1. Introduction: Agendas for Conflict Resolution in Eastern Africa

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Abstract

This introduction explains that the ROLES volume (University of Tokyo) is a collaborative product with Eastern African partners, including IGAD Leadership Academy researchers, aimed at strengthening conflict-resolution research in a region where active wars and latent tensions persist. It frames Eastern Africa as a strategically contested gateway facing the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean, shaped by FOIP, BRI, BRICS dynamics, and renewed great-power and Middle Eastern involvement. The report notes overlapping regional institutions (AU/IGAD/EAC/COMESA/IORA) and multiple crises—Sudan's SAF–RSF war, South Sudan's fragile transition, Ethiopia's internal and external disputes, Somalia's nsurgency and federal tensions, Kenya's protest cycles, and Djibouti's base-hosting role. It provides basic comparative socioeconomic indicators for IGAD states, then outlines each chapter's agenda, spanning geopolitics, governance, peace operations, mediation, maritime security, violent extremism (including digital dimensions), youth engagement, commissions, restorative justice, ethnic politics, and Kenya's digitally networked protest movements.

Keywords: ROLES project (University of Tokyo), Eastern Africa, conflict resolution, great-power rivalry (FOIP / BRI / BRICS), IGAD, regional and sub-regional institutions (AU/EAC/COMESA/IORA), multi-layered security crises

1. Introduction

This volume on conflict-related issues in Eastern Africa[1] is the product of research conducted under the ROLES project at the University of Tokyo, in collaboration with researchers based in Eastern Africa, including those affiliated with the IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) Leadership Academy (ILA). There is a continuous and urgent need for further research on conflicts in this region, where numerous serious armed conflicts persist alongside latent tensions. This collection of articles experimentally and ambitiously examines key issues from a shared commitment to promoting conflict resolution across Eastern Africa.

Eastern Africa comprises a set of conflict-prone environment marked by armed conflicts, violent extremism, recurring volatility, community-level disputes, and persistent political struggles. These complex conflict dynamics present significant challenges for field-based area studies and have discouraged many scholars from conducting in-depth research in the region. Researchers oriented toward conflict resolution therefore need to step in to provide rigorous analysis and help fill the existing research gaps. This volume is grounded in the recognition of the need for such collaborative research on conflict-related issues in East Africa. This is grounded in the recognition of the necessity of such

[1] We use the term "Eastern Africa" rather than "East Africa" in this volume. While we have no particular objection to the term East Africa, we consider Eastern Africa to be somewhat more neutral than other equivalent expressions. Throughout this region—and indeed across the African continent—many historical concepts, including geographical terms, are deeply embedded in the legacies of colonialism and other external influences. Although it is not the purpose of this volume to undertake an extensive historical examination of terminology, we seek to remain sufficiently sensitive to the political nature of the terms we employ. The concept of "East Africa" is frequently used to denote a particular subregion within Africa, whereas "Eastern African" more loosely refers to the eastern part of the African continent. There is no universally established definition of Eastern Africa. However, the member states of IGAD, for example, are generally regarded as forming the core of Eastern Africa, and the geographical area along the eastern coastline of the continent—excluding the far north and far south—around the Somali Peninsula, or the Horn of Africa, can also be considered part of this region. In this volume, we employ the terms Eastern Africa and Eastern African in a flexible manner, allowing us to identify and discuss critical issues in and around the region from a range of broad analytical perspectives.

collaborative research on conflict-related issues in Eastern Africa. By promoting joint research between Japanese and East African scholars, this volume aims to help bridge the gap in the global research community regarding East African studies.

The articles in this volume address a wide range of relevant topics—including violent extremism, maritime security, peace support operations, and mediation—with a focus on various countries across the region. They illuminate critical issues embedded in diverse local contexts that are nonetheless deeply interconnected within Eastern Africa. While the volume does not aim to cover every agenda in the region, it offers multiple perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of conflict and conflict resolution in Eastern Africa.

2. Why Eastern Africa?

Eastern Africa is a dynamic region that serves as a gateway to the African continent, facing the Indian Ocean and maintaining particularly strong connections with the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. Superpowers, great powers, regional powers, and several middle powers are actively seeking to establish and expand their presence in Eastern Africa. Rivalries, tensions, competition, and various forms of strategic maneuvering are increasingly prominent across the region.

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) is a cross-regional vision through which even countries such as Japan seek to strengthen their engagement with Eastern Africa. At the same time, the Western narrative of "democracies versus autocracies" may continue to shape the characterization of numerous political regimes in the region—for example, Kenya was once designated by former U.S. President Joe Biden as a "major non-NATO ally." Meanwhile, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) remain influential. Russia seeks to keep its presence in the region. It should be noted that Ethiopia recent was included as a BRICS member. Major Middle Eastern states are interested in securing their presence in the region. Since the Cold War, international rivalries have played an important role in shaping the region, contributing to varying levels of fragility in domestic political structures and in cross-border interactions among regional and global actors.

Given that the headquarters of the African Union (AU) is located in Addis Ababa, Eastern Africa can also be regarded as a central hub of continental regionalism in Africa. The region hosts multiple active sub-regional organizations and mechanisms—AU-recognized Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution (RMCPMR)—including the IGAD[2], the Eastern African Community (EAC)[3], the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)[4], and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)[5]. Eastern Africa thus represents one of the most complex cases of multi-layered regional intersections in the contemporary world. Such complexity reflects the strong push for integration within the region, while simultaneously creating overlapping functional roles and political competition among states and institutions.

