Perspectives from the HORN of AFRICA

PREVENTING MALIGN ACTIONS.
VITAL SUPPLY LINES.

2026



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Perspectives from the Horn of Africa

Preventing Malign Actions. Vital Supply Lines.

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Organised by
NATO Defense College Foundation (NDCF)

In co-operation with
the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fondazione CSF, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo,**
and the **NATO Defense College (NDC)**

Perspectives from the Horn of Africa: Preventing Malign Actions. Vital Supply Lines.
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NATO Defense College Foundation

The NDCF is a unique think-tank: international by design and based in Rome, due to its semi-institutional association with the NATO Defense College. Its added value lies in the objectives stated by its charter and in its international network, which make the Foundation a body with considerable freedom of action, transnational reach and cultural openness. The charter specifies that the NDCF works with the Member States of the Atlantic Alliance, its partners and the countries that have some form of co-operation with NATO. Through the Foundation the involvement of USA and Canada is more fluid than in other settings. The Foundation was born in March 2011 and is continuously expanding and refining its highly specific and high-profile customer-tailored activities. Currently, the Foundation operates across three main areas: high-level events and strategic dialogue; research and analysis (Strategic Trends, Food for Thought and Papers); and strategic communication, knowledge dissemination and executive education, including digital content, podcasts, specialised outreach and tailored activities for institutional and professional audiences.

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WELCOME REMARKS

"Perspectives from the Horn of Africa: Preventing Malign Actions. Vital Supply Lines." Rome, 9 July 2026.

Source: NATO Defense College Foundation


ALESSANDRO MINUTO RIZZO
President,
NATO Defense College Foundation



Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo
President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

WELCOME REMARKS

This is not the first time that the Foundation has a focus on Africa, and we like to address the issue of Africa because we think it is a continent of the future, well-represented by a fashionable slogan of some time ago, "Rising Africa". This time, we have a focus on the Horn of Africa, a region of strategic importance on various accounts for countries struggling to find a harmonious and stable dimension. Addis Ababa is the headquarters of the African Union, adding an international dimension that is very significant. The Horn of Africa today also has a maritime aspect that we do not always think about.

This is due to the Red Sea, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Indian Ocean, where problems of trade and energy have been linked with issues of security since the Cold War. They affect the European Union, NATO, the United Nations, and the international community in general. The Horn of Africa is also a region of interest to Italy not only for historical reasons, but also for important relations and investments.

I am thinking not only of Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, with whom different European countries shared a complex past until recently, but I also recall the very significant dam (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam) that has been built in Ethiopia, which represents at the same time a game changer for the country in economic terms and a strategic issue for other nations. In conclusion, the Horn of Africa is more relevant than ever for international security, where we simultaneously see maritime connectivity, energy resilience, competition for influence among different actors, and internal fragmentation versus international cooperation.

There are so many different aspects, and complexity is really the name of the game as we see very unfortunate things developing, like the civil war in Sudan today. In light of this, we have asked a specialised African team to provide initial research, assisted by artificial intelligence.

The idea is that it could be used as a methodology to address crisis prevention and management in the future, and the study that we have asked for examines crisis dynamics, possible avenues of preventive diplomacy, and early warning indicators.

We have organised this workshop to study the future implications of those factors by exchanging perspectives on the challenges that are shaping the region. We have been able to bring together a large number of high-level speakers and moderators coming from different angles in order to offer presentations that represent a vast spectrum of points of view and experiences. As usual, the Foundation ambitiously aims to promote a conversation that is scientific, high-level, and respectful of different views.

We hope that we can figure out some common indicators of a reasonable direction to promote stability and to support the countries of the region. Finally, I wish to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione CSF, and the NATO Defense College. Many thanks also go to our media partners, Africa Confidential, Africa Express, and Adnkronos.

Biography

After having served at the Italian Embassy in Washington DC and as Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Italy in Prague, Ambassador **Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo** worked as Head of the External Relations Office of the EEC from 1981 to 1986. In the following years, his career focused on Europe and Space Policy. In 1997 he was appointed Diplomatic Counsellor of the Minister of Defence Beniamino Andreatta, then of his successors Carlo Scognamiglio and Sergio Mattarella. In 2000, Minuto-Rizzo held the position of Italian Ambassador to the Western European Union and to the Political and Security Committee of the EU, of which he was among the founding members. He was Deputy Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance between 2001 and 2007. His mandate was mostly carried out in the strategic-political industrial area and in the relations with sensitive countries such as those in the Gulf and the Southern Mediterranean. He is the author of the books: *The road to Kabul* (Il Mulino-Arel, 2009); *A political journey without maps. Diversity and future in the Greater Middle East* (Rubbettino, 2013); and *NATO and the Middle East: The Making of a Partnership* (New Academia Publishing, 2018).



Marjorie Apruzzese
LTC Air Force, Senior Research Advisor,
NATO Defense College (NDC), Rome

WELCOME REMARKS

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour for me to represent the NATO Defense College today as we dedicate this conference to such a strategic topic as the Horn of Africa. First, I would like to warmly thank the NATO Defense College Foundation for organising this event and for bringing together such a distinguished panel of experts.

The Horn of Africa has always been a crossroads between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as between Africa, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific. Today, it has become one of the world's most strategic regions, lying next to one of the world's most important maritime passages.

Recent events (the conflict in the Middle East, the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, and the resurgence of piracy off the coast of Somalia) have once again reminded us how developments in this region have a direct impact on our collective security and supply lines. Yet, the region continues to face many challenges, with terrorism remaining a persistent threat.

Tensions between states and within society continue to fuel instability, while humanitarian crises are worsening as a result of conflict, climate change, and food insecurity. In addition to these traditional challenges, the region is now facing hybrid threats, as well as growing attempts by both state and non-state actors to expand their influence – particularly Russia and China, which continue to strengthen their presence in the region.

While the context I have just described is well known to all of us, many fundamental questions remain. For example, how can we protect this region from the destabilising influence of our strategic competitors? How can we support the emergence of a regional hub centred on Ethiopia, a key actor in the Horn of Africa, to encourage a cooperative rather than a hegemonic regional vision?

And perhaps above all, how can we help reconcile communities that continue to pay the price of conflict, poor governance, and political fragmentation? These are just a few of the many questions that we must address together. In an interconnected world, the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa must be regarded as an integral part of Euro-Atlantic security. Since 2005, at the request of the African Union, NATO has been engaged in the region and has steadily strengthened its cooperation, particularly with the African Union. Today more than ever, this region deserves our collective attention.

This is precisely why we are today: to reflect on how our preventive diplomacy, strategic foresight, and stronger cooperation between the African Union, the European Union, and regional partners can help prevent crises, strengthen regional resilience, and promote African solutions to African challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Horn of Africa is not simply a region that we must observe; it is a region with which we must build lasting partnerships. Preserving its stability is a shared responsibility and an essential investment in our common Euro-Atlantic security. I am confident that today's discussion will deepen our understanding of this vital region.

Biography

Lieutenant-Colonel **Marjorie Apruzzese** is a specialist in strategic challenges with expertise in the Southern Flank. A former journalist who spent six years in New Caledonia gaining insights into local issues, she then took a strategic turn to enter the world of politics and defence. She worked at the heart of power as an Advisor, then as an Africa Analyst within the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, and most recently as Head of Private Office to Jean-Marie Bockel, the French President's Personal Envoy for Africa.



Nicoletta Pirozzi
Member of the Board of Directors, Fondazione CSF (Scientific Advisor Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo), Turin

WELCOME REMARKS

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this high-level workshop dedicated to one of the most strategically relevant regions in the Euro-Atlantic security: the Horn of Africa.

