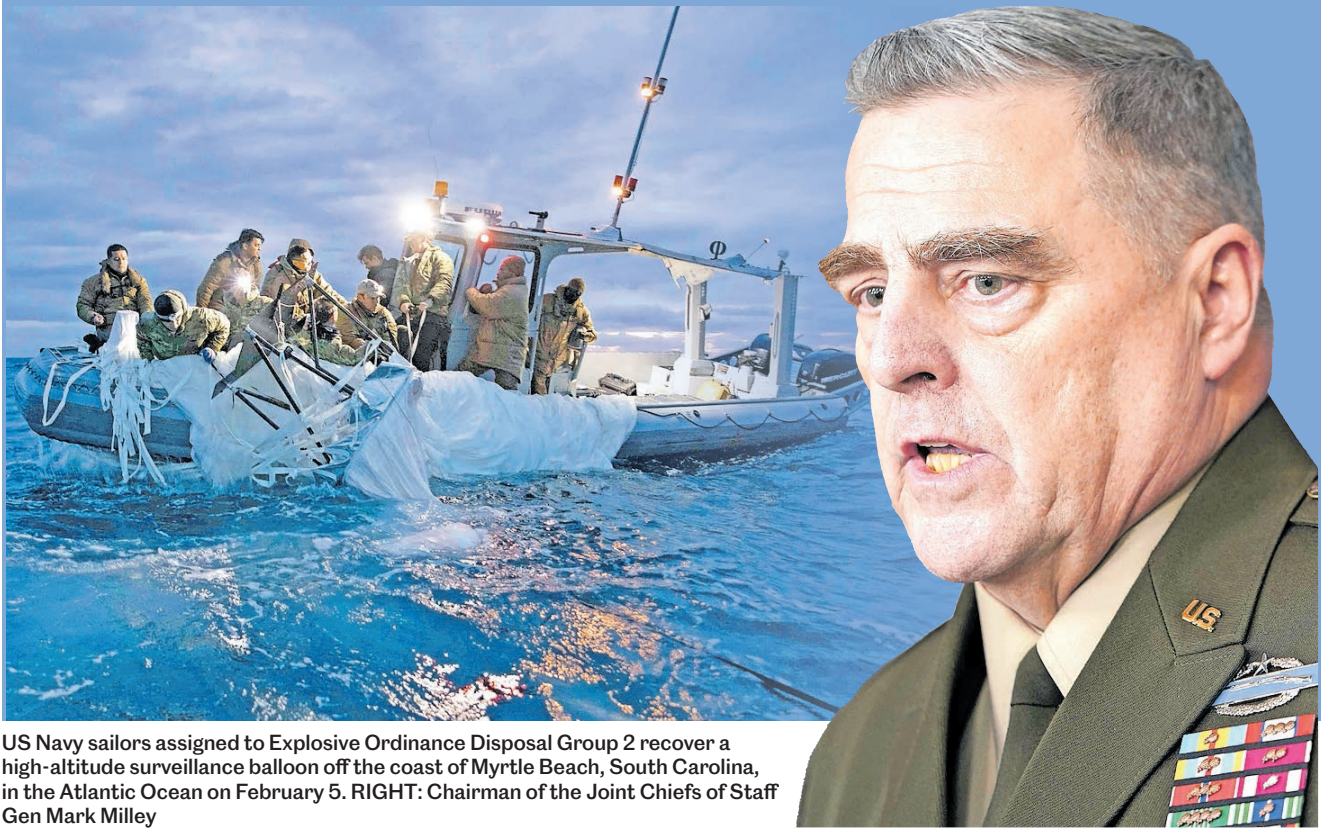
The chaos has become a major election issue, with calls for President Muhammadu Buhari to take action to avoid losing votes for the ruling All Progressives Congress. Despite the crisis, there are a few people, especially those who managed to plan well ahead, who have not felt the crunch just yet. Ruth Okeke, 35, runs a convenience shop in Omole. She says even though the number of her customers has dropped, she is not worried. "I know things will get better. The bankers are the ones making money from all this panic, but there will be new notes soon, everybody should relax."

— BBC

global lens

■ 'A CIVILIAN AIRSHIP USED FOR RESEARCH, MAINLY METEOROLOGICAL, PURPOSES'

THE US-CHINA BALLOON SAGA



US Navy sailors assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 2 recover a high-altitude surveillance balloon off the coast of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in the Atlantic Ocean on February 5. RIGHT: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Mark Milley

After the Pentagon first announced the existence of the balloon on February 2, Chinese officials refrained from an immediate response

● WASHINGTON

China's claim that the US has flown balloons into its airspace marks the latest in a series of shifting positions the country has taken on a saga that has gripped the world.

It has been almost two weeks since the US first accused China of floating a spy balloon over its territory.

