

# Seminar Report



## Understanding East African Region

Diverse Prospects and Challenges



Institute of Policy Studies  
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## Executive Summary

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, organized a roundtable on December 9, 2021, titled ‘Understanding East African Region’ as part of its ‘Understanding Africa Program’ and invited Ambassador (r) Tajammul Altaf, a senior research associate at IPS, as the session’s keynote speaker to examine in-depth the situation in East Africa and future of relations between Pakistan and East African nations. In addition, the session examined China’s successful development assistance through its foreign policy initiatives and policy options for Pakistan.

The East African region holds maritime, geopolitical and strategic significance. Moreover, this region is also important as the Nile originates from this area. The regional and international actors have positioned East Africa as a strategic base. The US, Russia, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have always demonstrated their interest and influence in the region.

In recent times, along with the US, China has increased its investment in the region. The total stock of Chinese foreign investment in Africa has increased from \$26.19 billion in 2013 to \$46.19 billion in 2021. In addition to preferential loans, China had financed, constructed, and started operating 46 seaports in west, east, central, and southern Africa by the end of 2019, along with infrastructure, communication, transportation, mining, and extraction. China has approached Africa with a developmental outlook and win-win cooperation.

Apart from development and strategic perspective, this territory is important from an Islamic perspective too. For example, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) dispatched his ambassador Jaffer ibn Abi Talib to the court of Christian king Najashi of Ethiopia to communicate the message of Islam and to have an exchange of views.

As this region has a lot of potential, Pakistan must also develop a proactive policy approach toward Africa. It must start engaging with the African countries for development and stronger relations. Pakistan can benefit from the example of China which was once in isolation but is now engaging with both the developed and developing countries.

### Takeaways from the Roundtable

#### *Q- What is the important demographic pattern in East African countries?*

East Africa is the most populous sub-region of Africa and comprises 18 countries, namely Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Out of these countries, four are islands located in the Indian Ocean: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia form Northern East Africa, also known as the Horn of Africa.

Zambia and Zimbabwe are middle-income countries in Africa’s most populous region, whereas Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda are high-income countries. Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, and Eritrea are among the poorest nations in East Africa.

The majority of population of East Africa is either Christian or Muslim. More than 160 tribes in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti speak Afro-Asian languages; Swahili is also widely spoken in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.

#### *Q- What are the challenges to regional development and stability?*

This region continues to offer a combination of relative stability and lawlessness. There are issues of human security and navigational security. Moreover, maritime routes and border regions cannot be said to be safe and secure.

In addition to issues of external security, internal security and stability is also facing grave challenges. Some regions are stable, others are less so, and some are more susceptible to risk. There are war zones; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Uganda. Moreover, armed

uprisings had been a part of most of the African states' history. Dictators in Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda rose to power after armed uprisings. In addition, there is extremism and terrorism and many militant organizations are active in various regions.

Abject poverty, this is the watchword, is a massive challenge. There are distinct development areas; low income, middle income, and high income, and there are still uneven models of development across East Africa and Africa in general.

While these and other related challenges emerge, to some extent, from continental factors, the prime mover of these challenges and present condition of Africa is neocolonialism, the nemesis of colonialism that characterizes the 21st century. While East Africa has also been a victim of colonialism where colonialists acquired their land, looted, plundered, and took raw materials to their countries to bolster their economy, the region is still being exploited to a large extent by power states in the name of cooperation under neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is the process of influencing a country through economic leverage, globalization, cultural collaboration, and aid as opposed to imperialism or direct political control, which were the traditional colonial approaches.

Currently, the major players in East Africa are the US, Great Britain, France, European Union (EU) member states, and China. Besides, India, Turkey, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia also have prominent presence in the region.

Among the major players, the US is primarily concerned with security issues, such as terrorism and piracy. Similarly, the UK, France, and the EU are presently concentrating on how to control terrorism under the guise of economy and security. China is the only nation that focuses exclusively on assistance and development through economic interaction with Africa and it has a long record of helping Africa.