I am particularly pleased to do so in my capacity as a member of the Board of Directors of Fondazione CSF – with the privilege of serving as a scientific advisor to Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo – and to support this initiative alongside the NATO Defence College Foundation, the NATO Defence College, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Fondazione CSF has long been committed to promoting research and policy dialogue on international affairs, European integration, and global security. We believe that today's complex challenges require multidisciplinary analysis and sustained cooperation among institutions, academia, and practitioners. It is precisely in this spirit that we have enthusiastically contributed to this workshop.

The speakers before me have already addressed the centrality of the Horn of Africa in terms of its geopolitical position; developments in this region are no longer confined to the immediate neighbourhood, but they have direct implications for European security, global trade, energy supplies, and the resilience of international connectivity. In particular, when we talk about the maritime corridors that pass through this region, we have learned through recent crises how vulnerable these routes can be to geopolitical tensions, hybrid activities, and regional instability – with immediate consequences that extend well beyond the region itself. At the same time, security challenges in the region have become increasingly interconnected, creating a very complex security environment that requires integrated responses rather than isolated initiatives.

Addressing these challenges calls for stronger partnerships. NATO has progressively reinforced its engagement in the southern neighbourhood, while the European Union continues to play a very important role through its security, maritime, and capacity-building missions. Additionally, regional organisations, above all the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), are indispensable actors in promoting sustainable solutions. So, the real challenge is to strengthen cooperation among all these institutions while ensuring that local ownership remains at the centre of these initiatives.

This is why this programme is particularly timely. Our discussions will explore how deterrence and strategic resilience can reinforce stability in the Horn of Africa, how preventive diplomacy and innovative approaches, including AI-assisted analytical tools, can help anticipate crises before they escalate, and how strategic foresight can support more resilient regional and international partnerships. Ethiopia, as today's case study, offers a very important opportunity to reflect on how Africa-led solutions can contribute to addressing African security challenges.

I also think that the distinguished speakers gathered here and coming from different institutions, organisations, academia, and leading research centres, reflect the breadth of expertise that we need to tackle these complex issues today. Their presence confirms that no single institution can effectively address these interconnected security challenges alone. So, let me once again express my sincere gratitude to the NATO Defence College Foundation, and particularly to Ambassador Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo.

Biography

Nicoletta Pirozzi is Deputy Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). She works mainly on EU governance, political and institutional developments in European foreign, security and defence policy, civilian crisis management, EU relations with the United Kingdom and the United Nations. She is an Associate at the European Governance and Politics Programme of the European University Institute (EUI) in Fiesole. From 2013 to 2019, she was Adjunct Professor at Roma Tre University. In 2018, she was Associate Analyst at the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) in Paris and Marshall Memorial Fellow. In 2012, she served as Seconded National Expert at the European External Action Service (EEAS). She is a member of IAI's Steering Committee, and of the Scientific Board of the online journal Affarinternazionali. She graduated in Political Science at the University of Pisa and at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies. She also obtained an MSc degree in European Political and Administrative Studies from the College of Europe (Bruges) and a PhD in Institutions and Politics at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. She is author and editor of a number of publications, and an active member of various research associations and institutions. Her latest book *L'Europa matura* has been published by Linkiesta Books in May 2024.



OPENING REMARKS

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Source: Windward





Sem Fabrizi
Ambassador of Italy to Ethiopia, accredited to Djibouti, South Sudan and IGAD, Embassy of Italy, Addis Ababa

OPENING REMARKS

I would like to thank Ambassador Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo – a colleague, friend, and mentor – and the NATO Defense College for their invitation. The Horn of Africa is an extended crossroads of many different streams of work: Eastern Africa, Central Africa, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific. It also overlooks the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea. All these elements make the Horn of Africa one of the key security areas where we must focus our attention. Its significance is not just geographical; it is clearly increasingly geostrategic. While this is a dynamic area, an area that is growing and has an outward outlook, we see a number of different layers of dynamism and competition at stake.

There is an intra-Africa dynamic: access to resources, energy corridors, access to the sea, management of the Nile Basin, development of digital infrastructure, and the defence of supply chains. There are also other challenges linked to demographic growth, illegal migration, and outbreak of non-transmittable

diseases, such as the recent Ebola outbreak. On the Horn of Africa sea, there is a strong projection of influence from countries in the Gulf and the Middle East, both on land and in the Red Sea, as seen in Somaliland. We also have a competing interest from third countries seeking maritime routes that remain open to trade flows by establishing ports, military bases, and maritime infrastructure, including submarine cables.

There is a level of cooperation centred around the African Union, with an increasing number of bilateral agreements and initiatives to foster peace, dialogue, and cooperation. In short, it is necessary to examine the Horn of Africa as having both a land and a maritime dimension (as Ambassador Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo said), considering the influence of the Gulf and the Middle East, and the role of the Red Sea as a global lifeline for trade.

I think it is positive that the region is increasingly of interest to NATO, particularly within the southern neighbourhood dimension of NATO, a concept developed over the last couple of decades. It is also important to remember that back in 2015, NATO established a military liaison office in Ethiopia as well as an operational desk based at the headquarter of the African Union. We need to think about the Horn of Africa as a continuous linchpin with other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, Central Asia, and the Red Sea. The 360-degree approach to deterrence and defence was indeed reaffirmed in the Ankara Declaration on 8 July 2026.

As Ambassador of Italy to Ethiopia – and accredited to Djibouti, South Sudan, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) – let me give some more detail on Ethiopia. Situated at the centre of the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is a gifted, mid-sized country in terms of its location. It is also the seat of the African Union and is widely recognised as the diplomatic capital of Africa, influential in the African Union, IGAD, and beyond. Ethiopia is a dynamic country with a large and growing population estimated at around 130 million people, and is naturally set as an anchor of the Horn of Africa. It is naturally involved and cooperating in development with its bordering countries: Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia.

When you look at security engagement, economic partnerships, migration, health issues and peace development, you have to recognise the role of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is engaged in a vast domestic reform process supported by the World Bank and international partners like Italy, who believe it is important to develop and support sustainable and inclusive growth. Of course, Ethiopia also has its security priorities and is developing a domestic strategy focused on energy and food independence, certainly in response or reaction to what is happening globally. Last month, Ethiopia went through a successful, widely participated,

and peaceful electoral process, despite some domestic issues linked to the ethnic dynamics in the country and some international challenges, such as tensions with Eritrea.

If I look at international Ethiopia, it also has an ambitious plan to integrate itself and consequently the region into the global arena. Next year, Ethiopia will host the 2027 UN Climate Change Conference (COP32). It is engaged in accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), is part of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and since January 2024, has been part of BRICS. Ethiopia is an active member of the United Nations – one of the largest contributors in the region – and currently serves as a member of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

From my position here in Addis Ababa since the end of last year, I can say that Addis Ababa is at the centre of an extremely busy international agenda, with a succession of high-level political visits from all quarters of the international arena. Considering its strategic importance and influence on the Nile Basin, the instability of the country's neighbours – such as Sudan and South Sudan – and the influence of these crises, one understands why Addis Ababa is an increasingly important global capital for politics and security.

Italy and Ethiopia have a very close historical relation, and our political dialogue is currently at its highest level. We have had the fortunate privilege of having the Prime Minister of Italy three times in Ethiopia in the last three years. We have accelerated and consolidated our diplomatic, development, economic, and social ties. Ethiopia remains at the forefront of the Mattei Plan, which provides the framework for institutional and political relations between Italy and Africa. Recently, in February this year, Ethiopia and Addis Ababa were Italy's co-partners in hosting the second Italy-Africa Summit.