There are multiple ongoing crises in the region. Sudan has plunged into a devastating armed conflict accompanied by recurring humanitarian crises, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), following two phases of political transition after the fall of former President Omar al-Bashir's regime in 2019. South Sudan continues to experience chronic instability due to political struggles among senior leaders backed by different ethnic constituencies. Ethiopia continues

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[2] The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) consists of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, and Eritrea. Originally established with the aim of addressing drought and desertification, it now covers a wide range of areas, including peace and security, regional development, and cooperation on climate change. It is recognized as a Regional Economic Community (REC) under the African Union (AU).

[3] The East African Community (EAC) consists of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia (approved for membership). It aims at economic integration and political union, seeking to establish a common market and a monetary union, while also advancing intra-regional mobility, trade, and educational cooperation.

[4] The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) covers Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, and several other countries. Its primary objectives are trade liberalization and the establishment of a customs union, with many of its member states overlapping with those of the EAC and IGAD.

[5] The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) comprises Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Comoros, and others. As a cooperative framework among countries along the Indian Ocean, it promotes economic partnership, maritime security, and the development of the blue economy.

to face multiple internal conflicts—particularly in Tigray, Amhara, Oromia—while also managing external tensions, including border disputes with Sudan and Somalia, as well as a long-standing dispute with Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Eritrea has been deeply involved in the Tigray conflict and maintains unresolved border tensions with Ethiopia. Djibouti, while relatively safe and stable, hosts multiple foreign military bases and is located adjacent to the highly volatile Red Sea, where the Houthis in Yemen continue to target vessels linked to Western countries. In Somalia, the federal government, supported by AU missions and other international partners, has long been engaged in armed conflict with Al-Shabaab while also contending with tensions involving the self-declared regions of Somaliland and Puntland. In Somalia, the federal government has engaged in prolonged fighting against Al-Shabaab for nearly two decades, following years of clan-based conflict dating back to the 1990s. The agreement announced on 1 January 2024 between Somaliland—a de facto state entity within Somalia—and Ethiopia came as a major shock to many in Eastern Africa. Tensions between the Federal Government of Somalia and Ethiopia were subsequently eased through an agreement mediated by Türkiye, following turmoil triggered by Ethiopia's intention to withdraw from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in exchange for the arrival of Egyptian troops—an alarming development given the antagonistic relationship between Ethiopia and Egypt over the GERD dispute. Kenya does not face armed conflict internally, but frequent political instability and elite-level contestation continue to pose persistent risks. Kenya experienced tragic postelection violence in 2007, which resulted in more than 1,000 deaths. Although the country is currently comparatively stable, the potential for unrest remains, as illustrated by mass youth-led protests against the government in June 2024 and June 2025, each resulting in roughly 70 fatalities. In this way, Eastern Africa continues to witness various forms of armed conflict and social unrest across the domestic contexts of countries in the region.

This volume of *ROLES Review* offers diverse perspectives for exploring various agendas in such a dynamic region as Eastern Africa. Each contributor brings her or his own distinctive perspective to examine potential or apparent conflicts in Eastern Africa. This introduction does not intend to prejudice

these chapters; however, the chapter may seek to first provide an overall picture of the region from the perspective of conflict resolution and geopolitics.[6]

3. The Overall Picture of the Region

Here, we provide a comparative overview of the countries of Eastern Africa in terms of population size, economic scale, and economic growth.

Country	Population[7]	Nominal GDP (US$ billions)[8]	GDP per Capita (Nominal, US$ thousand)[9]	Economic Growth Rate[10]
Ethiopia	135,472,051	109.49	0.99	7.2
Kenya	57,532,493	136.01	2.55	4.8
Sudan	51,662,147	35.9	0.71	3.2
Uganda	51,384,894	64.99	1.35	6.4
Somalia	19,654,739	12.94	0.76	3
South Sudan	12,188,788	4.98	0.31	24.3
Eretria	3,607,003	No data	No data	No data

[6] See also Chapter 2 for the perspectives from theories of geopolitics. Geopolitics means perspectives to look at geographical conditions as decisive factors to determine the courses of political entities of human beings. See Hideaki Shinoda, *Confronting Theories of Geopolitics: Continental and Anglo-American Traditions* (Springer, forthcoming).

[7] Worldometer, "Countries in the world by population (2025)", https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/

[8] IMF, "GDP, current prices" <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>

[9] IMF, "GDP per capita, current prices" <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>.

[10] IMF, "Real GDP Growth" <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>

Country	Population[7]	Nominal GDP (US$ billions)[8]	GDP per Capita (Nominal, US$ thousand)[9]	Economic Growth Rate[10]
Djibouti	1,184,076	4.61	4.37	6

Table 1: Comparison of Countries in Eastern Africa (IGAD member states)

In Eastern Africa, Ethiopia is the most populous country, with a population more than ten times greater than that of Djibouti, the smallest state in the region by population. While Kenya surpasses Ethiopia in total GDP, Ethiopia continues to expand its economy—driven largely by rapid population growth—despite the persistent negative impacts of ongoing conflicts. Djibouti, followed by Kenya, records comparatively higher levels of GDP per capita within the region. Conflict-affected countries such as South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia generally fare poorly in terms of per capita income. Overall, the region remains characterized by underdevelopment, exacerbated by armed conflicts and political instability, although clear disparities exist among countries in population size, economic scale, and economic performance.

4. Political Profiles of the Countries in Eastern Africa

Let us now examine political instability—particularly armed conflicts—across the countries of Eastern Africa.

4-1 The Somali Conflict After the Cold War

The conflict in Somalia can be traced to several governance-related factors, including social, economic, and political inequalities among clan groups that shaped access to political positions and resources; the authoritarian and patrimonial nature of Barre's regime; and the consequences of losing the 1977 war with Ethiopia, which triggered the rise of armed clan-based movements.

