

Introduction

The September 2025 Mashariki Monthly issue analyzes key developments shaping Eastern Africa through a conflict and geopolitical foresight lens. Guided by MRPC's dual mandate on Conflict and Geopolitics, this issue examines how governance fragility, cross-border tensions, environmental shocks, economic disruptions, and public health crises intertwine to influence regional stability. During the month, governance strains in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, border posturing in Eritrea-Ethiopia, the inauguration of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), and operational challenges in peacekeeping missions underscored enduring governance and security strains. Meanwhile, the flooding of Lake Tanganyika, AGOA-related trade uncertainties, cholera outbreaks in Darfur, and Rwanda's assertive soft-power maneuvers amid M23 activity in the DRC, highlighted the region's multidimensional vulnerabilities. Through scenario-based foresight and anticipatory intelligence, this issue provides policymakers and regional stakeholders with early-warning insights to reinforce institutional resilience and advance stability across Eastern Africa.

Key Trends Across Eastern Africa

Political Stability and Governance

September 2025 highlighted growing governance strains in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, exposing institutional fragilities with regional implications. In Kenya, youth protesters were tried in anti-terrorism courts. Most of the 75 Kenyans charged in recent weeks were accused of allegedly destroying government property during street protests (Wall Street Journal, September 2025). In Uganda, the Electoral Commission rejected opposition signatures and disqualified presidential candidate Luhaga Mpina for the second time, triggering accusations of bias and weakening trust in electoral integrity (Reuters, 2025). In Tanzania, repeated disqualifications of opposition candidates, including opposition leader Tundu Lissu and the main opposition party CHADEMA, to participate in the general elections, signaled narrowing competition ahead of national polls (Reuters, 2025). Collectively, these events revealed how political exclusion and governance opacity heighten conflict sensitivity and public disaffection. Drawing from September's developments, MRPC identifies three plausible governance trajectories.

Positive Scenario: Transparency reforms, inclusive dialogue, and judicial independence would rebuild legitimacy, ease civic tensions, and strengthen institutional trust across Eastern Africa.

Baseline Scenario: Sporadic protests and politicized legal disputes would persist but remain manageable, maintaining fragile governance while limiting reform progress.

Risk Scenario: Escalating unrest, judicial capture, and declining public trust could trigger systemic governance crises and undermine regional stability.

Key Early-Warning Indicators: Politicized rulings, restrictive security laws, rising protests, electoral irregularities, and shifts in donor or observer statements signal growing governance strain and potential instability.

Cross-Border Security and Regional Dynamics

September 2025 saw intensified cross-border tensions across Eastern Africa, driven by militarized posturing, illicit arms flows, and proxy alignments. Along the Eritrea-Ethiopia border, renewed troop movements around Bure and Zalambessa signaled persistent mistrust, with informal cross-border movement resuming in early September 2025 (Addis Standard, September 2025). Sudan's prolonged conflict increased displacement and humanitarian pressures along the South Sudan and Ethiopia borders, indirectly affecting northern Kenya and Uganda (Reuters, 2025). In the Great Lakes corridor, Rwanda's assertive diplomacy and heightened M23 activity in eastern DRC illustrated the convergence of soft-power signaling and nonstate militancy. Collectively, these dynamics revealed how fragile border governance and overlapping interests continue to strain regional security architectures. Building on these developments, MRPC identifies plausible security trajectories shaping cross-border dynamics in Eastern Africa.

Positive Scenario: Renewed regional diplomacy under IGAD and AU frameworks would strengthen border cooperation, improve intelligence-sharing, and enhance collective conflict management across the Horn-Great Lakes corridor.

Baseline Scenario: Persistent localized clashes, illicit trafficking, and limited peacekeeping capacity would sustain a fragile equilibrium, preventing escalation but stalling long-term stability.

Risk Scenario: Escalating militarization, proxy mobilization, and diplomatic fragmentation could intensify insecurity, undermine cooperation frameworks, and destabilize the broader region.

Key Early-Warning Indicators: Indicators may include increased troop deployments or military build-ups near contested borders, shifts in illicit arms and trafficking routes, declining peacekeeping capacity or funding, and reduced diplomatic coordination within IGAD, AU, and EAC—signaling emerging flashpoints and growing risks to regional stability.