If I zoom out from Ethiopia and move to the Horn of Africa, Italy has a historically strong footprint in the area. The Red Sea is an area through which more than 40% of our maritime trade flows pass. Is it clear that the Horn of Africa represents one of Italy's key security priorities, and we are engaged in ensuring peace, growth, and stability in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. We have a military base in Djibouti and military contingents in Somalia. We are participating in European naval operations (both EUNAVFOR ASPIDES and EUNAVFOR ATALANTA) and possibly in the future, when the situation allows, also in the Strait of Hormuz. We work closely with the African Union and regional organisations such as IGAD, and we are supporting a more proactive engagement by the European Union in the area to be a trusted regional partner.

As a final comment, we have to work with a regional approach in mind. We need to support Africa solutions for African problems. There are a number of

hotspots in the region that, if unchecked, are ready to radiate their negative impacts all over the region and beyond. We need to take into consideration that there are a number of spoilers in place. The current crisis in the Strait of Hormuz has not impacted the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea particularly severely so far. It is clear that preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention are needed, and I am glad that this aspect will be dealt with in the upcoming two sessions.

Biography

Sem Fabrizi is a senior Italian diplomat with a wide range of leadership experience and skills gained over three decades of international assignments. Until August 2026 he was the Italian Ambassador to Ethiopia, with accreditation to Djibouti, South Sudan, and IGAD. He has previously held senior postings as a diplomat for the European Union, including two appointments as EU Ambassador to Republic of Serbia and, previously, to the Commonwealth of Australia. He holds experience in business as he was seconded from the Italian MFA to the Defence Leonardo Group as international relations Director. He spent several years as a diplomatic advisor to the President of the European Council in Brussels, and earlier to the Prime Minister of Italy in Rome. His areas of expertise cover EU affairs, trade, development, environment, defence and security, IP, global governance (G7/G20) and multilateral affairs. He has worked extensively in multicultural and multilingual environments in Brussels/EU, Geneva UN/WTO, Beijing, Canberra, the Western Balkans and in the Horn of Africa.



Alessandro Politi
Director of NDCF

POLITICAL SUMMARY

The continuation of the civil war in Ethiopia, after its first phase concluded in 1022, has upended for the time being most of the assumptions regarding the Horn of Africa. In the longer term, African ownership, through regional organizations like the African Union and IGAD remains central to peace effort as well as effective partnerships with NATO, the EU and local communities. Equally important for preventing further crises are credible institutions, resilient governance, economic development, and community trust.

The predictive platform developed for NDCF under a contract of the Italian MFA by an African team, led by dr. Bagayoko, correctly anticipated the continuation of a second phase of the Ethiopian civil war, but blended threats like piracy (again on the rise due to general lack of control) and extremism (especially in the Somali region) require also comprehensive security, governance and strategic communication measures. Conflicts in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Yemen risk to become increasingly linked, creating wildfire-like risks for broader regional spillover and escalation, leading rapid, widespread violence across the Horn. The problem is that conflict prediction should translate into prompt interventions, but political and capacity barriers often delay action.

Italy has invested considerable nation building efforts vis-à-vis Ethiopia, the most important country in the region and seat of the African Union, because it sits astride a vital crossroads connecting North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific; in fact, its maritime routes and energy corridors are crucial for global trade, security and energy resilience (particularly for European and Mediterranean countries). Notwithstanding the actual conflict situation and some minor setbacks, one of the priorities is to give more political content to the Mattei Plan, because it pragmatically started as an economic and energy diversification plan.

On the one hand, it is important to consider that the Horn of Africa is closely connected to the Arabic Peninsula, especially Yemen, as demonstrated by the latest Iran-Israel-USA war, through its repercussions on the security of the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. By the way, what seems a new security linkage, compared to the Cold War situation where Yemen seemed detached from the African continent, is in reality a long-standing factor since the beginning of the XX century (British wars in English Somaliland against the "mad mullah", indirectly threatening Aden).

On the other hand, Ethiopia's security depends on an access to the sea, the port of Assab (in addition to the existing link to Djibouti), still not granted by Eritrea, for serious political reasons. In the Red Sea, maritime stability depends on coastal community stability, fair fishing practices, capable maritime institutions, and regional cooperation in piracy and trafficking prevention.

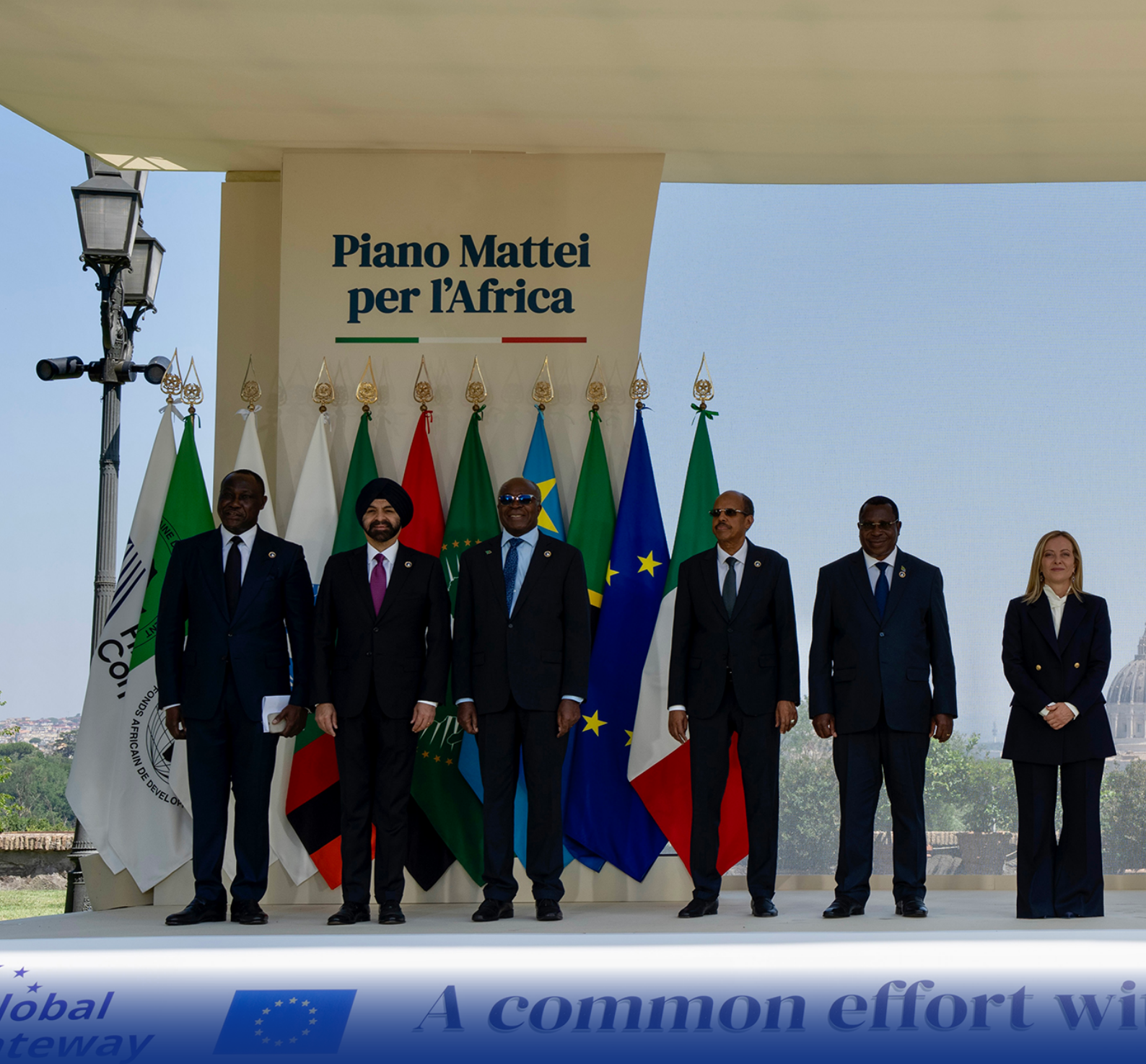
Unfortunately, external mediation by the African Union, the United Nations, the UAE and/or the United States to secure a ceasefire in the current civil war (aggravated by a risk of a war with Eritrea) is less likely over the next nine months.