**Q- How has China aided in development in Africa?**

China's foreign direct investment in Africa began in the 1950s, shortly after the continent's independence. At the beginning of the 1990s, China provided funding of \$51.19 million for 102 projects throughout Africa. In 1998, China adopted the "Looking Outside Policy" and started to seek business opportunities outside the country.

In the 1950s, the Chinese were venturing less into the outside world, but in 1998, Deng Xiaoping initiated the opening of China to the outside world, focusing on Africa and ports and terminals. China introduced its "Look Africa Policy" in 2006, offering preferential loans and buyer credits to encourage investments. China made substantial investments in infrastructure, construction, transportation, communications, mining and raw material extraction, water conservation, and energy. Until 2007, China's investment in East Africa only amounted to \$1.57 billion.

When Xi Jinping assumed office in 2013, his first tour was to Russia, followed by Tanzania, South Africa, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While standing in Tanzania's newly constructed Chinese-built parliament building, he outlined his country's engagement with Africa over the next three decades till 2050.



In addition, China constructed its first overseas naval station in Djibouti. Under Chinese development assistance, the largest investment was made in the Tanzania-Zambia railway, the African Union Conference Centre, the second largest, and the remainder consisted of 80 large-scale power plants, and 13,000 kilometers of roads and railways. Since 2009, China has been Africa’s largest trading partner and the annual trade volume exceeds \$200 billion.

### Ports Financed or Constructed by Chinese Entities<sup>1</sup>

PORT PROJECT(S)	APPROX. LOCATION	OPERATOR	FUNDER	BUILDER	STATUS
<i>West Africa</i>					
Conakry Container Wharf Expansion Project, Port of Conakry	Conakry, Guinea		X	X	<i>Various Stages</i>
Various Expansion Projects, Friendship Port of Nouakchott	Nouakchott, Mauritania		X	X	<i>Various Stages</i>
Tema LNG Terminal, Tema Port	Tema, Ghana		X	X	<i>In Progress</i>
Takoradi Port	Takoradi, Ghana		X	X	<i>In Progress</i>
Bakassi Deep Sea Port	Calabar, Nigeria		X	X	<i>In Progress</i>
Multipurpose Terminal Project, Apapa Port	Apapa (Lagos), Nigeria		X	X	<i>Announced</i>
Mindelo Deepwater Port	Mindelo, Cabo Verde		X	X	<i>Announced</i>
Kamsar Fishing Port Economic Zone	Kamsar, Guinea			X	<i>Announced</i>
Mineral Port of Nouadhibou	Nouadhibou, Mauritania			X	<i>Completed</i>
Atuabo Free Port	Atuabo, Ghana			X	<i>Stalled Indefinitely</i>
Queen Elizabeth II Quay Expansion Project, Freetown Port	Freetown, Sierra Leone			X	<i>In Progress</i>
Douala Chanel Expansion Project, Douala Port	Douala, Cameroon			X	<i>Various Stages</i>
Jamestown Fishing Port Complex	Jamestown (Accra), Ghana		X		<i>In Progress</i>
Simandou Iron Ore Project, Makatong Deep Water Port	Makatong, Guinea		X		<i>Stalled Indefinitely</i>

<sup>1</sup> Judd Devermont, Amelia Cheatham, and Catherine Chiang, “Assessing the Risks of Chinese Investments in Sub-Saharan African Ports,” Centre for Strategic and International Studies, June 4, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessing-risks-chinese-investments-sub-saharan-african-ports>.