The incident has provoked a range of responses — from indignation to fevered speculation — from the Chinese government and people.

Silence, then admission

After the Pentagon first announced the existence of the balloon on February 2, Chinese officials refrained from an immediate response, only breaking their silence the following evening.

In a statement, they admitted the object belonged to them, but added it was a “civilian airship used for research, mainly meteorological, purposes” that had been blown off-course.

Taking a near-apologetic tone — rare for Beijing — they characterized it as an accident, saying they “regretted the unintended en-

try of the airship into US airspace due to force majeure”.

But state media, which had mostly held off from reporting the story until the government's admission, got more defensive.

China Daily claimed the “fabricated balloon lie cannot be tied down to China”, while the *Global Times* urged the US “to be more sincere in fixing relations with China instead of making provocative actions against it”.

Netizens wasted no time in making jokes about the incident, with many calling the object “The Wandering Balloon” — a refer-

ence to the popular Chinese science-fiction novel and film *The Wandering Earth*.

The morning after, Chinese authorities released a longer, more vigorous defence as news broke that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had called off a planned trip to China, claiming that “some politicians and media in the US have hyped it up to attack and smear China”.

That same day, the US shot the balloon down — prompting Chinese ire. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning called it “a clear

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global lens

Second balloon spotted drifting over Latin America

Continued from Page 27

overreaction” and “unacceptable and irresponsible.” “The airship does not belong to the US. It belongs to China,” she said, when asked if China had requested for the balloon’s remnants to be returned. Officials lodged a formal complaint with the US embassy in Beijing, and China’s Defence Ministry said they “reserved the right to use necessary means to deal with similar situations”.

Online, Chinese nationalists indignantly denounced the US. Prominent commentator Hu Xijin, the former editor-in-chief of *Global Times*, thought the US “had to end” the situation by using a missile, because Americans “aren’t able to treat an accident by seeking truth from facts, instead they had to politicise it”.

Meanwhile, a second balloon was spotted drifting over Latin America, which Chinese authorities also admitted was theirs.

Speculation mounts

On the Chinese internet there was fevered speculation about who exactly had launched the balloon in the absence of details about its civilian origins. Many seized upon recent news articles that mentioned a local company, ChemChina Zhuzhou Rubber Research and Design Institute, as one of the main producers of high-altitude balloons in China.

Some bloggers claimed ChemChina Zhuzhou, a subsidiary of a state-owned enterprise, had made the balloon. But there has been no evidence linking the company to the airship.

The confusion deepened on Sunday, when a report came out in news outlet *The Paper* about an unidentified object allegedly flying off the coast of the eastern Shandong Province.

It said fisheries officials had sent out a warning to local fishermen that Chinese authorities were preparing to shoot down the object.

The report was reproduced by some Chinese outlets, but state media and government departments remained silent. It sent social media into overdrive nonetheless, with some accounts even live-streaming satellite images of the area. But some reacted with suspicion and asked if it was real, questioning why the news had not been announced on more official channels.

Turning the narrative

On Monday, the Chinese government had a new claim – that US balloons had breached their airspace at least 10 times in the past year.

“The first thing the US side should do is start with a clean slate, undergo some self-reflection, instead of smearing and accusing China,” said a foreign ministry spokesman.

The US has denied the accusation.

At the same time, state media has begun focusing on a different narrative — a derailed train carrying hazardous material in Ohio.

Though the incident happened in early Feb-



A suspected Chinese spy balloon in the sky over Billings, Montana, on February 1.
PHOTO | AFP

ruary, Chinese news outlets are now devoting significant coverage to the topic, citing US media reports. US officials have performed a controlled release of toxic chemicals from the train to prevent contamination.

It has since become a significant talking point on social media. On Weibo, China’s equivalent to Twitter, the main Ohio train hashtag has been viewed more than 690 million times since the weekend, with more than 40 hashtags created on the topic.

Many Chinese netizens have expressed worry that the incident would turn into a global environmental crisis, and anger over the relatively sparser coverage of the train incident in US media compared to the balloons.

“Turns out the Wandering Balloon was being used to take the heat for Ohio,” a post liked nearly 3,000 times reads.

In the most recent strike – over Lake Huron – the first Sidewinder missile fired by a US F-16 warplane missed its target, the top US general has confirmed. “First shot missed. Second shot hit,” said Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley during a visit to Brussels.

“We go to great lengths to make sure that the airspace is clear and the backdrop is clear up to the max effective range of the missile. And in this case, the missiles land, or the missile landed, harmlessly in the water of Lake Hu-

ron.”

A spokesman for China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meanwhile, criticised the American response. “Many in the US have been asking what good such costly action can possibly bring to the US and its taxpayers?” said Wang Wenbin.