However, the collapse of the Cold War order in the early 1990s coincided with the disintegration of the Somali state, precipitating one of the most protracted and complex conflicts in modern African history. In 1991, Somalia's long-serving authoritarian leader, Siad Barre, was overthrown by a coalition of clan-based militias. During Siad Barre's regime, clan divisions were further entrenched as select clans—particularly from the Darood family—were disproportionately represented in government. Patrimonialism and exclusionary governance had deepened inequalities, antagonism, and mistrust. A violent power vacuum followed as rival factions—primarily organized along clan lines—competed for control of Mogadishu and other regions. The capital became a battleground, particularly between forces led by Mohamed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi Mohamed. The absence of a central government ushered in a decades-long period of lawlessness, humanitarian emergency, and recurring violence. Weak governance structures continue to exacerbate insecurity and have facilitated the rise of extremist movements.

The resulting humanitarian crisis—marked by famine and mass displacement—prompted international intervention. In 1992, the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) was deployed, followed by the U.S.-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF), tasked with securing humanitarian relief. After the disastrous 1993 "Black Hawk Down" incident, in which 18 American soldiers were killed, U.S. and UN forces withdrew by 1995, leaving Somalia in a state of stateless anarchy.

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, Somalia remained fragmented and dominated by warlords and localized administrations. Amid this instability, two significant developments emerged in the north: Somaliland declared independence in 1991—though it remains internationally unrecognized—while Puntland declared autonomy without pursuing secession. Both enjoyed relative stability compared to the conflict-ridden south.

By the early 2000s, widespread frustration with warlord rule enabled the rise of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a coalition of sharia courts that restored a degree of order in parts of southern Somalia, including Mogadishu. When the ICU gained control of the capital in 2006, Ethiopia—fearing a hostile Islamist regime on its border—invaded Somalia with U.S. backing. The intervention ousted the ICU and supported the Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

This intervention paved the way for the emergence of a more radical offshoot, al-Shabaab, which launched a brutal insurgency against the TFG and Ethiopian forces. After Ethiopia's withdrawal in 2009, al-Shabaab expanded its territorial control, imposed strict Islamic law, and launched major terrorist attacks, including the 2010 Kampala bombings and the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi.

In response, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was established in 2007. Contributing troops from Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and others, AMISOM helped the Somali government reclaim major cities, including Mogadishu by 2011. The TFG transitioned into the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in 2012 with a new provisional constitution. AMISOM later evolved into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in 2022, and subsequently into the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) in 2025.

Despite these developments, Somalia remains fragile. The central government controls limited territory, and al-Shabaab continues to operate as a resilient insurgency. Persistent clan rivalries, corruption, and contested federalism further undermine governance. International actors—including Turkey, Qatar, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates—remain deeply involved, often supporting rival local factions. The re-election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in 2022 signaled renewed efforts toward stabilization, but enduring challenges—al-Shabaab's insurgency, recurring droughts, humanitarian crises, and unresolved state-building issues—show that Somalia's post–Cold War conflict remains far from resolved. Indeed, Somalia's history illustrates how difficult it is to establish and sustain peace and security at the tip of the Somali Peninsula.[11]

The roots of the Somali conflict stretch back decades. Much of the contemporary instability is connected to governance structures introduced during the colonial period, which imposed centralized authority over a society traditionally organized around clans. Clan affiliation remains the most fundamental social identity for most Somalis and has historically served as the basis for maintaining

[11] While the phrase "Horn of Africa" is more widely used, this chapter adopts the term "Somali Peninsula" because of its historical links to the colonial era and its comparatively more neutral connotation. However, other chapters in this volume may use "Horn of Africa" in a similarly neutral manner.

law and order. The politicization of clans during and after the colonial era intensified struggles for power and resources under the centralized state, generating patterns of deprivation and grievance.

4-2 Ethiopia After the Cold War

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s coincided with a profound transformation in Ethiopia's political landscape at the heart of the Somali Peninsula. In 1991, the Marxist-Leninist Derg regime, which had ruled since overthrowing Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, collapsed under military pressure from a coalition of rebel forces, primarily the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The fall of the Derg marked the end of a brutal dictatorship under Mengistu Haile Mariam, who fled into exile in Zimbabwe. The EPRDF assumed power and formed a transitional government, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1995. Under the new federal constitution, Ethiopia was divided into ethnically defined regional states, each with the theoretical right to secede—an unprecedented arrangement in Africa.

Meles Zenawi, the leader of the EPRDF, became Prime Minister and dominated Ethiopian politics until his death in 2012. His government pursued a strategy of ethnic federalism, authoritarian development, and state-led economic growth, while maintaining tight control over political opposition and the media. During his tenure, Ethiopia emerged as one of Africa's fastest-growing economies, with heavy investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Nevertheless, the post–Cold War era was marked by significant conflict. From 1998 to 2000, Ethiopia fought a devastating war with Eritrea, which had gained independence in 1993 following a long guerrilla struggle. The war claimed tens of thousands of lives and resulted in a tense, militarized stalemate along the border that persisted for nearly two decades. Domestically, the EPRDF's authoritarian governance increasingly alienated many ethnic groups—particularly the Oromo and Amhara. Between 2015 and 2018, widespread protests erupted, driven by grievances over land rights, political marginalization, and demands for democratic reform. These protests culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018.

