

1.0 Introduction

The month of May 2026 was characterised by converging structural pressures across Greater Eastern Africa, where conflict volatility, geopolitical competition, and climate-linked disruptions increasingly interacted as interdependent drivers of regional insecurity. These dynamics were most pronounced across the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region, and the Western Indian Ocean corridor, reflecting uneven state capacity, contested authority spaces, and expanding external strategic engagement. Conflict dynamics remained concentrated in Sudan, South Sudan, and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where fragmented armed actors, constrained state authority, and restricted humanitarian access continued to intensify civilian exposure and prolong instability.

These conflict systems increasingly operated in parallel with shifting geopolitical alignments, particularly around infrastructure corridors, maritime security governance, and external security partnerships involving regional and extra-regional actors. At the same time, environmental and health-security pressures, including localised climate shocks and disease outbreaks, amplified governance strain and mobility disruption in vulnerable contexts. The interaction of these domains underscores a region increasingly shaped by systemic interdependence between security, political authority, and environmental stressors. Through a security foresight lens, this Outlook reviews May-specific developments across Conflict Trends, Geopolitics, and Environmental/Climate Security domains, and provides a structured, evidence-based assessment of these developments and their implications for regional stability and security across the reporting period.

2.0 Thematic Focus

2.1 Conflict Trends

Conflict dynamics during May 2026 reflected sustained fragmentation of coercive authority and widening humanitarian exposure across key instability clusters in Greater Eastern Africa. In South Sudan, recurrent armed violence and repeated attacks on civilian infrastructure significantly constrained humanitarian access and healthcare delivery systems, reinforcing structural fragility in civilian protection architectures (ReliefWeb, 2026). The United Nations Security Council's renewal of sanctions, asset freezes, and arms embargo measures reinforced persistent elite fragmentation and the absence of a consolidated political settlement framework (UNSC, 2026).

In Sudan, conflict internationalisation intensified through transnational armed logistics networks associated with Rapid Support Forces capabilities, reinforcing the externalisation of the conflict economy and increasing cross-border risk exposure along regional corridors (Human Rights Watch, 2026). In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, continued armed group activity coincided with the declaration of an Ebola outbreak in Ituri Province, where insecurity significantly constrained containment capacity and humanitarian response operations (UN News, 2026; Mercy Corps, 2026). This produced a compounded instability environment with spillover sensitivity across the Rwanda-Uganda-eastern DRC corridor.

In Burundi, escalating political tensions ahead of the 2027 electoral cycle were marked by opposition withdrawal from the electoral process, signalling deepening institutional contestation and weakening political consensus with implications for internal stability trajectories (SOS Médias Burundi, 2026). Somalia continued to exhibit fragmented governance and uneven territorial control, sustaining localised insecurity dynamics and reinforcing maritime and land-based volatility within the Horn of Africa security system. Across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius, and Madagascar, no major escalatory conflict incidents were recorded during the reporting period. However, these states remain structurally embedded within regional security interdependence through displacement flows, trade corridors, and maritime security architectures. Collectively, these dynamics reflect an increasingly integrated conflict system characterised by governance fragmentation, externalised violence networks, and overlapping humanitarian crises across subregional theatres.

Foresight Recommendations

- The African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) in coordination with Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), should operationalise a preventive diplomacy mechanism in South Sudan focused on elite fragmentation mapping, structured mediation sequencing, and independent ceasefire verification systems to reduce subnational militarisation risks.
- The United Nations Security Council should expand Sudan sanctions enforcement architecture by integrating maritime, aerial, and land-based interdiction monitoring mechanisms to disrupt transnational armed logistics networks sustaining conflict economies.
- The East African Community (EAC), in coordination with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), should establish cross-border stabilisation corridors in eastern DRC, integrating security coordination, humanitarian access guarantees, and epidemic containment logistics under unified operational command structures.
- International humanitarian and public health agencies, in coordination with national ministries, should deploy conflict-adaptive health response systems in high-risk zones, embedding mobile medical units within real-time insecurity mapping platforms and rapid-response deployment protocols.

Forward-Looking Scenario: Conflict trajectories across Greater Eastern Africa are expected to remain structurally unstable, with Sudan and South Sudan functioning as primary escalation nodes driven by fragmented authority systems and externalised armed networks. Eastern DRC is expected to persist as a compounded instability zone where armed conflict and epidemic vulnerability reinforce each other, increasing the probability of humanitarian system stress and regional spillover effects. Burundi's political trajectory may continue toward intensified institutional polarisation ahead of the 2027 electoral cycle, with implications for Great Lakes regional stability. Somalia is likely to remain a fragmented governance environment with persistent localised insecurity and maritime risk exposure, sustaining broader Horn of Africa security volatility.

2.2 Geopolitical Shifts

Geopolitical developments in May 2026 reflected intensifying competition over infrastructure corridors, maritime governance regimes, and external strategic influence across Greater Eastern Africa. Kenya, hosted a high-level investment forum resulting in expanded capital commitments from European and multilateral actors, reinforcing its position as a regional financial intermediary and infrastructure financing hub linking Africa–Europe economic systems (Al Jazeera, 2026). Concurrently, Kenya advanced aviation fuel transition initiatives, integrating energy diversification objectives into industrial policy and transport-sector restructuring frameworks (Standard Media, 2026).