Sensors from the alleged Chinese spy balloon shot down over the US on February 4 were recovered from the Atlantic Ocean on Monday, and are being analysed by the FBI.

Search crews found “significant debris from the site, including all of the priority sensor and electronics pieces identified” off the coast of South Carolina, said US Northern Command.

The Chinese balloon was being tracked by US intelligence since its lift-off from a base on Hainan Island on the south coast of China earlier this month, US media report.

Shortly after take-off the balloon drifted towards the US islands of Guam and Hawaii before moving north towards Alaska, American officials told *CBS News*, the *BBC*’s partner.

The unnamed officials say that its path indicates that it could have been blown off course by weather, but that it was back under the Chinese control again by the time it reached the continental US. The entire US Senate received a classified briefing on Tuesday about the matter from military leaders. —**BBC**

global lens

■ THE CRUCIAL 1972 ANTI-BALLISTIC MISSILE TREATY COLLAPSED IN 2002

Ukrainian servicemen take part in a joint military training of armed forces, national guards, border guards and Security Service of Ukraine in Rivne region near the border with Belarus on February 11. PHOTO | AFP



THE SPECTRE OF NUCLEAR WAR

Russia's threats to use deadly weapons remind the world that escalation of the conflict — by accident, intention, or miscalculation — is a terrible risk

● KYIV

For decades, children in the United States and the Soviet Union were drilled on what to do in a nuclear war. One year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, could the danger have returned for new generations?

Within days of Moscow's attack, President Vladimir Putin ordered the mobilisation of Russian nuclear forces, stunning the world.

Washington bashed such talk as “dangerous” and “irresponsible”, and warned Moscow of “catastrophic consequences.” But Moscow kept up its threats, giving rise to deep worries that Putin was willing to start a nuclear exchange that could trigger an all-out apocalypse.

“We have not seen a public announcement from the Russians regarding a heightened nuclear alert status since the 1960s,” said Avril Haines, US Director of National Intelligence.

And President Joe Biden warned that the world risked nuclear destruction for the first time since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Russian officials sought to clarify their stance, saying the country would only use nuclear weapons if it were facing an “existential threat”. But in September, when Putin declared the annexation of four Ukraine regions, the question was: would attacking them amount to an “existential threat” to Russia?

Though there was no sign of Russian nuclear mobilisation, in January, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved their “Doomsday

Clock” forward to just 90 seconds to midnight, signalling their view that the destruction of humanity was closer than ever. “Russia's thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons remind the world that escalation of the conflict — by accident, intention, or miscalculation — is a terrible risk,” the *Bulletin* said.

The threat has returned not only because Russia invaded Ukraine. The US-USSR arms control pacts that eased the tensions of the Cold War are dead or broken. The crucial 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty collapsed in 2002.

In 2019 the United States pulled out of the INF treaty, which limited medium-range nuclear-capable missiles, saying Russia was violating its commitments. And over the past year the 2011 New Start Treaty between the United States and Russia limiting nuclear warheads has frayed, Washington again accusing Moscow of not complying.

But ironically, said Pavel Podvig, a senior researcher at the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, Russia's threats may have made the world a little safer, by reminding new generations of the unthinkable danger of atomic Armageddon. For one, he said, Russia may have calculated that it could start and quickly finish the war on Ukraine because it had nuclear weapons.

Instead, it collided with nuclear-armed NATO's support for Ukraine. The conflict may even have helped make the case that nuclear weapons are “obsolete”, said Podvig, as Rus-

sia may have found that “they don't give you security.” Second, Podvig said, is the pushback from world leaders, including Russia's friends India and China, over Moscow's nuclear talk, helping to bolster a sense that nuclear threats are taboo. In September, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised concerns about the nuclear talk with Putin.

In November, the G20 declared at the end of its summit in Bali — where Russia took part — that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is “inadmissible”. Even more important, said Podvig, was the joint statement by Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping at the Bali venue. Biden and Xi agreed “that a nuclear war should never be fought and can never be won and underscored their opposition to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine,” their statement said.

Washington has toned down its own talk, refraining from repeating its warning of “catastrophic consequences” for nuclear use. “It turns out that people don't really like when states talk like that,” said Podvig, adding people are again “acutely clear of the danger of a nuclear war.” Meanwhile, the tanks and trench warfare in Ukraine may seem old-school, but US experts say the conflict has provided strategic insights into future possible conflicts from the Middle East to Taiwan. They range from the mundane to the high-tech, with Ukraine a proving ground for artificial intelligence and robotic warfare. — AFP

OBIT

■ HE WAS ONE OF THE MOST HIGH-PROFILE RAPPERS ON THE CONTINENT

• DURBAN

To his family, he was Kieran Jarryd Forbes. To his daughter, he was “dad” and to his legion of fans, he was AKA, Supa Mega, Bhova. And now, his spirit will live on in those memories and the memories tied to his music.