His successor, Abiy Ahmed, came to power promising sweeping reforms. In his first year, Abiy released political prisoners, welcomed exiled opposition groups, liberalized parts of the economy, and signed a historic peace agreement with Eritrea in 2018—efforts that earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. However, hopes for a democratic transition were soon challenged by mounting tensions between the federal government and the TPLF, the former ruling party. Prior to Abiy's leadership, the TPLF had dominated Ethiopian politics since 1991 but had gradually lost legitimacy due to widespread perceptions of repression, corruption, and human rights violations. A broad wave of protests eventually weakened TPLF dominance and contributed to Abiy's rise to power. In November 2020, these tensions escalated into a full-scale war in the Tigray region. The conflict caused mass displacement, widespread human rights violations, famine conditions, and significant regional instability. The Tigray conflict spilled over into wider regional tensions: some Oromo groups aligned with the TPLF, while certain Amhara factions supported the federal government. In parallel, the government sought to consolidate federal military authority by launching operations in Oromia and Amhara—regions that had previously been both allies and adversaries at different moments.

With a population of over 135 million and one of the largest economies in Eastern Africa—alongside Kenya—Ethiopia continues to play a leading role in regional diplomacy. It hosts the African Union and remains a key partner in continental peacekeeping and development efforts. Although landlocked, Ethiopia's strategic and political importance is unquestionable. However, renewed conflict emerged due to deteriorating ethnic relations, exacerbated by multiple delays in national elections and the extension of Abiy's mandate, which fueled public resentment. Ethiopia's instability stems largely from the politicization of ethnic divisions by political elites pursuing their own strategic interests. With ethnic identity often shaping political allegiance, building a national consensus that reflects the interests of all groups has remained exceptionally difficult. This dynamic has contributed to widespread perceptions of relative deprivation, as Ethiopia's political history is marked by unequal access to resources and political influence. As a result, disadvantaged groups have frequently resorted to resistance, sometimes violently.

From the perspective of good governance theory, Ethiopia's recurring conflicts highlight the consequences of weak institutions. Effective governance requires transparency, accountability, and the capacity to deliver public goods equitably. Yet Ethiopia's political system has long been characterized by corruption, limits on civil liberties, and deep ethnic fragmentation. This environment has exacerbated conflict dynamics and continues to undermine the country's prospects for durable peace.

4-3 Kenya: Maritime Orientation and Domestic Fragility

Kenya, located on the eastern coast of Africa facing the Indian Ocean and positioned at the southern base of the Somali Peninsula, has a rich and complex history spanning prehistoric settlement, ancient trade, colonial conquest, and post-independence transformation. With its substantial economy, Kenya has played a leading role in regional diplomacy, peacekeeping, and counterterrorism, particularly in relation to Somalia and the African Union. Economically, it serves as a regional hub for trade, finance, and technology, with Nairobi emerging as a key center in Eastern Africa.

Parts of modern-day Kenya were inhabited as far back as two million years ago. During the first millennium, the Eastern African coast, including present-day Kenya, became integrated into the Indian Ocean trade network. Arab and Persian traders established coastal settlements in places such as Mombasa, Malindi, and Lamu. These ports evolved into powerful Swahili city-states, blending African, Arab, and Islamic cultures. The Swahili language and identity emerged from this cultural synthesis. By the 15th century, Chinese and Portuguese sailors were active in the region. The Portuguese briefly dominated the coast in the 16th century before being displaced by Omani Arabs in the 18th century.

In the 19th century, European explorers, missionaries, and traders entered Kenya's interior. By the late 1800s, the British had established the Imperial British East Africa Company and, in 1895, declared the East Africa Protectorate, formalizing Kenya as a British colony in 1920. The colonial period saw widespread land expropriation in the fertile highlands for white settlers, the imposition of taxes, forced labor, and strict racial segregation—developments that sparked growing indigenous resistance.

The Mau Mau Uprising (1952–1960), led primarily by the Kikuyu, was a pivotal anti-colonial revolt. Although violently suppressed, it accelerated constitutional change. Kenya gained independence

on December 12, 1963, with Jomo Kenyatta as its first Prime Minister and later President. Under Kenyatta and his successor Daniel arap Moi, Kenya experienced a combination of economic growth, authoritarian rule, and recurrent ethnic tensions. Multi-party democracy was restored in the 1990s. In 2002, Mwai Kibaki defeated the ruling party in a peaceful transition of power. However, the disputed 2007 election triggered widespread violence, resulting in more than 1,000 deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. A power-sharing agreement brokered through international mediation led to a new constitution in 2010, which devolved power to county governments and expanded civil liberties.

Since independence, Kenya has remained a central player in Eastern Africa while maintaining close relations with maritime powers beyond the continent. Kenya was a founding member of the original East African Community (EAC) in 1967, along with Uganda and Tanzania. Although the EAC collapsed in 1977, Kenya was instrumental in its revival in 2000. Today, the EAC includes Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kenya is also a leading member of the IGAD, a regional body focused on development and conflict resolution in the Somali Peninsula. Nairobi has hosted major peace negotiations for South Sudan (2005) and Somalia (early 2000s), strengthening Kenya's position as a diplomatic hub. Kenya has also consistently contributed troops to African Union peace support missions in Somalia.

Kenya maintains strong ties with the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, especially in trade, security, and development cooperation. It is a key counterterrorism partner, particularly in efforts against al-Shabaab. U.S.–Kenya relations expanded under the Obama administration and continue through ongoing security and public health initiatives. Kenya also has longstanding ties with India, reinforced by a large Kenyan-Indian community. India is a major partner in trade, healthcare, and education, providing scholarships, technological support, and credit lines. In addition, Kenya maintains close relationships with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—especially the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—which are important sources of investment and remittances. Kenya has generally adopted a neutral diplomatic posture regarding Middle Eastern rivalries, balancing relations with both Western and Islamic states.

Kenya's relationship with China has grown significantly in recent decades. Chinese firms have constructed major infrastructure projects, including the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). While these developments have boosted economic growth, concerns remain about Kenya's growing dependence on Chinese loans.