UNDERSTANDING EAST AFRICAN REGION: DIVERSE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

PORT PROJECT(S)	APPROX. LOCATION	OPERATOR	FUNDER	BUILDER	STATUS
<i>East Africa</i>					
Tadjourah Port	Tadjourah, Djibouti		X	X	Completed
Djibouti Damerjog Industries Development	Damerjog, Djibouti		X	X	In Progress
Various Expansion Projects, Dar es Salaam Port	Dar es Salaam, Tanzania		X	X	Announced
Expansion Project, Mtwara Port	Mtwara, Tanzania			X	In Progress
Various Expansion Projects, Massawa New Port	Massawa, Eritrea			X	Completed
Lamu Port	Lamu, Kenya			X	In Progress
Construction of Three Berths, Mombasa Port	Mombasa, Kenya			X	Various Stages
<i>Central Africa</i>					
Expansion and Rehabilitation Project, Port of Bata	Bata, Equatorial Guinea		X	X	Completed
Deep Sea Trans-shipment Port	Fernão Dias, São Tomé e Príncipe		X	X	Announced
Various Expansion Projects, Port Mole	Libreville, Gabon			X	Stalled Indefinitely
PORT PROJECT(S)	APPROX. LOCATION	OPERATOR	FUNDER	BUILDER	STATUS
<i>Southern Africa</i>					
Various Expansion Projects, Port of Lobito	Lobito, Angola		X	X	Completed
Caio Deep Water Port	Caio, Angola		X	X	Stalled Indefinitely
Rehabilitation and Expansion Project, Beira Fishing Port	Beira, Mozambique		X	X	Completed
Various Rehabilitation Projects, Port of Durban	Durban, South Africa		X	X	Various Stages
Various Renovation Projects, Port of Ambodifotatra	Ambodifotatra (Nosy Boraha), Madagascar			X	In Progress
Tamatave Deepwater Harbour	Toamasina, Madagascar			X	Announced
Narinda Bay Deep-Water Port	Bay of Narinda, Madagascar			X	Announced
Various Expansion Projects, Port of Walvis Bay	Walvis Bay, Namibia			X	In Progress
Port of Cabinda	Cabinda, Angola			X	Various Stages
Shipbuilding and Repair Facility, Richards Bay Port	Richards Bay, South Africa			X	Announced
Deep Water Port of Techobanine	Matutuíne District (Maputo), Mozambique		X		Announced

***Q- It was stated in a report that China aims to take control of Uganda's airport if the country defaults. Although both countries have denied the allegations, China is still rumored to have neocolonialist objectives. Do you believe China has become a neocolonialist state?***

That report was false and it derived such false information from the agreement between Uganda and China. However, the Chinese immediately made it clear that the report has no factual basis and is an attempt to malign China and its relationship with the developing countries of Africa.

Later, there was a Chinese version of the report. They even provided the specifics of their agreement with Uganda for the operation of the airport, and they have rejected any form of mismanagement or arrogance. Both reports are easily accessible and one can compare both to know what is true and what is allegation.

China is a very astute nation that has 5,000 years of history, philosophy, and Confucian wisdom. There are no traces of neocolonialism. After decades of economic growth and becoming the second largest economy in the world, they have learned how to interact with the international community. China is an ambitious nation that is focused on its own growth and development. They are now focusing on the second half of the 21st century, 2050, to achieve certain milestones and objectives.

In this race, if China believes even for a second that it would become a colonial power or a neocolonialist, it will be the beginning of China's decline. And the Chinese are aware of this reality. Chinese leaders and people are very clear-headed and wise, and their engagement with Africa is based on certain very clear parameters. One is solidarity; the Chinese have been assisting the African countries since their independence that were poor, communist, socialist, and had no ties with capitalistic forces. The second is cooperation, which the Chinese refer to as win-win cooperation, or "what is good for me is also good for you".

The regional organizations have started working together in a very close fashion. All of this occurs inside the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which was conceived by the Chinese. These regional organizations in the East Africa region are becoming more active and robust as a result of the AfCFTA. No neocolonialist state would do that.

There is a myth of a debt trap, which the Chinese have refuted with facts and figures, and it is better to go for hard data and investigate the statistics from which the Chinese derive their facts and figures. Even developing countries need to figure out how much they have been provided in terms of funds, assistance, and foreign direct investment and how much they have given to China besides goodwill.