Born in Cape Town on January 28, 1988 to Tony and Lynn Forbes, AKA became one of the most high-profile musicians on South Africa’s rap scene.

In 2002, during his formative years, he formed a rap group called Entity alongside his friends Greyhound (Nhlalnhla Makena) and Vice Versa (Sizwe Mpo-fu-Walsh). In a 2005 interview with *IOL*, he explained that his stage name stemmed from the fact that he was a different person to each of the people in his life.

“To my mother, I am her son, to Vice Versa and Greyhound, I am a friend,” he told the publication. Entity broke up in 2006, much to the dismay of their fans and AKA later joined a production collective now known as IV League. There, he worked alongside Buks and Kamza to produce some of the Hip Hop bangers that formed the soundtrack to many a young South African’s high school and university years.

Three years later, that group came to an end as AKA ventured out on his own, starting with just three singles titled *In My Walk*, *I Do* and *Mistakes*. It wasn’t until 2010 that things really took off for him with the release of *I Want It All*, the lead single on his debut studio album, *Altar Ego*.

In fact, his friend who died along with him in the shooting, Tebello ‘Tibz’ Motoane, was instrumental in this part of AKA’s career, even serving as his manager.

Altar Ego also gave fans songs like *All I Know* and *Victory Lap* which went on to top South African radio charts. It won several accolades, among them a Metro FM Music Award and a South African Music Award. He followed up that success with a project that many argue is one of the greatest offerings in South African hip-hop history, an album titled *Levels*, released on June 20, 2014.

Notable tracks on the project include *Jealousy*, *Kontrol*, *Congratulate* and *Run Jozi* (Godly) featuring K.O and Yanga. It was in the music video for *Jealousy* that we would

‘AKA’ LIVED UP TO HIS STAGE NAME

On February 10, the African music industry lost an enigmatic superstar to a senseless act of violence



South African rap sensation Kiernan Forbes, popularly known as AKA, performs at the 22nd annual South African Music Awards at the Durban International Convention Centre on June 4, 2016.

first see Bonang Matheba feature in an AKA project before the pair went on to become boyfriend and girlfriend years later.

This year, interestingly, he also began dating fellow musician Ntombezinhle ‘DJ Zinhle’ Jiyane, with whom he had a seven-year-old daughter named Kairo Owethu Forbes (born in 2015). Their relationship ended due to an affair between AKA and Bonang and they tried to reconcile years later, to no avail.

Levels was followed up by *Be Careful What You Wish For*, a joint project with South African producer and rapper, Anathi ‘Anatii’ Mnyango.

Thereafter, he dropped an album called *Touch My Blood*, which was prefaced by singles such as *The World Is Yours* (the song which featured then-girlfriend Bonang in its music video), *Caiphus Song*, *Star Signs* featuring Stogie T and *Sweet Fire*. The album rollout was accompanied by a social media competi-

tion calling on young graphic designers to duke it out for the honour of designing the star’s cover art. The competition wasn’t without controversy as many criticised the rapper for requiring presumably struggling artists to put in work they may not ever be compensated for as there could only be one winner.

The winner went on to receive an internship at a company that AKA set up to manage his brand called Beam Group.

Though the lead single for *Touch My Blood* and its accompanying music video were an ode to his Bonang, the pair went through a messy break-up that saw AKA include a diss track aimed at his ex on the project.

The song, titled *Beyonce*, took aim at the media darling for the way in which her ex believed she was living. The album went on to be certified double platinum. In 2019, the controversial rapper was honoured by Comedy Central in a roast aimed at celebrating his career by poking fun at him. The following year, he partnered with alcohol manufacturer Cruz Vodka in a deal that saw him earn profit on every bottle sold from his branded flavour variant.

Two years later, in 2021, he released an EP titled *Bhovamania* and was honoured as Artist of the Decade at that year’s South African Hip Hop Awards.

It was also, tragically, the year that he lost his young fiancée, Anele Neli Tembe, after she fell from the tenth floor of a hotel they were staying at in Cape Town. This is also the incident that changed how many viewed the rapper, adding another layer to the man that people saw AKA as, a view that many have said they cannot forget in the wake of his passing.

Having picked the name AKA for himself and cleverly naming his debut solo project *Altar Ego*, one can only wonder if AKA knew just how much power lay in the stage name he chose for himself. At the time of his passing, he was just days away from releasing his highly-anticipated album, *Mass Country*.

He was also scheduled to appear on the line-up for the upcoming Valentine’s Day event called ‘The Soiree’ by Stella Artois. AKA leaves behind his parents, his brother Steffan, his daughter and his girlfriend, Nadia Nakai.

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