From Gatekeeper to Guardian: The Role of Tanzania Immigration Services Department in National Security and Economic Protection

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Abstract

The Tanzania Immigration Services Department (TISD) plays a critical role at the nexus of national security, economic safeguarding, and migration governance. Anchored by its guiding motto, *"Migration, Security and Development,"* TISD oversees cross-border movements while protecting the nation from transnational threats, including terrorism, human trafficking, and organized crime. This article situates TISD within the wider global framework of immigration securitisation, drawing comparisons between its practices and those of other African nations and global counterparts. Through analysis of policy documents, regional integration frameworks, and international migration trends, the study identifies emerging opportunities—such as digitalisation, enhanced inter-agency collaboration, and regional harmonisation—as well as enduring challenges like porous borders, limited resources, and the imperative to balance security imperatives with the protection of human rights. The article argues that immigration management in Tanzania transcends routine administration, representing a strategic endeavour that upholds national sovereignty while advancing development objectives. These insights enrich scholarly discourse on migration as a fundamental component of national security and economic governance across Africa.

Keywords
Tanzania Immigration Services Department, National Security, Migration Management, Economic Protection

1 Introduction

It is an indisputable fact that immigration services have a direct and enduring impact on the protection of national security and the safeguarding of economic interests. In Tanzania, the Tanzania Immigration Services Department (TISD) stands as one of the most strategic government institutions tasked with securing the nation's sovereignty while also facilitating development. Guided by its motto *"Migration, Security and Development"* and mission of controlling and facilitating the movement of persons through the implementation of relevant laws and regulations, the Department embodies the delicate balance between openness and control that defines modern states' approach to migration governance (United Republic of Tanzania, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2016).

The place of the Immigration Department in national security cannot be overstated. By managing borders, monitoring the legal status of non-citizens and preventing transnational crimes such as terrorism, human trafficking and smuggling, the Department ensures that Tanzania's territorial integrity and internal stability are not compromised. At the same time, immigration services contribute to economic protection by regulating labour migration, curbing illicit flows and supporting lawful investment and trade. In this sense, the Department is not only a guardian of national sovereignty but also a vital partner in sustaining Tanzania's long-term development (Mbiyozo, 2019).

Globally, immigration services have increasingly been redefined as central actors in security architecture. Since the early 2000s, particularly in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, immigration has become closely tied to counterterrorism, organized crime control

and transnational risk management (Huysmans, 2006). Countries across the world from the United States and European Union members to African states like Kenya and South Africa have repositioned immigration agencies as pivotal to safeguarding national security while simultaneously supporting growth. TISD reflects this global trend, while also facing unique challenges shaped by its geography, regional dynamics and developmental priorities.

2　　Immigration at the Core of National Security

The central argument of this article is that TISD is not a peripheral administrative agency, but a frontline institution in the protection of national security and the safeguarding of economic interests. Its core functions - controlling entry and exit, verifying identity, managing residence and preventing illegal migration are inseparable from the state's ability to defend its sovereignty and ensure internal stability. By regulating who enters, who stays and under what conditions, the Department acts as the first line of defence against transnational threats ranging from terrorism and trafficking to espionage and cross-border organized crime (Guild & Bigo, 2010).

At the same time, immigration management is deeply tied to economic protection. The Department plays a vital role in facilitating lawful labour migration, regulating investment-related permits and ensuring that migration contributes to, rather than undermines Tanzania's economic growth. It also generates state revenue through fees, penalties and services, while curbing illicit economic activities that often exploit porous borders (Mbiyozo, 2019). Thus, the Immigration Department serves a dual mission: protecting Tanzania from security threats while enabling the state to capture the developmental benefits of regulated migration.