Kenya also enjoys cordial and steadily expanding relations with Japan. Diplomatic ties were established in 1963, and Japan is now one of Kenya's key development partners, particularly in infrastructure, education, health, and technology. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has implemented numerous initiatives, including the expansion of Mombasa Port, improvements to road networks, and energy-sector development. Japan has also supported Kenya's human resource development through training programs and scholarships. Japanese firms are increasingly investing in sectors such as manufacturing, renewable energy, and ICT. Kenya, for its part, views Japan as a strategic partner aligned with its Vision 2030 development agenda.

4-4 Djibouti as a Hub of External Powers at the Root of the Somali Peninsula

Djibouti, located on the Somali Peninsula at the strategic junction of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, has a long history shaped by trade, colonialism, and geopolitics. Despite its small size, Djibouti's position near one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints—the Bab el-Mandeb Strait—has made it a critical node in both regional and global affairs.

The territory now known as Djibouti has been inhabited for thousands of years, primarily by the Afar and Somali peoples, both Cushitic-speaking groups. Historically, the area formed part of major trade routes linking the Somali Peninsula, Arabia, and the Indian Ocean world, and it was influenced by neighboring civilizations such as the Kingdom of Aksum and the Islamic sultanates of the medieval Horn. The spread of Islam in the 7th century deeply shaped the cultural and religious identity of the population.

In the late 19th century, France established control over the area, creating the colony of French Somaliland in 1896. Drawn by the territory's strategic location, the French built the port of Djibouti City, which became a vital hub connecting maritime trade to inland Ethiopia via the Djibouti–Addis Ababa

railway (completed in 1917). The colony served as an important coaling and refueling station for French ships transiting between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

During World War II, French Somaliland remained under Vichy control until Allied forces seized it in 1942. After the war, demands for independence grew gradually. Referendums in 1958 and 1967—shaped by French political maneuvering and internal divisions between Afars (generally pro-French) and Somalis (often pro-independence)—delayed the transition to sovereignty.

Djibouti finally gained independence on June 27, 1977, becoming the last major French colony in Africa to do so. Hassan Gouled Aptidon, a prominent nationalist leader, became the country's first president. His People's Rally for Progress (RPP) established a de facto one-party state until limited multi-party politics were introduced in 1992. Gouled remained in power until 1999, when he was succeeded by his nephew, Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, who has since won multiple elections amid persistent allegations of repression and electoral manipulation. Ethnic tensions—particularly between the Afar and Somali (Issa) communities—triggered a brief civil conflict in the early 1990s, although a peace agreement was reached in 2001.

In the 21st century, Djibouti has leveraged its strategic location by hosting military bases for several global powers—including France, the United States, China, Japan, and Italy—making it one of the world's most militarized small states. These bases support anti-piracy patrols, counterterrorism operations, and broader regional security missions across Somalia, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea corridor.

Djibouti is also positioning itself as a logistics and commercial hub for Eastern Africa, particularly for landlocked Ethiopia. Major infrastructure projects—most notably the Chinese-financed Doraleh port and related facilities—have strengthened economic ties with China, though they have also raised concerns about debt dependency.

Djibouti's history illustrates the enduring interplay of geography, colonial legacies, and global power competition. Despite its domestic challenges, it remains a pivotal actor in the security and geopolitics of the Red Sea and the Somali Peninsula.

4-5 The Mysterious Existence of Eritrea

Eritrea, located in the Somali Peninsula along the Red Sea, remains an enigmatic presence in Eastern Africa—an issue this chapter briefly examines. Historically, parts of present-day Eritrea were integrated into the ancient Kingdom of Aksum. With the rise of Islamic states along the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula, Eritrea's coastal regions became part of regional trade networks and broader religious and cultural exchanges.

In the late 19th century, Italy established colonial control over the territory, officially creating Italian Eritrea in 1890. Eritrea served as a strategic base for Italy's imperial ambitions in Eastern Africa, including the failed invasion of Ethiopia in 1896 and the subsequent formation of Italian East Africa following the 1935–36 conquest of Ethiopia under Mussolini. After Italy's defeat in World War II, Eritrea came under British military administration.

In 1952, the United Nations federated Eritrea with Ethiopia, granting it internal autonomy. However, in 1962, Ethiopia—under Emperor Haile Selassie—unilaterally annexed Eritrea as a province, triggering a 30-year armed struggle for independence led primarily by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). This struggle culminated in 1991 when the EPLF captured Asmara at the same time the Derg regime collapsed in Ethiopia. Eritrea formally gained independence in 1993 following a UN-supervised referendum.

Isaias Afwerki, leader of the EPLF (now the People's Front for Democracy and Justice), became the country's first—and to date, only—president. Since independence, Eritrea has remained a one-party state with no national elections. From 1998 to 2000, Eritrea fought a devastating border war with Ethiopia. Although a peace agreement was eventually signed, tensions persisted until a brief rapprochement in 2018. Following the conclusion of the Tigray War, however, relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia deteriorated once again and now represent a continuing source of instability in the Somali Peninsula.

4-6 The Tragic Ongoing War in Sudan

Sudan, located at the crossroads between North and South of Africa (or the Sub-Saharan Africa),[12] has a long and complex history shaped by ancient civilizations, colonial conquest, post-independence struggles, and ongoing conflict. With access to the Red Sea through Port Sudan, the country also serves as a strategic maritime gateway. The Nile River—meeting at Khartoum where the White Nile and Blue Nile converge—further enhances Sudan's importance for transportation and commerce across Eastern Africa. Today, Sudan is experiencing a devastating war, posing grave risks not only to the stability of Eastern Africa but also to that of North and Central Africa.

