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How resources and rival powers are remaking Africa's security landscape

Africa's conflicts are too often narrated as separate emergencies: Sudan as a Red Sea-Horn of Africa catastrophe, and the Sahel as a West African counter-terrorism theatre. That framing is increasingly misleading. A connected "fracture belt" is emerging, a widening arc in which civil war, insurgency, displacement, illicit finance, and external competition reinforce one another across borders. In strategic terms, these crises are converging into a single regional security system with continent-wide consequences.

Sudan illustrates how an internal war can rapidly acquire geopolitical gravity. As State authority erodes, violence fractures market, degrades public services, and forces displacement. Over time, displacement becomes more than a humanitarian statistic: it becomes a driver of regional politics, border securitisation, and fiscal stress for neighbours. When that pressure persists, governments are pushed into crisis budgeting, host communities absorb long-term service demands, and political attention shifts from development to survival.

Further west, the Sahel shows how violence has evolved into political economy. Armed groups do not only raid; they tax roads and livestock routes, regulate local trade, and police smuggling corridors. This is why battlefield pressure alone rarely delivers strategic results because as long as these revenue streams and permissive spaces remain, insurgency can regenerate.

Natural resources are the connective tissue that makes the belt geopolitically sticky. Critical minerals function as both prize and fuel, but gold is the most destabilising because it is easily portable, and hard to trace. In weakly governed zones, resource extraction becomes a parallel financial system financing armed actors, distorting local authority, and incentivising control of territory and transport routes.

Resources also pull in external actors. The Red Sea and wider Horn have become a the-

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Samuel Obedgiu
Geoeconomics



atre of competitive Statecraft: Gulf States seek leverage over ports, logistics hubs, and food-security supply chains, while offering investment, mediation, or security cooperation. Such engagement can stabilise when it strengthens institutions, but it can also entrench spoilers when local factions treat foreign backing as insurance against compromise.

In the Sahel and adjacent zones, a different marketplace has emerged: "regime security" assistance. Russia-linked contractors, regional military partners, and Western security programmes all compete to provide training, intelligence, equipment, or battlefield support. When security cooperation becomes transactional, accountability often declines, civilian protection weakens, and armed groups gain propaganda oxygen.

China and the European Union shape the fracture belt less through force than through geoeconomics finance for infrastructure, access to markets, and investment in extractives. These tools can strengthen States when they create jobs, improve connectivity, and reinforce transparency. Yet in brittle environments, mega-projects can become magnets for predation, corruption, and attacks; investment does not automatically produce stability when legitimacy is failing.

Political fragmentation inside the belt compounds the risk. Coups, shrinking civic spac-

es, and diplomatic ruptures weaken regional organisations' ability to coordinate mediation, share intelligence, and apply collective pressure. When regional blocs fragment, crisis management becomes bilateral and ad hoc rather than rule-based and multilateral, raising the leverage of external actors and reducing Africa's bargaining power on debt, climate finance, and the terms of resource extraction.

For East Africa and Uganda in particular this is not a distant drama. The fracture belt exports three pressures: sustained demand on schools, clinics, water systems, and local administration; networked insecurity through arms flows, document fraud, and human smuggling; and geoeconomics volatility that disrupts corridors, raises insurance costs, and deters investment. The region pays a conflict tax whether or not it is a combatant.

A response that meets international standards must redefine security. Civilian protection should be treated as a strategic imperative, and policy must follow the war economy through financial intelligence, commodity tracing, anti-corruption enforcement, and coordinated disruption of transnational logistics. Frontier governance is decisive too: functioning courts, dispute resolution, and accountable policing in peripheral areas are how armed actors are outcompeted over time.

Africa's fracture belt should be read for what it is: an emerging geopolitical system where war economies, strategic commodities, and rival patrons converge on weak institutions. Left unmanaged, it will not burn out; it will normalise permanent emergency and reorder regional stability. The choice is strategic: coordinate to contain the conflict economy or accept a future in which armed actors and outside patrons set the terms of security.

Samuel Obedgiu, geopolitician and biotechnologist. sammyobedgiu@gmail.com

aniel Kalinaki
vech 29/35 8th Street, P.O. Box 12141
Kampala, Uganda

Phones 0312301100/101
Fax 041232369

Email editorial@ug.nationmedia.com
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