Security Operations and Regional Peacekeeping

September 2025 underscored both progress and strain in regional peacekeeping and stabilization missions. Kenya's withdrawal from its Haiti peacekeeping role—replaced by a 5,500-strong UN Gang Suppression Force—highlighted logistical and coordination gaps in African-led operations (UN Security Council, 2025). Meanwhile, the EU's continued engagement in Somalia aimed to strengthen governance and policing under African Union Support and Stabilization in Somalia (AUSSOM), though uncertain funding and timelines raised sustainability concerns (European External Action Service, 2025). These developments demonstrated how operational capacity, financial stability, and civilian trust shape the credibility of regional interventions. MRPC identifies plausible trajectories shaping peacekeeping and security operations across Eastern Africa.

Positive Scenario: Peacekeeping missions may become locally anchored with clear mandates, stable financing, and strong civilian oversight, enhancing deterrence, regional trust, and Eastern Africa's credibility in global stabilization efforts.

Baseline Scenario: Operations would achieve limited progress if constrained by logistical gaps, fragmented command, and inconsistent donor support, hence maintaining presence without achieving structural transformation or strategic resilience.

Risk Scenario: Donor fatigue, political interference, and weak coordination could trigger mission paralysis, loss of legitimacy, and security vacuums that embolden armed actors and escalate regional instability.

Key Early-Warning Indicators: Indicators may include troop fatigue, funding delays, command fragmentation, civilian hostility, intelligence gaps, and host-government friction—warning of operational strain, declining coordination, and potential mission collapse.

Environmental Stressors and Climate-Security Risks

September 2025 highlighted how environmental shocks increasingly intersect with governance fragility and conflict risks across Eastern Africa. Burundi's Lake Tanganyika flooding displaced over 100,000 people, damaging sanitation infrastructure and heightening disease and displacement pressures (ReliefWeb, 2025). In Djibouti, a new MoU with Visa and TECH5 for a national Smart Wallet showcased digital adaptation efforts but raised concerns over data privacy and social inclusion (Biometric Update, 2025). These developments underscore how climate stress, technological transition, and institutional capacity gaps shape emerging security vulnerabilities across the region. Building on current patterns, MRPC identifies key trajectories shaping the region's climate-security landscape.

Positive Scenario: Expanded investment in resilient infrastructure, inclusive digital access, and proactive disaster governance would strengthen adaptation capacity, reduce vulnerability, and lower the risk of climate-related conflict.

Baseline Scenario: Incremental adaptation efforts would ease immediate climate pressures but leave deeper governance, inequality, and coordination challenges unresolved, sustaining fragile resilience.

Risk Scenario: Escalating floods, resource depletion, and exclusionary adaptation practices could heighten displacement, fuel social unrest, and trigger widespread instability across vulnerable regions.

Key Early-Warning Indicators: Indicators may include rising climate variability, declining adaptation financing, widening inequality in resilience measures, and slow or politicized disaster responses signaling weakening governance capacity and growing risks of climate-induced conflict.

Economic and Trade Dynamics in a Security Context

September 2025 underscored how evolving trade and environmental regimes are reshaping Eastern Africa's security landscape. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) expired on 30 September 2025, with only a proposed one-year U.S. extension pending, exposing key exporters in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Madagascar to renewed tariff and investment risks (Reuters, 2025). Simultaneously, the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ Agreement) achieved 60 ratifications, set to enter into force in January 2026, compelling coastal states such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Somalia to tighten fisheries regulation, maritime surveillance, and environmental compliance (UN Treaty Collection, 2025). These developments highlight the strategic link between trade fragility, maritime governance, and regional stability across Eastern Africa.

Positive Scenario: Coordinated trade reforms, sustainable fisheries management, and harmonized policy frameworks would stabilize regional markets, enhance institutional resilience, and reinforce long-term economic security.

Baseline Scenario: Partial policy adjustments and limited mitigation would preserve a fragile economic balance, averting major shocks but leaving structural and governance weaknesses intact.

Risk Scenario: Falling exports, factory shutdowns, and escalating resource disputes could trigger widespread unemployment, social unrest, and severe governance strain across regional economies.