***Q- What is the issue of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which has become a source of conflict among Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia?***

The Egypt-Sudan-Ethiopia dispute is a combination of internal and external pressures that has not yet been resolved. It will take some time for the interplay of national, regional, and internal issues to settle down.

***Q- There has been a conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. For some it is a dispute having historical root causes, some see it as a conflict fueled by external actors like the US and EU to destabilize the region that is near to the strategic port of Djibouti. What is your take on the issue?***

There is an overlapped interest of Europe and the US and the significant presence of China in Djibouti. External players are aggravating this dispute more than domestic ones. There are conflicts in Ethiopia, however, other factors exert a greater influence. Due to China's ascent, Djibouti might be a challenging contesting ground for those seeking to undercut Beijing's influence in the region. Some actors do not want China's footprint on that continent, particularly in Djibouti. This strategic battle will persist within the context of international relations that will not end soon. Otherwise, Ethiopia, Tigray and Sudan would have been in close proximity to address their essential challenges, which are currently being complicated by these forces. This conflict appears to be a protracted struggle that will not be resolved as quickly as Rwanda, Burundi, or the Congo because of the fact that it is a combination of national, regional, and international factors that overlap.

***Q- Africa also carries significance in Islamic perspective. Did Islam spread in Africa in the same way it did in Malaysia and Indonesia?***

Islam is an exceptionally peaceful religion. It was historically a very peaceful growth of Islam for both religious and commercial purposes in Africa. It was an extremely effective model of Islam that was brought into the African land. As some aspects of Islam's expansion were not exactly as Europeans have jotted down in history or as the world perceives, there have been some misconceptions that Islam has spread extremist trends.

While the vast majority of these trends and tendencies emanated from other factors and advent of entities all around the world. Certain tendencies are viewed through particular prisms by the interpreter, and as a result, certain tendencies appear to be unsettling.

There were no tensions in this regard in Africa. But after the second half of the 20th century, there were changes and ripple effects caused by the introduction of various forces. The 9/11 incident was one of these that brought religious tensions of a greater extent not only to Asia and the Middle East but also to Africa and a push-and-pull element emerged. There were some movements that carried out simultaneously. After mid-20th century, and particularly after 2001, religious co-existence has not been always peaceful in specific regions. Certain phenomena, such as Islam-related cultures, became popular. If we consider certain militant organizations, such as Boko Haram and Daesh in Nigeria, Africa became a hub for these inclinations.

***Q- Could fighting terrorism and militancy become a converging point between Pakistan and East African region to come closer to each other?***

The incident of September 11, 2001, was preceded by attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, resulting in enormous losses. After 2001, there has been a very clear understanding between Pakistan and the East African countries as well as some other African states to converge their preparations, to make certain concerted and collective efforts, including the dispatching of naval ships, sharing of intelligence, and some form of cooperation to contain the rise of extremism or terrorism. The East African nations and Pakistan committed to take specific measures, supported each other, and continue to do so. There are like-minded countries with shared interests or factors on which they want to cooperate. They can always join heads and hands, and continue the type of cooperation where they can offer and share their best experiences in dealing with and combating terrorism in the region. Pakistan must take this cooperation to the next level for peace and stability.

***Q- What must Pakistan do to fortify Pakistan-Africa relationship?***

As part of Pakistan's 'Engage Africa Policy', which includes a range of incentives, the government aims to open embassies in Djibouti, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Uganda, and other countries which do not have Pakistan's diplomatic presence as yet. Many of the African countries have no or very small embassy presence in other states.

In order to fortify Pakistan-Africa relations, Islamabad must participate in various development ventures in African countries. For that, the foremost thing that the government needs to do is increase its prominence and establish embassies in all African countries. Moreover, commercial counsellors must immediately be assigned to every Pakistani embassy in Africa.

Unfortunately, Africa was never on Islamabad's political radar, and even under the current administration, there have been no reciprocal visits by Pakistani or African officials. For the purpose of forging new areas of engagement with African nations, leadership diplomacy is a vital component.

## Picture Gallery



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