Tanzania and Rwanda, in coordination with Kenya, concluded trade facilitation and corridor efficiency agreements aimed at reducing logistics bottlenecks along Northern and Central Transport Corridors, strengthening intra-regional interdependence within East African supply-chain architecture (The Citizen, 2026). In Somalia, intensified external strategic engagement was observed as Türkiye expanded offshore energy exploration licensing activity while the United States increased structured engagement with federal member state authorities, reinforcing fragmented sovereignty conditions and competitive alignment dynamics (Somali Guardian, 2026a; 2026b).

In the Red Sea theatre, Eritrea and Egypt formalised a maritime cooperation framework affirming littoral-state primacy in regional maritime governance, reshaping the institutional balance of Red Sea security management and constraining external naval influence architecture (Daily News Egypt, 2026). Concurrently, Seychelles and Mauritius advanced defence cooperation under the United States State Partnership Programme framework, institutionalising Western Indian Ocean maritime security coordination and interoperability systems (National Guard Bureau, 2026).

Collectively, May 2026 reflects a structurally tightening geopolitical environment defined by corridor securitisation, maritime governance consolidation, and increasing external strategic layering across continental and maritime domains.

Foresight Recommendations

- The AU, in coordination with IGAD and EAC, should operationalise a phased Red Sea–Western Indian Ocean maritime governance framework to reduce regulatory fragmentation and harmonise overlapping sovereignty claims.
- EAC member states should establish corridor-security integration units within transport and trade ministries to embed infrastructure protection, risk monitoring, and security screening into cross-border logistics systems.
- Somalia's federal government and federal member states should implement an AU-supported structured dialogue mechanism with defined mediation timelines to address governance fragmentation and external alignment competition.
- States engaging in external defence partnerships should institutionalise national security coordination frameworks to ensure interoperability and transparency, and maintain sovereign command coherence.

Forward-Looking Scenario: Geopolitical competition across Greater Eastern Africa is expected to intensify, particularly in maritime governance systems and infrastructure corridor management. Kenya and Tanzania are likely to consolidate logistical influence, while external actors deepen strategic and financial engagement across key regional nodes. Somalia is expected to remain a persistent instability-sensitive space due to fragmented governance and overlapping external partnerships, sustaining competitive alignment pressures. The Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean will continue to evolve as primary theatres of strategic contestation, shaping regional security architectures.

2.3 Environmental Security

Environmental and climate-security dynamics in May 2026 functioned as systemic risk multipliers across Greater Eastern Africa, with differentiated but interconnected impacts on health systems, energy stability, and mobility corridors. In the eastern DRC, the Ebola outbreak in Ituri Province exposed persistent structural constraints in outbreak containment under insecure conditions, where limited access, disrupted surveillance systems, and constrained humanitarian movement reduced response effectiveness and increased transmission vulnerability across high-mobility zones (UN News, 2026; Mercy Corps, 2026).

In Kenya, external financial inflows supporting epidemic preparedness reflected a gradual institutional shift toward anticipatory biosecurity governance, particularly in response to regional mobility patterns and cross-border health risks (Citizen Digital, 2026). This signals increasing recognition of health security as a regional stability variable. In Comoros, a sudden fuel price escalation triggered localised civil unrest, demonstrating acute sensitivity of small island economies to external energy-market volatility and import dependency exposure (Reuters, 2026).

Across the Western Indian Ocean and Great Lakes regions, climate variability, health emergencies, and energy instability increasingly intersect with governance capacity constraints, reinforcing compound exposure to external shocks and limiting adaptive resilience across critical infrastructure systems.

Foresight Recommendations

- Africa CDC and WHO should establish integrated cross-border epidemic surveillance systems embedding conflict-sensitive operational protocols to ensure continuity of outbreak response in insecure environments such as eastern DRC.
- Western Indian Ocean states should institutionalise coordinated energy shock absorption mechanisms, including pooled fuel reserves and synchronised pricing stabilisation tools to mitigate external volatility shocks.
- Regional governments should develop interoperable border health-security infrastructure combining real-time epidemiological tracking, mobile diagnostics, and coordinated response deployment across high-mobility corridors.
- Development partners should prioritise integrated climate–health–energy resilience financing frameworks targeting infrastructure systems that simultaneously reduce exposure to environmental shocks and strengthen adaptive capacity.

Forward-Looking Scenario: Environmental security pressures are expected to intensify as climate variability, health emergencies, and energy-market instability increasingly converge across structurally constrained governance environments. The Eastern DRC is likely to remain a persistent convergence zone where epidemic risks and insecurity reinforce each other. Small island economies and import-dependent coastal systems will remain highly exposed to external price shocks, while mobility corridors across the Great Lakes and Western Indian Ocean are likely to experience growing systemic stress absent of coordinated regional resilience mechanisms.

3.0 Conclusion

May 2026 reflects an increasingly interdependent security architecture across Greater Eastern Africa, where conflict fragmentation, geopolitical competition, and environmental pressures function as reinforcing rather than isolated dynamics. Persistent instability in Sudan, South Sudan, and eastern DRC continues to generate sustained humanitarian strain and governance stress, while maritime competition and infrastructure-centred diplomacy are reshaping strategic alignments across the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean. At the same time, environmental volatility and health-security shocks underscore the structural convergence between ecological systems and political order. These pressures are no longer peripheral but constitutive of regional stability dynamics, particularly where mobility systems, state capacity constraints, and external engagement intersect. Overall, the region is entering a phase defined by compounded risk exposure, requiring coordinated governance responses, strengthened regional interoperability, and anticipatory policy architectures capable of managing cross-domain systemic vulnerabilities across security, economic, and environmental spheres.

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