At the same time, one should consider that, while the anti-government coalition is active, but fragmented, the governmental Prosperity Party could collapse if the vital access to Gibuti might be cut by Tigrayan and/or Afari guerrillas. It is a low probability, high impact scenario that should be prudently kept in mind, at least to organise the rescue of trapped civilians and minimise casualties.

The end of the civil war in Ethiopia could be an important opportunity to start untangling the Horn's complex regional conflicts and to employ integrated approaches, combining diplomacy, development and military efforts. In sum, building regional resilience includes strengthening governance, investing in youth, and fostering regional cooperation to prevent conflict resumption or escalation.

Biography

Alessandro Politi is Director of the NATO Defense College Foundation. A specialist in political and strategic affairs, he has worked with different top decision makers in Italy and abroad both in public institutions and private companies. He teaches geo-economics and intelligence at the Italian PwC/IASSP think tank in Milan.



What is needed to build a sustainable regional security architecture in the Horn of Africa that **deters conflict** and **strengthens resilience**?



SESSION I
Deterrence and Strategic Resilience in the Horn of Africa

The family photo at 'The Mattei Plan for Africa and the Global Gateway: A common effort with the African Continent' Summit.

Source: Governo Italiano Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

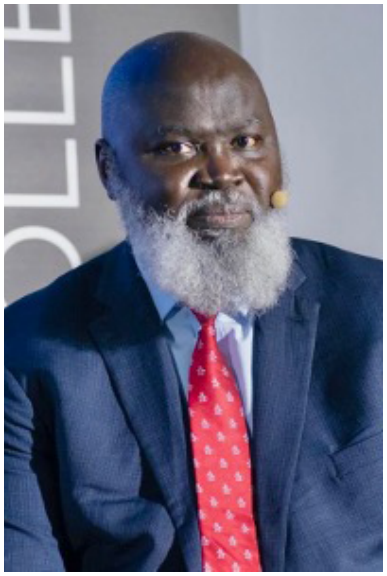
“Partnership, coordination,
and integration are essential,
but another important
and strategic actor is civil society.
It is really about the role of
communities and people in the
Horn of Africa, and how they can play
an active role, not just be a sort of
receiver or passive element
nominated by great regional actors, but,
at the end of the day, have the capacity
to become real operators.”



CHAIR
Francesca Fraccaroli
Chief Global Security Information Centre,
UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS),
New York City

Biography

Francesca Fraccaroli currently serves as Chief of the Global Security Information Centre at the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in New York. With over two decades of international experience across complex emergency, peacekeeping, and humanitarian settings, she specialises in strategic communications, conflict analysis, protection of civilians, and crisis management. Throughout her distinguished career within the United Nations, she has held senior leadership and advisory roles in high-risk environments such as Yemen, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan (Darfur), and Syria. Her expertise spans leading large-scale humanitarian operations, designing strategic early warning mechanisms, managing gender and protection policies, and coordinating complex crisis responses, including public health emergencies. Prior to joining the United Nations, she worked as an international journalist and Middle East correspondent for major media outlets, including Associated Press and RAI, covering major geopolitical conflicts in Iraq, Gaza, and across the broader region.



El Hadji Ibrahima Diene
Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia (SRCC); Head of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia, African Union, Addis Ababa

AFRICAN UNION PERSPECTIVES ON STRATEGIC RESILIENCE, DETERRENCE, AND PARTNERSHIP IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

My predecessor already said it clearly: all of Africa is very strategic. It is not only about Africa; it is also about global peace, global trade, and global maritime security. We need to open the lens to have a broader understanding. From the African Union angle, you hear about African solutions to African problems. We believe that African security issues need African leadership and strong partnerships; I wanted to emphasise that.

Deterrence and strategic resilience cannot be sustained if they are not built on legitimate national institutions supported by strong international partnerships. We need resilient societies and trusted regional partnerships to work together. In the Horn of Africa, deterrence strictly conceived as just kinetic military activities will not be enough. We need more than that, because the threat is hybrid. It is also about piracy and maritime crime, violent extremism, and state fragility.

We also have extreme climate fragility and humanitarian vulnerability, alongside competition over the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb. I would like to insist that, to be effective, deterrence in the Horn of Africa should comprise very credible national security institutions, capable regional security mechanisms, resilient governance, economic opportunities for young people and local communities, strong community resilience against violent extremism, and trusted strategic communication against misinformation and disinformation. The greatest deterrence is to ensure that the population has trust in its constitution.

I would like to quickly use Somalia as a case study to highlight some aspects. Since 2007, the African Union has been in Somalia, evolving from the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) to where we are today. This long engagement has seen significant evolution, not only at the security and political levels, but also in institutional capacity. I believe that we have seen stronger Somali ownership and leadership, strengthened national institutions, closer coordination between the federal government, the African Union, and international partners, as well as a gradual transfer of responsibility to the Somali state. The AU mission is not only a military mission; we have four strategic priorities:

- Deterring and defeating Al-Shabaab;
- Supporting stabilisation, local governance, and state institutions;
- Protecting civilians;
- Creating a safe and conducive environment for humanitarian action in partnership with humanitarian actors.

All of this requires the sustainment of our actions. We have established a unique tripartite partnership between the AU, the UN, and the federal government. This partnership allows us to have political leadership, military operational coordination planning together, and benefitting from the logistics support provided by the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS).

Hybrid threats require integrated responses. We need to make sure that we are bringing together all misinformation, intelligence, diplomacy, technology, strategic communication, law enforcement, and development policy. So, resilience should also be built within society, as local communities are the first line of defence. We need to invest in local communities and address the growth of all these issues. If not, we will not have it.

Furthermore, we need to invest in early warning and rapid response mechanisms. Today, a lot of technology is available to better manage and use data to help us understand what is happening, anticipate what may happen, and

respond effectively to prevent: because prevention is cheaper and more effective than having this action.

Maritime security is regional security. We cannot talk about the Red Sea without stable coastal communities, just and equitable fishing, capable national maritime institutions, interoperable coastguard capacity, regional information-sharing, coordinated action against piracy and trafficking, and, most importantly, a thriving blue economy. Hope must be provided; otherwise, our investments will not yield results.

I believe that partnerships also must be based on comparative advantage and added value. We need to make sure that partners need to align with the priorities defined by host countries and local communities to avoid wasted effort. We need to build local capacity, avoid duplication and competition, and strengthen regional institutions. In the African Union, we are talking about subsidiarity and complementarity to ensure that regional economic communities and institutions are utilised according to their level of capacity and development. So, we need to make sure that we are exactly doing that.

Partnership, as demonstrated by the African Union since 2007, needs to be forward-looking. We will not get results as quickly as we wish; we need to invest in the long-term to improve operational effectiveness, accountability, and institution-building.

Looking forward, the Horn of Africa has immense potential. I think we need to build the capacity to prevent crises rather than respond to them through effective governance, inclusive growth, resilient institutions, resilient communities, and hope for the next generation.

I wish that the African Union remains committed to working with Somalia, the Horn of Africa, and all international partners to ensure that peace is not only restored, but sustained. We must collectively invest in deterring conflict while building demonstrated capacity and resilience to anticipate, absorb, and recover from threats and conflicts.