This dual role is not unique to Tanzania but resonates with a broader global trend. Across the world, immigration services have become embedded in security architectures, particularly after the

securitization of migration in the early twenty-first century (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2006). States increasingly view immigration as both a vulnerability and an opportunity: a vulnerability when uncontrolled flows open avenues for transnational crime, terrorism or instability and an opportunity when managed migration fuels economic growth, innovation, and cultural exchange (IOM, 2022). TISD embodies this global paradox and, like its counterparts elsewhere, must constantly negotiate the tension between openness and security, development and control.

By itself, the concept national security can be defined as the safekeeping of the nation as a whole. That is, protection of the nation and its people from attack and other external dangers (U.S Department of Homeland Security, 2025; U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2025). It also entails both national defence and the protection of a series of geopolitical, economic and other interests and affects not only defence policy but also foreign and other policies as well (Baldwin,1997; Buzan et al,.1998).

Article 16 of the *Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania*[1] lays a foundation for the right to personal security (among others).[2] This is due to the fact that national security begins with protection of personal security as enshrined in the Constitution. Yet, under the *Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service Act,*[3] security is defined to mean the protection of the United Republic from any acts

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[1] Cap.2

[2] Article 16(1) Every person is entitled to respect and protection of his person, the privacy of his own person, his family and of his matrimonial life, and respect and protection of his residence and private communications.
(2) For the purpose of preserving the person's right in accordance with this Article, the state authority shall lay down legal procedures regarding the circumstances, manner and extent to which the right to privacy, *security of his person,* his property and residence may be encroached upon without prejudice to the provisions of this Article.

[3] Cap.406 (As amended in 2023).

including acts of terrorism, espionage, sabotage and subversion,[4] whether or not it is directed from or intended to be committed within the United Republic.[5]

The role of safekeeping of the nation as a whole is crosscutting and involves both individual citizens and entities. In Tanzania, the *National Security Act,[6]* is the Act creating the basis of what entails national security. Other Acts related directly to the aspect are the *Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service Act*[7] *and the National Security Council Act.*[8]

3   Historical Overview of the Immigration Services in Tanzania

The history regarding matters of control of immigration into Tanganyika commenced in 1924 with the enactment of *the Immigration Ordinance.*[9] The latter was aimed at controlling

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[4] Subversion means encouraging the overthrow by unlawful means of the Government of the United Republic or of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar; the undermining by unlawful means of the authority of the State in the United Republic.

[5] The Act further defines threats to the security of the United Republic to mean: espionage, sabotage or other activities which are against Tanzania or are detrimental to the integrity, sovereignty or other interests of the United Republic or are activities directed toward or in support of such espionage or sabotage; foreign influenced activities within or relating to the United Republic that are detrimental to the interests of the United Republic or are clandestine or deceptive or involve a threat to any person; activities within or relating to Tanzania directed toward or in support of the threat or use of acts of serious violence against persons or property for the purpose of achieving a political objective within the United Republic or a foreign state; and activities directed toward undermining by covert unlawful acts, or directed toward or intended ultimately to lead to the destruction or overthrow by violence of, the constitutionality established system of government in the United Republic, but does not include lawful advocacy, protest or dissent, unless carried on in conjunction with any of the activities referred to above.

[6] Cap.47.

[7] Cap.406 *(As amended in 2023).*

[8] No.8 of 2010.

[9] Cap 37 of 1924.

immigration into Tanganyika which was by then a British Territory and started to operate on 1st February, 1925.

According to the First *Annual Report of the Immigration and Passport Department of 1949,*[10] before the 1st January, 1949, the immigration structure formed part of the Police Department. From September 1939 to December 1949, the Passport office was a section of Police Headquarters and prior to 1939 it was attached to the Secretariat.[11]

On the 1st January, 1949 this Department, with its distinct Immigration and Passport sections, was set up but owing to some difficulty and delay in obtaining a sufficient nucleus of staff it remained under the control of the Commissioner of Police until the arrival of a Principal Immigration Officer on the 13th July, 1949 namely, T.N. Drake to take charge. The latter date may be regarded as its official birthday as a separate department under the then name Immigration department. In October 1949, it was renamed the Immigration and Passport department.