Sudan was home to one of the world's earliest civilizations—the Kingdom of Kush (ca. 1000 BCE–350 CE)—centered in Nubia along the Nile. Kushite rulers even governed Egypt as its 25th Dynasty. Later, medieval Christian kingdoms such as Nobatia, Makuria, and Alodia thrived until Islam gradually spread southward through trade and conquest from the 7th century onward.

By the 19th century, northern Sudan came under Ottoman-Egyptian rule, while the south remained largely autonomous. In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad led a major religious rebellion against Ottoman-Egyptian authority, declaring himself the Mahdi. The Mahdist State controlled most of Sudan until it was defeated by Anglo-Egyptian forces in 1898, ushering in a joint—but in practice British-dominated—condominium administration. During colonial rule, the north and south were governed separately, deepening cultural, religious, and economic divides. As nationalist sentiments grew, Sudan achieved independence in 1956, becoming Africa's largest country at that time.

Post-independence Sudan was marked by civil war. The First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972), which began even before independence, reflected southern resistance to domination by the Arab-Muslim north. Although a peace agreement paused the conflict, war resumed in 1983, launching the Second Sudanese Civil War between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The conflict lasted more than twenty years and killed an estimated two million people. Sudan's political

[12] This chapter prioritizes the phrase "the South of Africa" over "sub-Saharan Africa," as the latter is closely associated with colonial history. However, given the widespread use of the term "sub-Saharan Africa," this chapter does not discourage its use in other chapters.

landscape was also shaped by coups, authoritarianism, and Islamization. Jaafar Nimeiry ruled from 1969 to 1985, followed by a brief democratic period before the 1989 coup that brought Omar al-Bashir to power. Bashir's Islamist regime isolated Sudan internationally and hosted extremist figures, including Osama bin Laden, in the 1990s.

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement formally ended the Second Civil War and granted Southern Sudan autonomy, leading to the 2011 referendum in which South Sudan overwhelmingly voted for independence. With most oil reserves located in the south, Sudan suffered a major economic loss after the secession.

Conflict persisted nonetheless. In Darfur, rebellion in 2003 prompted a brutal government response involving the Janjaweed militia, resulting in mass atrocities and displacement. The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for President Bashir in 2009 and 2010.

In 2019, following widespread protests over economic hardship and repression, Bashir was overthrown. A fragile civilian–military transitional government emerged but was disrupted by a military coup in October 2021. The Transitional Sovereignty Council, which had embarked on drafting a new constitution and forming a transitional government. However, the coup of 2021 suspended the constitutional process, triggering nationwide unrest and renewed demands for civilian rule. In 2023, internal tensions within the military escalated into open conflict, devastating Khartoum and other major areas. The current intercommunal and political conflict was triggered by the breakdown of the transitional government following the coup, plunging the country into severe political and economic turmoil. The two-year-long civil war is largely fueled by a power struggle between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

The roots of Sudan's conflict can be traced to the post-independence era: historically, the Muslim-Arab north was wealthier and more politically dominant than the predominantly Christian and animist south. This region-based socioeconomic and cultural disparity generated deep grievances and contributed to the earlier civil wars.

4-7 Fragility in South Sudan

South Sudan, the world's youngest country, officially became independent in July 2011 after decades of conflict, marginalization, and resistance to northern rule. Its history is closely intertwined with that of Sudan, from which it seceded. While South Sudan is landlocked, its political dynamics and fragility significantly influence neighboring states.

The roots of South Sudan's contemporary challenges lie in colonial-era governance. During the Anglo-Egyptian administration (1899–1956), the British governed northern and southern Sudan separately. The south—home to predominantly Nilotic and other African ethnic groups, and largely Christian and animist—was administratively isolated from the Muslim-Arab north. When Sudan gained independence in 1956, the unified state inherited profound political and cultural divisions.

Southern grievances surfaced immediately, sparking the First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972). Southern insurgents, feeling politically and culturally marginalized, demanded autonomy or independence. The conflict ended with the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, which granted limited autonomy to the south, though peace proved short-lived.

In 1983, President Jaafar Nimeiry revoked the autonomy arrangement and imposed Islamic law (sharia) nationwide. This reignited conflict and led to the Second Sudanese Civil War—one of Africa's deadliest—led in the south by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) under John Garang. The war lasted more than two decades, claimed an estimated 2 million lives, displaced millions, and further entrenched ethnic and regional divisions. While the SPLA initially advocated for a united, secular Sudan, it increasingly shifted toward the pursuit of southern self-determination.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 granted the south autonomy and provided for a referendum on independence after six years. Although John Garang died shortly after the signing, his successor, Salva Kiir Mayardit, carried the process forward. In the 2011 referendum, 98.83% of South Sudanese voted for independence. On July 9, 2011, the Republic of South Sudan became Africa's 54th state and the 193rd member of the United Nations. The international community initially expressed strong optimism regarding the country's future.

Yet hope soon faded. In December 2013, a political struggle between President Kiir (ethnic Dinka) and former Vice President Riek Machar (ethnic Nuer) escalated into civil war. Rooted in political rivalry and ethnic polarization, the conflict resulted in mass atrocities, famine, and widespread displacement. At its height, more than 4 million people were displaced and tens of thousands killed. Despite repeated ceasefires, violence persisted until the signing of a revitalized peace agreement in 2018, which reinstated Machar as vice president in a unity government formed in 2020. Although Kiir and Machar entered negotiations under the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018, implementation has been slow, reflecting weak political commitment. In 2020, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) was formed to oversee a transition toward inclusive national elections. However, continued instability has forced the postponement of elections originally scheduled for December 2024. Local-level violence continues, and implementation of the agreement remains fragile.