Biography

Mr. **El Hadji Ibrahima Diene**, a Senegalese national, is a seasoned leader with over three decades of experience in military operations, diplomacy, and peacekeeping across Africa and beyond. Since April 2025, he has been serving as the SRCC and Head of AUSSOM, leading efforts to promote peace and stability in Somalia. Before his current role, he served as Chief of Staff at the United Nations Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and previously with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), where he also held several senior positions, including Head of Regional Office in Kidal, Chief JOC, and Principal Political Affairs Officer. A former Senior Officer and Pilot in the Senegalese Air Force (1989–2013), Mr. Diene has participated in multiple peacekeeping missions, notably in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Syria. Mr. Diene served in various positions at the tactical, operational and strategic level, both within and outside of Senegal, thus developed solid experience and a strong background knowledge on conflicts and crisis resolution strategies in West, Central and East Africa. He holds multiple Master degrees and diplomas in Military Studies, Political Science, Aeronautics, and Programme Management, with advanced training from prestigious institutions such as the Air Command and Staff College (2003) and the Air War College (2009).



Giuseppe Mistretta
Former Director for Sub-Saharan Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome

A CHANGING HORN: CONFLICT LEGACIES AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

As we have mentioned several times, there are ongoing tensions and problems in the Horn of Africa. Let us go a little deeper into this subject. What are the main tensions in the Horn of Africa today, and what can we do to prevent them from escalating further?

In my opinion, the three major tensions are as follows. First is the possible resurgence of a war in Tigray. The war in Tigray is not over; it was never truly resolved by the Pretoria Agreement. And the tensions in Ethiopia are growing once again: not only in Tigray, but also in two of the country's other main regions, Oromia and Amhara. So, this is the primary concern because if a war in Tigray starts again, it will concern not only Ethiopia and Tigray, but the entire region and external spoilers.

The second main problem is Ethiopia's request to have access to the Red Sea. We all know that the situation in the Red Sea is particularly tense now, also

because of the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz. It deserves the maximum attention because having a new access to the Red Sea provokes further tensions among the main actors of the region. Ethiopia is a landlocked country, and Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan are very concerned about this potential access. Having a new partner in that very fragile condominium is extremely difficult and could provoke new instability in the region.

Furthermore, Ethiopia is currently asking access to the Red Sea solely based on natural right – the natural right of a country that has 130 million people and is landlocked. However, international law does not foresee a natural right per se of access to the sea. Under international law, as I recall from my studies, there would need to be an agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, followed by a referendum in the contested area, and then the approval from the United Nations and the African Union. Considering all the problematic situations in the region, it does not seem possible at present to reach such an agreement or hold a referendum, making this another source of severe tension.

And the last one is the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which from the beginning has drawn disagreement from Egypt. Egypt depends on the water of the Nile and fears that the full operation of the dam could damage the flow of the Nile River to Cairo and the Mediterranean.

So, if we in Europe, NATO, the African Union, and beyond do not make the maximum effort to resolve these three main sources of tension in the future, the risk of another conflict is very real.

To say something in positive terms, we have the Mattei Plan (Piano Mattei). Italy has a role to play in the region because it is widely recognised for its past collaboration and cooperation. I believe that now the Mattei Plan has the limitation of being a purely financial experiment and should be more political. There is no political and governance chapter in the Mattei Plan. What I always say in these circumstances – as I do not represent any institution – is that I believe the Mattei Plan can exert a better role if there is a political and governance side of it, which currently, in my view, are non-existent.

Biography

Ambassador **Giuseppe Mistretta** served as Italy's Ambassador to Angola (2009–2014) and Ethiopia (2014–2017) and has spent more than twenty years of his professional career in Africa. He has also served in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the United States, Libya and the United Kingdom. In recent years, he was Director for Sub-Saharan Africa at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. He is the author of several books, including *A Bridge Spanning Four Centuries* (2013), *Angola: A Modern Country at the Heart of Africa* (2014), *I Noti Ospiti* (2018), *Africa's Pathways* (2021), and *Tigray, the Invisible War* (2024), published by Luiss University Press. He has also contributed to leading Italian newspapers, including *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera*, as well as the monthly magazine *Capital*.



Fabio Massimo Ballerini
Counsellor, Office of the Diplomatic Adviser to the Prime Minister and Mattei Plan for Africa Task Force, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Rome

GATEWAY CONNECTIVITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCE: ITALY'S PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

At the second Italy-Africa Summit held in Addis Ababa, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni stressed that the strategy for the Mattei Plan has now been flashed out and established. It took time to create a new financial architecture to ensure that the project could be carried out, but we now have the opportunity to make it a more political strategy. This was highlighted in her intervention at the summit on the 13th of February 2026. Furthermore, her presence as an honoured guest at the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government serves as testimony that the African nations and the main continental organisation hope the Mattei Plan can develop into a political strategy that works effectively alongside partner nation.

However, I would not underestimate the importance of finance. Money is crucial, especially regarding connectivity, infrastructure, and regional integration.

Under the Mattei Plan for Africa, Italy increased its contributions by 25%:

- International Development Association (IDA): 733 million euros allocated at the end of 2024;
- African Development Fund: 387 million euros added (a 25% increase);
- Total Combined Allocation: 1,12 billion euros.

This is particularly significant at a time when Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding is declining, and we hear about the damage that these cuts are having on projects from the non-governmental organisation we work with every day. So, part of this money is basically focused on the Horn of Africa.

As some of the most concessional windows of multilateral development banks, these funds support major infrastructural projects without overburdening the fiscal space of countries facing long-standing fiscal challenges (thanks to near to zero interest rates and very long repayment periods). This is simply to highlight that the political perspective is important. We will have to work on that, but at the same time, I do not think that we can have any credibility if the money is not there.

I would also like to stress the partnership we have been building with the European Union. The Mattei Plan and Global Gateway, which were mentioned at the first Italy-Africa Summit in January 2024, were intended from the outset to work together. We managed to do so, especially last year, with a summit hosted in Rome on 20 June, where Prime Minister Meloni and President von der Leyen welcomed a number of African authorities.

Regarding connectivity and infrastructure in the Horn of Africa, that summit produced a tangible result by securing financing for the extension and continuation of the Blue Raman digital cable, which runs from Trieste to India, passing through Djibouti. In perspective, this will link Kenya, Mombasa, and Tanzania with Dar es Salaam and, possibly, if the situation allows, Mogadishu in Somalia, thereby connecting the region.

Another flagship initiative under the Mattei Plan is the AI Hub for Sustainable Development hosted in Rome and managed to secure the development of 7.000 startups across Africa, mostly in Ethiopia and Kenya.

In the Horn of Africa, many tensions stem from:

- Small, poorly integrated markets;
- Fragile financial systems;
- Inadequate logistics chains in the context of very poor regional infrastructure that do not work.

The digital revolution and the digital challenge are among the most pressing issues, and I think that, in the Horn of Africa region, helping these countries, as well as businesses and the private sector in this area can also help reduce tensions and move towards shared prosperity.

Not to be too rhetorical, but alongside infrastructure, connectivity, funding, and the political perspective, we also have to think about small steps and de facto solidarity, which was mentioned 70 years ago here in Europe and provided a very good example of integration. The situation is different, and the tensions are probably much more deeply rooted, as Ambassador Giuseppe Mistretta pointed out.

We are very worried about what could happen between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and that is precisely why we all need to work together and make sure that the funding put on the table and these projects can contribute to a common objective.

Biography

Counsellor **Fabio Massimo Ballerini** is an Italian diplomat and currently served as a Senior Official within the Mission Structure responsible for implementing the Mattei Plan at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. A graduate in Political Science and International Relations from Luiss University in Rome, he joined the Italian Diplomatic Service in 2012. Throughout his career, he has held diplomatic assignments in Dakar, Mogadishu and San Francisco, and has also served at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in the Directorate-General for the European Union and the Directorate-General for Global Affairs. His professional experience combines expertise in Africa, international cooperation, global affairs and Italy's engagement with key regional and international partners.