The commencement of the entity was a result of a number of reasons, particularly for controlling immigrants who entered the Territory especially fellow Europeans who had other colonies in Africa and other related immigrants. Africans were on their part not restricted to these immigration controls owing to the need for labourers in colonial plantations. However, with the rising of nationalist struggles for independence in some African countries by 1950s, some tribes such as the Kikuyu, Kamba and Jaluo from Kenya started to be restricted to enter the Territory in order to counter the spread of nationalist struggles for independence.

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[10] Published by the Government Printer, Dar Es Salaam in 1950.

[11] The Tanganyika Colonial Secretariat was the central administrative body of British-ruled Tanganyika. Located in Dar Es Salaam, it consisted of a Governor appointed by the Colonial Office, an Executive Council, and various technical departments. The Secretariat was responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the territory.

All immigration duties outside Dar es Salaam had of necessity, to continue to be performed by District Commissioners and Police Officers. This was due to the fact that all members of staff[12] were attached to the headquarters office in Dar es Salaam. Thus, direct immigration control of those entering the Territory was exercised by officers of the Department in Dar es Salaam.

All Police officers were *ex-officio* Immigration Officers and by arrangement with the Commissioner of Police accepted instructions from the Principal Immigration Officer on immigration matters to check entrants at designated points.[13] Likewise, by arrangement with the Provincial Administration, District Commissioners or District Officers checked arrivals at designated entry points.[14] Delegated authority to act certain matters for the Principal Immigration Officer was mandated under section 3 of the *Immigration (Control) Ordinance.*[15]

On the part of Zanzibar, immigration control matters were under the Sultanate and began formally earlier than Tanganyika in 1923. The first law known as the *Immigration Regulation and Restriction Decree*[16] was passed on 26 March 1923 to cater for immigration matters. Zanzibar was a hub of foreign visitors and attracted businesses from foreign countries, thus necessitating regulation of immigration matters. A Section of Travels and Passports was established for that purpose and was issuing passports and visa. It also monitored entering ships and yachts for immigration related matters (Mubanga, 2023).

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[12]That is, Principal Immigration Officer, Six Immigration Officers, Three Stenographers, Six Clerks, Junior Service, Executive Division, Six Clerks, Junior Service, General Division, Seven Messengers.
[13]Tanga, Lindi, Tabora (airport), Mbeya, Kigoma, Urambo (airport), Mikindani.
[14]Pangani (dhow traffic), Bagamoyo (dhow traffic), Kilwa (dhow traffic), Ngara (road traffic from Belgian Congo).
[15] *No.50 of 1947,* as amended by No.32 of 1949.
[16] *Cap 43.*

Following this establishment, the British Colonial Government appointed the Commissioner of Police of Zanzibar to be the Principal Immigration Officer. On the other hand, the Police Head of Criminal Investigations was appointed as the deputy to the Principal Immigration Officer. Although the entity was headed by the Commissioner of Police, it operated as an independent section. Matters related to immigration in Zanzibar continued to be manned under the *Immigration Regulation and Restriction Decree* until it was repealed and replaced later by the *Immigration Act.* On Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, immigration was made part of Union matters. In that regard, the Immigration Department has remained as Union Department.

In 2015, the former Office of the Director of Immigration Services was converted to be a department known to-date as the Tanzania Immigration Services Department (TISD). The chief executive officer of the Department from that time to-date was to be named as the Commissioner General of Immigration. The latter is currently assisted by seven Commissioners, namely, Commissioner of Immigration Zanzibar, Commissioner of Citizenship and Passports, Commissioner of Border Management and Control, Commissioner of Finance and Administration, Commissioner of Legal Services, Commissioner of Permits, Visa and Passes and Commissioner of Training. Currently, Section 13 of the *Immigration Act,*[17] provides for the general duties of the TISD. Other services are specifically detailed in the *Tanzania Citizenship Act*[18] and the *Tanzania Passports and Travel Documents Act.*[19]

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[17] *Cap.54.*
[18] *Cap.357.*
[19] *Cap. 42.*

4   Immigration and National Security in the Global Context

Globally, immigration has become a central component of the broader security agenda, shaped by the dynamics of globalization, transnational crime, terrorism, and humanitarian displacement. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, states across the world significantly restructured their immigration systems, introducing tighter border controls, biometric data collection, and enhanced intelligence-sharing to close loopholes that could be exploited by extremist networks (Amelung, 2023; Osasona, 2024).