South Sudan faces enormous challenges: weak state institutions, the proliferation of armed groups, food insecurity, and recurrent humanitarian crises. Despite significant oil resources, economic development remains severely limited. Regional and international actors—including IGAD, the African Union, and the United Nations—remain engaged in supporting peace and governance reforms.

Since 2013, South Sudan's conflicts have largely involved political elites and key military leaders. Governance challenges associated with the war include a lack of political direction, limited political goodwill, and persistent struggles for power, all of which have deepened societal divisions. Shortly after independence, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), which had led the fight for independence, split into rival factions competing for political dominance. Violence erupted after claims of an attempted coup allegedly involving the vice president. The repeated delays in the electoral process expose the depth of South Sudan's governance and structural crises. These crises continue to hinder the country's transition toward a stable and functional democracy and slow its progress toward sustainable peace.

5. The Structure of the Report

Given the diverse and dynamic circumstances in Eastern Africa, the contributors to this volume address a range of issues across multiple domains and from various analytical perspectives. Following this Introduction, Hideaki Shinoda tries to challenge the difficulty of cultivating geopolitical perspectives on Eastern Africa in Chapter 2 under the title of "Explorations of Geopolitical Configurations of Eastern Africa." Shinoda ambitiously seeks to apply the Anglo-American and Continental traditions of geopolitical theories to Africa, or Eastern Africa in particular. In so doing, he illuminates contemporary international agendas relevant to Eastern Africa including the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as historical interventions in Eastern Africa by external powers. While his chapter highlights the relevance of these geopolitical theories in Eastern Africa, it also emphasizes the limits of such scopes.

In Chapter 3 under the title of "Leadership and conflict: Examining governance as the core challenge in East and Horn of Africa," Simon Nyambura examines conflicts in the Horn of Africa as products of post-colonial state formation and fragile government transitions, compounded by socio-economic stresses. Using qualitative case studies of Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia, it analyzes governance–conflict linkages and the mediation role of Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Grounded in relative deprivation and good governance theories, it finds that corruption, exclusion, and weak institutions drive conflict, arguing that inclusive democratic governance and regional cooperation are essential for sustainable peace.

Mika Inoue-Hanzawa's Chapter 4 under the title of "The Japanese Peace Cooperation Policy in the Horn of Africa," analyzes Japan's peace cooperation policy in the Horn of Africa amid declining UN peacekeeping operations, whose mandates and resources poorly match contemporary conflicts such as violent extremism. It contrasts this with sustained African Union peace support operations, notably in Somalia. The study traces Japan's policy evolution, debates over Self-Defense Force deployment, and the strategic reframing of Africa under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, concluding with analysis of the June 2025 Cabinet Office report.

In Chapter 5 under the title of “Redefining Peacekeeping in Africa: UNSC Resolution 2719/2023 and the Challenge of Implementing African Solutions: Examples from Post-ATIMISS Arrangement in Somalia,” Markos Tekle Rike illustrates that Africa remains the largest host of UN peacekeeping missions, yet persistent conflicts highlight the limits of externally led interventions. He examines the evolution of UN–African Union cooperation and the shift toward African ownership of peace operations. It analyzes UN Security Council Resolution 2719 (2023), which enables UN funding for AU-led missions, and uses Somalia’s transition from ATMIS to AUSSOM to assess prospects and challenges for sustainable, African-led peacekeeping.

Chapter 6 on “Conflict Resolution in Eastern Africa: A Focus on Somalia” by Abdifatah Aden Abdi follows by analyzing Somalia as the core case of conflict in Eastern Africa, tracing instability to colonial legacies, clan politics, state collapse, and competing foreign interventions. It highlights how regional powers, Gulf rivalries, and resource competition over ports, fisheries, and hydrocarbons exacerbate fragmentation, while Al-Shabaab exploits governance failures. The study argues that sustainable peace requires Somali-led inclusive governance, equitable resource management, regional cooperation, and community-based approaches beyond military solutions.

Chaapter 7, “Elite Bargains and the Structural Impediments to Comprehensive Peace in South Sudan (2011–2025)” by Patrick M. Maluki and S. Gitau Regina, analyzes South Sudan’s conflict (2011–2025), showing that elite power-sharing agreements—ARCSS, R-ARCSS, and the Tumaini Initiative—reduced violence only temporarily while failing to address governance deficits, corruption, and weak justice. Regional mediation by IGAD and international support via UNMISS remain constrained. The study argues sustainable peace requires institutional reform beyond elite bargains.

In Chapter 8 under the title of “Fragmented Peace as Peaceocracy: A Critical Examination of Ethiopia's Disjointed Peacebuilding Architecture,” Yonas Ashine assesses Ethiopia’s post-2018 transition, finding peace efforts fragmented into siloed “micro-infrastructures” such as dialogue, transitional justice, DDR, and elite deals. Lacking conceptual and operational coherence, these initiatives reproduce tensions between peace and justice and between top-down and local approaches. This fragmentation

creates inefficiency and legitimacy deficits, yielding a "peaceocracy." The paper proposes a national macro-infrastructure for peace to integrate efforts and enable sustainable conflict transformation.

In Chapter 9, "The Nexus Between Climate Change and Pastoralist–Agro-Pastoralist Border Conflicts in Eastern Ethiopia: The Case of Babili Wereda of Fafan Zone in the Somali Region and Babile Wereda of East Hararghe Zone in Oromia Regional State," Ashenafi Mebratu Bahiru examines climate-induced drought and cross-border pastoral conflicts in Babile Wereda and Babili Wereda. Mixed-methods data show rainfall variability causing water and pasture scarcity, livestock losses, income decline, and heightened resource competition despite fragile cooperation. Drought indirectly fuels conflict through administrative barriers and marginalization. Traditional mediation persists but weakens, highlighting the need for community-based, cross-border, and gender-sensitive resilience strategies.