Luca Miehe
Chef de Cabinet, EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, European External Action Service (EEAS), Brussels

REASSESSING JOINT VISION 2030: THE EUROPEAN UNION AND REGIONAL SECURITY

The strategic relevance of the Horn of Africa has been well described. To put it in layman's terms from a European perspective, the Horn of Africa is our neighbour, and we feel it when the Horn of Africa is undergoing changes – both positive and negative. Words noted down from previous speakers include hope, solidarity, and hybrid threats. Those who have worked on this region for some time can all remember 2018, when there was a moment of hope, new beginnings, and transitions; which was probably the key word. Today, however, we look at a different diagnosis: states are fragmenting, crises are regionalising, and threats and conflicts are modernising with new tools, equipment and strategies.

If I look at the theme of this panel and the work we do in the European Union, I find many entry points regarding deterrence and strategic resilience. Deterrence, first of all, depends heavily on the question of what we are trying to deter. There

are many threats, and there will be many different answers to them. For example, we have our own soldiers and boats in the region responding to threats through two Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions at sea, which are more relevant than ever. Having responded initially to the threat of piracy, they are now responding to the threat of the Houthis and expanding their mandates to tackle illicit flows of arms and equipment. We need to be nimble and adapt; it is not always easy with a union of 27 Member States plus the institutions, but we try our best and have been swift with our operational speeders.

Strategic resilience is another important factor. Echoing the previous speaker, it is partly about money, but not only. We see the Horn of Africa as a region with one of the lowest levels of economic integration. While we have regional institutions and our reflex is always to stand by their side, this low level of integration remains part of the diagnosis. At that moment of hope in 2018, we co-launched the Horn of Africa Initiative alongside our partners from the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the region itself to push forward the joint benefits of regional cooperation. Eight years later, the finance ministers of the region continue to meet four times every year under this initiative to discuss joint projects, even in times of tension: something we need to capitalise on.

It would be remiss not to add a third element: regional security and regional security architectures. In the Horn of Africa, as well as in the wider Red Sea space, we see a region where this security architecture is lacking. A lot of diplomatic work is necessary to complement development efforts, address the drivers of the threats we try to deter, and apply strategic resilience measures. We value our cooperation with regional institutions immensely; over the last four years, our travels have become increasingly regional, always asking partners the same question: what is the common interest and shared objective?

This is why we need to be nimble: the different conflicts we work on require us to play different roles. Sometimes we revert to direct mediation; at other times, we rally behind our partners – such as steadily supporting the African Union and the AU mission in Somalia or asking the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for guidance and advice on where we can be helpful in South Sudan. In the Red Sea, the situation is much more complicated and involves many more stakeholders, but we still have a role to play.

Ultimately, there is a specific experience that we bring to the table as Europeans: one of integration. Having faced painful experiences, we overcame them by collectivising the discussion and engaging in joint exercises of trust-building. Expanding connectivity is part of that process. We try to incentivise regional partners by asking what joint projects and joint institutions can focus

their minds on what they want to achieve together, an experience we offer as the EU alongside our 27 strong Member States.

Biography

Luca Miehe is Chief of Staff in the Cabinet of the European Union Special Representative for the Horn of Africa. He previously served as Political Adviser to the EU Special Representative, supporting political analysis, policy coordination and the European Union's engagement across the region. Before joining the European External Action Service, he worked at the Munich Security Conference as a Researcher and Policy Adviser, and at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik), where he contributed to research within the Africa and Middle East Division. He also gained professional experience with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the German Federal Foreign Office. He holds both a Master and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Freie Universität Berlin.



Alberto Munisso
Senior Analyst, Knowledge & Engagement Branch, NATO Strategic Direction South Hub, Naples

THE RED SEA – HORN – MEDITERRANEAN COMPLEX: ECONOMIC VULNERABILITIES, HYBRID PRESSURE AND STRATEGIC RESILIENCE

I would like to introduce my intervention by saying that when considering the Mediterranean Sea, one recognises how it is characterised by a network of relations among countries, usually around trade routes, which is the main topic of my analysis. Presently, trade routes are being displaced by the current situation because access to the Mediterranean Sea becomes somewhat contested. There are three main accesses: the Suez Canal, the Strait of Gibraltar, and the Turkish Straits (comprising the Strait of Çanakkale (Dardanelles), the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus Strait).

Focussing on the Suez Canal, maritime transit is currently facing some challenges. Due to these difficulties, maritime trade has plummeted by around 60 to 65%, because ships are now practically passing by the Cape. This is the main issue, as adding 3.000 to 3.500 nautical miles of navigation results in 10 to 15 days more at sea, costing a lot of money.

Why is this happening? It occurs because there are spillovers of the Iranian crisis. The first main spillover creates a double chokepoint scenario: the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, blocking trade, combined with instability in the Red Sea. This endangers, specifically, the trade of oil. In fact, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has decreased the oil trade through that passage by 70%, pushing prices beyond 100 dollars per barrel.

Instability in the Red Sea is motivated by non-state actors, specifically the Houthis in Yemen, and also other actors such as Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa and violent extremist groups that are active and may have ties to the maritime environment. Houthis, specifically, received drones from Iran in the past, which is why they are highly likely using these assets to create problems at sea.

Going back to violent groups, we are seeing a resurgence of piracy, with 24 pirate attacks occurring in the Horn of Africa in the last three or four months. For example, the recent hijacking of tankers Honour 25 and Eureka, and of the cargo ships Sward. Why do I focus on piracy? Piracy creates danger at sea that has consequences, but it is not just a maritime issue; it is also a land issue, because pirates live on land. If we see the peaks of pirate attacks in the Horn of Africa, we will discover a story of protection on land. This is why, from the NATO perspective, security architecture agreements like the Yaoundé Architecture in West Africa are interesting in the pirate environment, as Allied member states could do something more here in terms of training and understanding how to cope with maritime dangers.

In conclusion, all this insecurity, piracy, and attacks from violent extremist groups, (mostly the Houthis) have a cost on maritime trade affecting both NATO countries and others. These costs include spot freight rates that are up to 25% or higher, and insurance companies that have practically doubled their fees on cargo and personnel on the vessels. Most importantly, this cost falls on African countries:

- Egypt has lost several billion US dollars in revenues from the Suez Canal;
- Ethiopia faces issues with foreign influences coming from Middle East countries regarding the Ethiopian-Sudan conflict;
- Tunisia and Morocco, as net oil importers, face higher oil prices;
- Libya and Algeria are producers of energy.

Given that all these disturbances will last for a long time, the situation has changed, and our potential partners in Africa are now facing new realities. As the organisation I represent (NATO Strategic Direction South Hub), we should keep understanding and engaging with them to understand their challenges and find new opportunities to work together.

Biography

Alberto Munisso is a Senior Analyst at the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub (NSD-S Hub) in Naples. He has taken part in international forums on African peace and security, including the African Peace and Security Annual Conference (APSACO). Before joining NATO, he worked at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva as an Associate Economic Affairs Officer in the Landlocked Developing Countries Section. There he was part of the team that developed UNCTAD's Productive Capacities Index (PCI) and supported statistical capacity-building for structurally weak and vulnerable economies, contributing statistics and analysis to global publication data. He also co-authored, with Giovanni Valensisi, the chapter "The Small, the Landlocked, and the Island: Geography and International Trade in Africa," published in Illusions of Location Theory: Consequences for Blue Economy in Africa (Vernon Press). He holds a Master of Science (MSc) in Economics from the University of Rome Tor Vergata.