At the same time, immigration intersects directly with state sovereignty. While global integration has eased the movement of goods, services, and information, the movement of people remains politically sensitive. Many countries perceive irregular migration as a threat to national identity, political stability, and social cohesion. Europe's migration crises, the United States' southern border debates, and refugee movements in Asia illustrate how immigration management is increasingly intertwined with national security narratives (Kraly & Hovy, 2020; Appleby, 2025).

Border management has thus become a defining feature of modern immigration systems. Weak or porous borders expose nations to multiple vulnerabilities, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, and irregular migration that could conceal extremist infiltration. To counter these threats, many states are investing in advanced technologies such as e-gates, integrated surveillance, and artificial intelligence–driven risk profiling systems (ICMPD, 2025; Chelioudakis et al., 2024).

Equally, the rise in forced displacement—driven by wars, political instability, and climate change—has broadened the security dimensions of immigration. Refugees and asylum seekers are not inherently security risks, but large-scale influxes can strain public services, stretch resources, and challenge governance systems. The Syrian refugee crisis in Europe, the Rohingya displacement in

Southeast Asia, and protracted African refugee situations all highlight how humanitarian challenges often converge with security imperatives (Desmond, 2020; Bast, 2023).

Importantly, immigration and national security cannot be managed in isolation. Shared borders and transnational risks require strong international cooperation. Frameworks such as the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)* emphasize that migration governance must balance sovereignty with collective responsibility (Kraly & Hovy, 2020; OHCHR, 2018). This includes protecting borders while respecting human rights and promoting development.

A continuing global challenge lies in balancing security and rights. Overly securitized policies risk stigmatizing migrants and fuelling xenophobia, which can itself become a source of instability. Many progressive states are therefore moving toward integrated approaches that treat migrants as partners in development while ensuring that security threats are effectively neutralized (Desmond, 2020; Amelung, 2023).

TISD reflects these global and regional dynamics. Its motto *"Migration, Security and Development"* captures the dual imperative of safeguarding sovereignty while facilitating lawful movement and integration within the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Like its global counterparts, the Department faces the challenge of balancing security with development: protecting the nation from irregular flows, transnational crime and potential extremist infiltration while at the same time promoting regional trade, investment, and labour mobility (United Republic of Tanzania, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2016).

5 Prospects and Challenges for Tanzania Immigration Services Department

Looking ahead, the TISD stands at a critical juncture. On the one hand, it has significant prospects to modernize its operations, strengthen inter-agency collaboration and align with regional and international migration frameworks. On the other hand, it faces enduring challenges that threaten to undermine its ability to deliver on its motto of *"Migration, Security, and Development."* Understanding both dimensions is key to appreciating the Department's place in the future of national security and economic protection.

Among its most promising prospects is the digital transformation of immigration management. The rollout of biometric passports, e-visas and digital border surveillance systems enhances efficiency, transparency and security (IOM, 2022). These innovations allow the Department not only to process lawful migration faster but also to detect and deter illegal migration with greater precision. At the regional level, Tanzania's active membership in the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) creates opportunities for harmonized policies, information-sharing and cross-border cooperation that can strengthen collective security while facilitating trade and mobility (Mbiyozo, 2019). International partnerships with bodies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and INTERPOL further expand capacity in managing transnational threats.