Stephen Mogaka and Brendon J. Cannon, in Chapter 10, "Kenya as an Indian Ocean State: Maritime Security, External Partnerships, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific," analyze Kenya's shift from maritime neglect to an outward-looking maritime security strategy shaped by Somali piracy, blue economy ambitions, and geopolitical competition in the Western Indian Ocean. Their chapter identifies capacity-building, improved maritime governance, and multilateral engagement as key pillars. Cooperation with Japan under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) framework has provided principles and partnerships that reinforce Kenya's maritime security and regional stability.

Chapter 11, Rosalind Nyawira Macharia's "From Eastern Africa to the Lake Chad-Sahel Belt: The Current and Imminent Exploitation of Digital Technology by Terrorist Groups", highlights Africa's persistent terrorist threat, noting that frequent low-profile attacks in remote areas of the DRC, Mozambique, and Somalia—by groups such as Islamic State Central Africa Province and Al Shabaab—often go underreported. It argues that focusing solely on physical violence overlooks cyber and information warfare, emphasizing how extremist groups across Eastern Africa and the Sahel exploit digital technologies for propaganda, recruitment, coordination, and financing.

Chapter 12, "Youth Engagement in the IGAD Region: Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Countering Radicalization into Violent Extremism through Strategic Communication" by Martha Njiiri

and Simon Nyambura, argues that Africa's large youth population—especially in the IGAD region—is highly vulnerable to radicalization but also vital to preventing violent extremism. Rather than viewing youth only as perpetrators or victims, it emphasizes engaging them as preventers through the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. The paper highlights the role of IGAD Centre of Excellence for P/CVE in building youth capacity in strategic communication and dialogue, while identifying gaps in youth engagement.

Nkatha Kabira, in Chapter 13, "Commissions and Governance in Eastern Africa," examines commissions in Eastern Africa as both conflict-resolution tools and governance mechanisms. Using case studies from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan, her chapter shows how truth, electoral, constitutional, and fact-finding commissions manage crises, mediate tensions, and shape post-conflict transitions. While contributing to accountability and stability, these bodies face politicization, elite capture, and implementation gaps.

Chaapter 14, "Rethinking Restorative Justice Systems to Address Border, Ethnic, Resource, and Political Grievances and Conflicts in East Africa: A Case Study of Uganda" by Katusiime Elizabeth, argues that militarized responses to East Africa's conflicts are ineffective, while Uganda has achieved relative stability by integrating restorative justice into governance. A hybrid model combining restorative justice principles, customary mechanisms, and regional frameworks has promoted reconciliation, inclusion, and conflict prevention. Despite gaps from politicization and capacity limits, the study concludes that reimagined, locally grounded restorative justice is essential for sustainable peace in East Africa.

Muiru Ngugi in Chapter 15, "Ethnic Manipulation, Representational Dilemmas, and the Precarious Future of Multi-ethnic Democracy in Kenya," argues that ethnic mobilization is a durable political strategy in East Africa, with Kenya as a key case. Rooted in colonial categorizations, ethnicity has been instrumentalized by political elites to consolidate power and marginalize rivals. Despite relative stability, unresolved constitutional issues and persistent elite manipulation of ethnic grievances threaten democratic consolidation and risk renewed conflict unless political behavior and safeguards fundamentally change.

Chapter 16, “Viral Dissent and Security Dilemmas in East Africa: Youth-Led Political Disruption and the Case of Kenya’s 2024 Gen Z Uprising” by Samuel C. Kamau analyzes the June 2024 youth-led protests in Kenya, highlighting digitally networked, leaderless mobilization that challenged state authority nationwide. Framed as “leaderless, tribeless, and partyless,” youth translated grievances over taxation, governance, and economic exclusion into viral narratives and coordinated action. Using social network analysis and interviews, the study assesses implications for national and regional security, civic–state tensions, and risks of misinformation and external manipulation in East Africa.

David Muturi, in Chapter 17 “Mediating Regional Tensions: A case for Conflict Resolution in East Africa,” illustrates that effective mediation is essential for managing East and Central Africa’s interconnected conflicts, from civil wars to border, resource, and trade disputes. Drawing on cases across the Horn, Great Lakes, and Nile Basin, it shows that success depends on coordinated roles among IGAD, African Union, and the United Nations, local ownership, integrated security–political strategies, and credible incentives. It proposes institutional reforms to professionalize mediation and enhance durable peace.

Chapter 19, “Djibouti: A Maritime Crossroads at the Heart of Global Naval Rivalries and Alliances,” is a translated version of the article, which Daoud Aboubaker Alwan originally published in March 2013 in French. In this piece he discusses Djibouti as a strategic maritime crossroads where global naval rivalries intersect. Tracing Cold War legacies and post-9/11 security dynamics, it shows how counterterrorism and anti-piracy transformed Djibouti into a hub for foreign bases.

In Chapter 20, Hideaki Shinoda discusses the cases of Sudan and South Sudan, specifically focusing on the failure of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The article argues that Sudan’s recurring wars stem from fragile statehood rooted in the lack of strong national identity and dependence upon military rule, shaped by its role as a gateway between the Arab/Mediterranean worlds and Sub-Saharan Africa. Harsh geography and center–periphery gaps undermined sovereignty and cohesion. UN and AU missions (UNMIS, UNAMID, UNISFA, UNITAMS) brought only temporary stability and failed to build durable unity. The post-2019 transition collapsed into the SAF–RSF war, deepening territorial and political fragmentation.