How can

anticipatory diplomacy

bridge the gap

between identifying

emerging risks

and translating

early warning

into timely

and effective

preventive action?



SESSION II
Pre-Emptive Diplomacy and Hybrid Anticipatory Action: Case Study Ethiopia

The African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, home to NATO's Liaison Office to the African Union.

Source: Office of the President of Rwanda



“Regional alliances are constantly shifting, and we are seeing a lot of ‘frenemies’ at times, which can create both opportunities and challenges for Ethiopia amid the civil war in Sudan.”



CHAIR

Gaja Pellegrini-Bettoli

Independent Journalist and Author, Rome

Biography

Gaja Pellegrini-Bettoli's focus areas are US politics and the Middle East, where she has lived for the past five years. An independent analyst and journalist, she produced video footage from Mosul for Italian TV while covering the battle to oust IS in Iraq. She conducted numerous interviews with Al Qaeda and IS jihadists including documentaries on de-radicalisation partially filmed inside Beirut's Roumieh prison. She is a regular TV guest commentator on the US and the Middle East for the Italian national channels Mediaset, RAI, Sky etc. Her interviews have included: Lebanese Ministers, political leaders, leading businessmen, as well as political interviews in Iraq, Algeria and Libyan ministers. Her articles appear on: *Carnegie*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Middle East Eye*, *Zenith Magazine*, *Al-Monitor*, *SyriaDeeply*, *The New Arab*, *EU Observer*, *France24*, *Al-Arabiya English*, *Opendemocracy*, *Corriere della Sera* and *Limes*, Italy's main geopolitical magazine among others. She holds a MSc. in Economic History from the London School of Economics and a BA in Political Science from Italy. Previously, she was posted in Gaza with the UN, and was a press officer for the European Commission and assistant at the European Parliament in Brussels. She is bilingual (English/Italian) and is fluent in French and Spanish. She is the author of *Generazione Senza Padri* (Castelvecchi publisher, 2019), a book about living in the Middle East today. She authored a second book on the United States election system *Shake-up America* (Castelvecchi publisher, 2020).



Niagalé Bagayoko
Chair, African Security Sector Network (ASSN), Paris

A CONSTELLATION APPROACH TO PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY: THE NDCF ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK ON ETHIOPIA

I am pleased to present the platform developed alongside the NATO Defense College Foundation (NDCF) at the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We have created the Ethiopia AI Decision Support Dashboard – a comprehensive analytical tool designed around the principle that a 360-degree perspective is essential to understanding any nation. To achieve this, the platform is structured into four core quadrants containing rich datasets.

The **first quadrant** examines the **institutional framework**. This section compiles detailed operational intelligence across government, parliament, local authorities, and national defence capabilities. Within the government subsection, for instance, users can review profiles of key executive figures – such as President Taye Atske Selassie – and examine detailed biographical data for individual ministers, such as Hanna Araya Selassie. Furthermore, the framework categorises leadership profiles according to whether officials operate primarily

as technocrats, reformists, or security-oriented figures. Beyond executive governance, this quadrant tracks defence inventory, including Ethiopia's active combat drone arsenal alongside cyber, telecom, and smart city infrastructure.

The **second quadrant** addresses the **informal sphere** – a crucial yet frequently overlooked dimension necessary for understanding a country's security, political, and social dynamics. Key components under this quadrant include:

- **The Religious Landscape**: Mapping religious authorities, inter-religious relations, intra-faith dynamics, and primary institutions such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, alongside the expanding influence of Protestant and Evangelical movements.
- **Armed Groups and Militias**: Detailed mapping of non-state actors, rebel factions, and their underlying leadership structures.

The **third quadrant** investigates the **informational space**. This domain evaluates official state media and public services, which maintain a dominant position in the domestic landscape, alongside the digital sphere. Within social networks, analytical tracking demonstrates that platforms such as TikTok are expanding rapidly and exhibiting explosive growth in user reach.

The **fourth quadrant** analyses the **international arena**, structured around interstate relations, major bilateral partnerships (including Italy and Germany), and regional actor dynamics across Africa Union and Arab countries. Additionally, it maps active geopolitical friction points, such as dispute dynamics over the Nile waters with Egypt, the Memorandum of Understanding crisis with Somalia, and regional tensions involving Eritrea and Sudan.

Finally, the dashboard incorporates a **forward assessment** matrix based on integrated risk indicators. The most probable high-impact scenario identified within this matrix is a multi-front armed offensive – an outcome consistent with current ambassadorial assessments. Concurrently, the predictive model highlights potential de-escalation pathways via US diplomatic mediation, while pointing to an ongoing risk of internal political fractures within the ruling party.

Biography

Niagalé Bagayoko is a political scientist. She has done extensive field research on security systems in African Francophone countries, Western security policies (France, United States, European Union) in Africa and African conflict-management mechanisms, focusing on the interface between security and development. From 2010 to 2015, she managed the "peacekeeping and peacebuilding programme" at the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) and was a member of the Scientific Committee of the French IRSEM (Institut de recherches stratégiques de l'Ecole militaire). She is currently Chair of the African Security Sector Network (ASSN) and teaches at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Science Po) in Paris.



Nicola Minasi
Head of the Crisis Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome

ITALY'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT APPROACH: PREPAREDNESS, REQUIREMENTS, AND RESULTS

The Crisis Unit's role is to help Italians in need in case of serious danger. It intervenes in the event of terrorist attacks, kidnappings for terrorist purposes, and evacuations in cases of war. In recent years, for example, the Crisis Unit carried out the evacuation of approximately 100 Italian citizens from Khartoum following the outbreak of civil war in April 2023, and conducted subsequent evacuations from Niger in July 2023. There have also been cases of kidnapping on the continent, mainly in the Sahel, as well as a history of kidnappings in Somalia, including cases involving pirates.

The core objective of our unit is to assess situations in advance and obtain as much early warning as possible of potential crises, allowing it to intervene in time to help nationals leave, alert colleagues, and maintain contact. Against this background, the experience of Fabio Massimo Ballerini, a colleague formerly posted in Mogadishu, provided an opportunity for exchanges on similar

situations. This is very helpful in terms of gathering information and presenting it in a usable way. At the same time, the development of such efforts in recent years demonstrates how difficult it remains to make them fully operational.

Similar tools have also been tested within the Crisis Unit, providing a number of lessons that could be shared. However, no definitive answer has yet been found on how to use artificial intelligence or open-source information effectively for this purpose.

In security matters, there is usually the principle of the "need to know", meaning that only those who genuinely need access to confidential or classified information should be granted it. In this type of work, however, there is another kind of "need to know": understanding what information is actually necessary in order to operate effectively.

This is not a given. It takes time to understand what is not known and what needs to be explored. Most of the information is already available through open sources. The challenge is to determine how to use those sources to identify the "needle in the haystack": the weak signal indicating that something may be about to change. For example, following the invasion of Ukraine, it became clear that, in a number of countries, rising inflation and energy prices, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, led to many revolts occurring because the population was becoming poorer.

In some cases, people were spending 80% of their salary on rent and food, leaving only 20% for everything else. This highlighted the fact that certain variables can have a significant impact on wider equilibria. Identifying the red lines or parameters that are changing can therefore provide valuable early warning of a changing situation.

It is important to understand where to look for these signals. Sometimes questions are more important than answers, particularly in the current period. Once a question is asked, it is extremely easy to become overwhelmed by data. Not all data is relevant, and how different pieces of information are connected is equally important. So, it is quite important to spend time on understanding that.

Also, the user interface is very important. These are instruments that become useful when people using them enjoy using them. They need to be understandable, and users need to understand how they work. In this sense, they become companions. It is therefore important to develop tools that people can actually use rather than forget, as may happen with a new programme that is difficult to operate.