Yet, these opportunities exist alongside formidable challenges. Tanzania's extensive and often porous borders with multiple neighbouring states make it vulnerable to illegal migration, trafficking and smuggling (Lutterbeck, 2020). Resource constraints ranging from limited technology to understaffing and budgetary pressures hinder effective monitoring of movements. Furthermore, the Department must navigate the delicate balance between security imperatives and respect for human rights: heavy-handed enforcement

risks alienating communities and undermining Tanzania's long tradition of hospitality and regional solidarity (Huysmans, 2006). Geopolitical shifts, such as conflicts in neighbouring countries or global migration crises, may also generate unpredictable pressures on Tanzania's immigration system.

In sum, the Department's future lies in its ability to maximize emerging prospects while mitigating systemic challenges. Investment in capacity-building, legal reform and regional cooperation will be critical to ensuring that the TISD remains both a guardian of sovereignty and an enabler of national development.

6   Conclusion

The TISD occupies a pivotal place at the intersection of national security and economic protection. Far beyond its administrative functions of issuing passports, travel documents, visas and permits, the Department serves as a strategic institution safeguarding sovereignty, combating transnational crime and ensuring that migration contributes positively to the nation's development. Its motto of *"Migration, Security and Development"* is not a slogan but a reflection of the Department's dual mandate to protect Tanzania while enabling it to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world (United Republic of Tanzania, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2016).

In the global context, Tanzania's experience resonates with broader international trends in which immigration services are repositioned as frontline actors in security and development (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2006). From the United States and the European Union to African states such as South Africa and Kenya, immigration management has become inseparable from strategies to counter terrorism, organized crime and illegal migration. Tanzania is firmly part of this evolving security landscape, while also carrying the distinctive responsibilities of its geography, regional commitments and historical legacy.

The future of TISD will depend on its ability to adapt to new realities: harnessing digital innovations, strengthening inter-agency and regional cooperation and addressing persistent challenges such as porous borders and resource constraints. By pursuing reforms that balance security with openness and sovereignty with development, the Department can consolidate its role as both a protector and an enabler. Ultimately, the place of immigration in Tanzania's national security lies not only in defending borders but in shaping a secure, prosperous and resilient nation in an era of global mobility.

7   Author Biography

Dr. Clement Bernardo Mubanga (PhD, Law) currently serves as Assistant Superintendent of Immigration and Personal Assistant to the Commissioner General of Immigration within the Tanzania Immigration Services Department. A distinguished legal scholar and senior public servant, Dr. Mubanga brings nearly two decades of expertise in immigration governance, legal practice, policy development, and the administration of cross-border mobility. His professional approach integrates practical operational experience with rigorous legal and institutional analysis of Tanzania's immigration and citizenship frameworks. Since joining the Tanzania Immigration Services Department in 2005, Dr. Mubanga has held positions in various operational and specialist units. His early assignments included responsibilities for visa and residence permit administration, consular services, and the processing of passport and citizenship applications. From 2017 to 2024, he served as Inspector of Immigration in the Legal Services Unit. In December 2024, Dr. Mubanga was appointed Assistant Superintendent of Immigration and Personal Assistant to the Commissioner General. In this capacity, he supports executive coordination, strategic communication, legal counsel, and the implementation of policy initiatives at the senior management level. Dr. Mubanga holds a PhD in Law, an LL.M., and

an LL. B (Hons) from the Open University of Tanzania, as well as a Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice from the Law School of Tanzania. He is an Advocate of the High Court of Tanzania, Notary Public, and Commissioner for Oaths. Dr. Mubanga is widely published in the fields of immigration and citizenship law, statelessness, and justice delivery. His latest publication is a book titled "The Making of Tanzania Immigration Services: History, Functioning and Statutory Evolution" (2023). He also serves as a Visiting Tutor at the Tanzania Regional Immigration Training Academy (TRITA) and has held roles as Chief Editor and Member of the Research and Publications Committee for the Tanganyika Law Society Journals.

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