Key Early-Warning Indicators: Indicators may include shifts in trade and tariff policies, declining export and investment opportunities, currency instability, weakening fisheries governance, and growing labor or public unrest signaling deepening economic stress and emerging risks to regional stability.

September 2025 underscored the deepening intersection between public health crises and conflict vulnerabilities across Eastern Africa. The cholera outbreak in Darfur affected approximately 1.86 million people, intensified by conflict-disrupted sanitation systems, limited humanitarian access, and institutional fragility (World Health Organization, 2025). Similar vulnerabilities emerged in South Sudan and eastern Chad, where overstretched health infrastructure and population displacement heightened humanitarian stress. These developments reveal how disease outbreaks compound governance deficits, strain humanitarian corridors, and elevate cross-border security risks within the IGAD and AU coordination frameworks. Building on recent developments, MRPC identifies three plausible trajectories shaping public health and human security across Eastern Africa.

Positive Scenario: Coordinated vaccination campaigns, rebuilt WASH infrastructure, and uninterrupted humanitarian access would contain outbreaks, restore public confidence, and strengthen institutional legitimacy.

Baseline Scenario: Intermittent containment and short-term interventions would limit immediate health risks but fail to establish durable systems for epidemic prevention and resilience.

Risk Scenario: Persistent epidemics, restricted humanitarian access, and displacement-driven contagion could overwhelm health systems, erode governance capacity, and destabilize the wider region.

Key Early-Warning Indicators: Indicators may include rising outbreak frequency, mortality spikes, and cross-border transmission; disrupted aid access; delayed WASH and health infrastructure recovery; and escalating displacement trends signaling mounting epidemic stress and governance fragility.

Regional Soft Power, Armed Groups, and Conflict Signaling

September 2025 revealed how soft-power projection and armed-group dynamics intertwine with regional geopolitics in Eastern Africa. Rwanda's successful hosting of the 2025 Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) Road World Championships enhanced its international profile yet drew criticism over its alleged interference in eastern DRC and domestic civic restrictions (Wall Street Journal, 2025; BBC News, 2025). In the DRC, the consolidation of M23 positions and the in-absentia death sentence of former President Kabila signaled entrenched political fractures and potential spoilers to fragile peace efforts (Reuters, 2025). These developments underscore how state signaling, armed-group maneuvers, and perception management shape conflict risk, legitimacy narratives, and regional diplomatic alignment. Drawing from September's developments, MRPC identifies three plausible trajectories shaping soft-power influence and conflict signaling across Eastern Africa.

Positive Scenario: Transparent governance, credible strategic communication, and coordinated regional diplomacy would reinforce legitimacy, de-escalate tensions, and restore confidence in peace processes.

Baseline Scenario: Gradual reputational improvements would persist alongside intermittent instability and contested narratives, sustaining manageable but unresolved geopolitical friction.

Risk Scenario: Intensifying proxy involvement, cross-border insecurity, and mounting external criticism could erode regional trust, deepen polarization, and destabilize the Great Lakes corridor.

Key Early-Warning Indicators: Indicators may include shifts in armed-group movements and alliances, changes in regional diplomatic posturing, evolving international narratives, and growing restrictions on civil society signaling mounting reputational strain and potential escalation of geopolitical tensions.

Conclusion

The Mashariki Monthly, September 2025 issue highlights the intricate linkages between governance fragility, regional tensions, environmental stress, economic volatility, public health crises, and strategic signaling shaped Eastern Africa's conflict and geopolitical landscape. It underscores that early detection, anticipatory planning, and scenario-based analysis remain central to preventing escalation and reinforcing resilience. Positive trajectories hinge on inclusive governance reforms, cross-border cooperation, climate-resilient infrastructure, strategic diplomacy, and coordinated humanitarian action. Baseline pathways reflect localized instability and reputational strain, while risk scenarios could escalate into cross-border insecurity, civic unrest, and systemic volatility. Sustained monitoring of political transitions, economic performance, environmental shifts, and conflict indicators will generate actionable foresight for early warning and stabilization planning. Through integrated analysis and coordinated engagement, regional institutions and international partners will strengthen collective security, safeguard strategic interests, and advance durable peace and security across Eastern Africa.

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