A further relevant question concerns who will operate these systems and how information can be made actionable. There is also the question of how much politicians trust artificial intelligence. How many leaders would make major

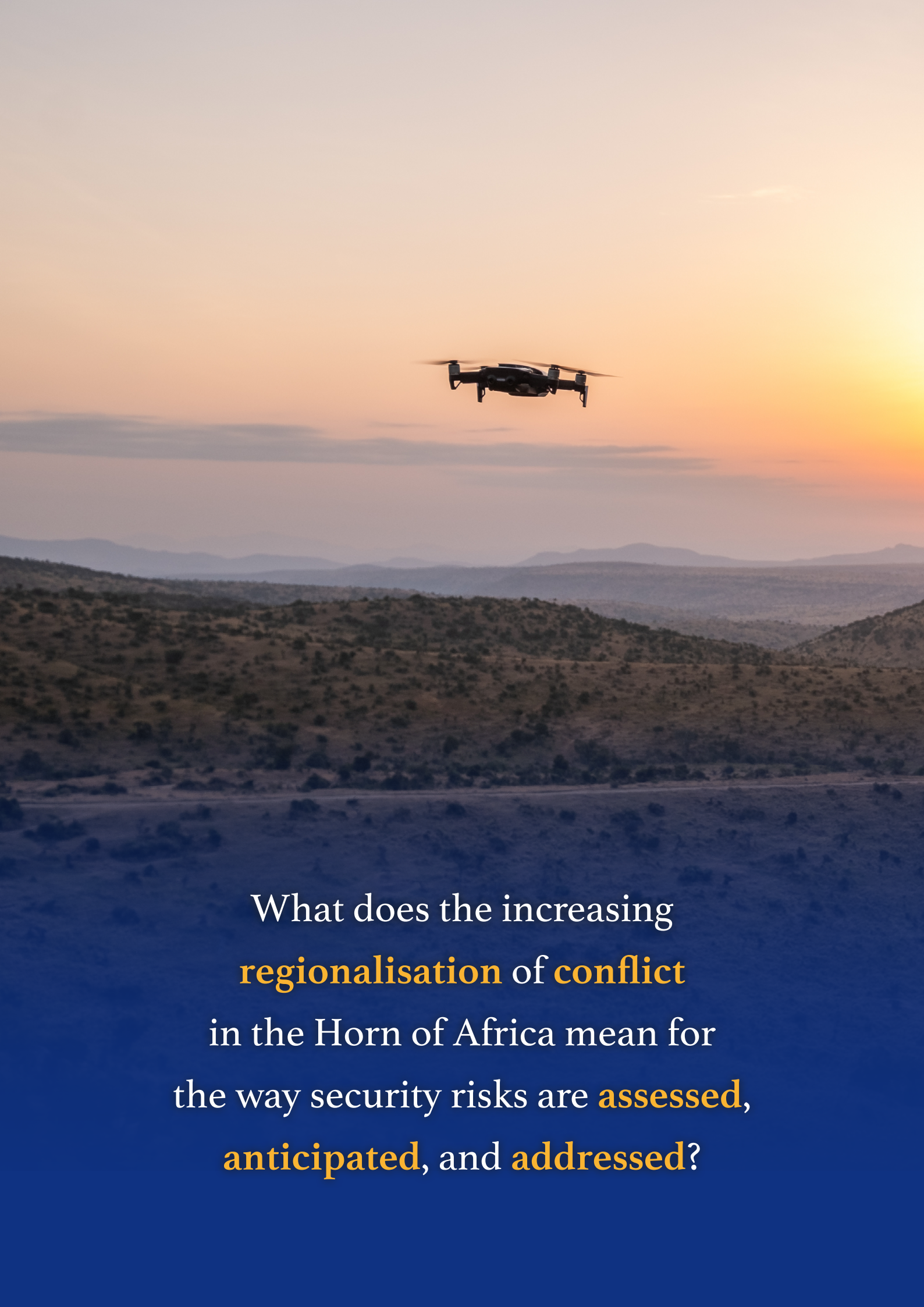
political decisions based on information provided by ChatGPT or another advanced AI system? Thus, the sociology of artificial intelligence, not just for political leaders but also for organisations, needs to be taken into account. Introducing a new system is extremely difficult, unless people across the organisation are convinced that it is well designed, useful, and effective.

So, we still need a lot of traditional intelligence to make artificial intelligence work, and it is important to look for the right parameters. There is still considerable human work involved in creating organisational consensus about what to look for and ensuring that everyone moves in the same direction.

Finally, all of these are living instruments. It is very difficult to create something that, once completed, will remain unchanged forever. Information and operational aspects need to be continuously updated, and the details need to be regularly reviewed to keep the instrument's usefulness.

Biography

Nicola Minasi earned a degree in Political Science from LUISS University in Rome in 1996, followed by a Master's degree in Development Studies from the London School of Economics in 1999, both with top honours. He joined the diplomatic service at the end of 1999 and has served in the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, and at Italy's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels. From 2017 to 2021, he was Italy's Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since October 2021, he has been Head of the Crisis Unit at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In recent years, he has coordinated evacuations from Ukraine (2022), Sudan and Niger (2023), and from Israel, Lebanon, and Iran during the conflicts following October 7, 2023.



What does the increasing **regionalisation** of **conflict** in the Horn of Africa mean for the way security risks are **assessed**, **anticipated**, and **addressed**?



SESSION III
Predictive Security and Strategic Foresight: Building a Resilient Future

Drone flying over the Semenawi Bahri National Park, Somalia. Drones are emerging as a tool for strengthening security, resilience and connectivity across the Horn of Africa.

Source: Wirestock

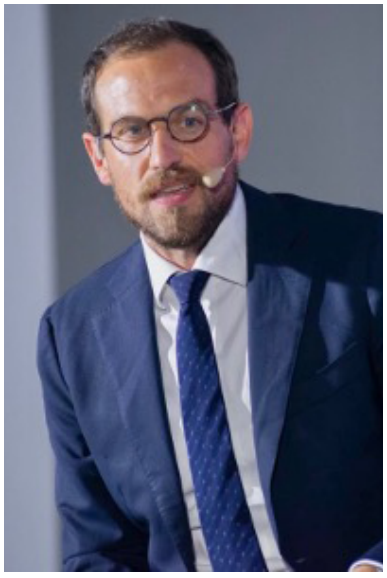
“We have managed to have
a discussion for two or three hours
about the Horn of Africa,
yet there has been very little
substantive reference to what
the European Union could do,
should do, and is doing.”



CHAIR
Patrick Smith
Editor-in-Chief, Africa Confidential &
The Africa Report, London

Biography

Patrick Smith is Editorial Director of Africa Confidential, the premier news and analysis service on economic, political and security developments in Africa. In 2021 he co-organised a conference with the International Crisis Group and the Royal African Society on Demography, Climate Change and Security. Starting with Associated Press in the 1980s, Smith has written widely on the political economy of Africa, the international financial institutions and what he calls 'geo-history'. He served on the UN panel on the exploitation of mineral resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2002-20003). Smith contributed to a collection of short stories about Ghana published as 'Accra Noir' by Akashic Books (New York, 2020).



Alan Boswell
Project Director, Horn of Africa,
International Crisis Group (ICG), Nairobi

THE HORN'S ESCALATION PATHWAYS: MAPPING INTERLOCKING RISKS FROM SUDAN TO SOMALIA AND THE RED SEA

The Horn, as has been mentioned, is one of the world's most fragmented, contested and violent places. It is the place where there has been the fragmentation of greater Sudan into Sudan and South Sudan, while what was Ethiopia for a period is now Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. There has also been the de facto separation of Somaliland since 1991. So, fragmentation is still ongoing and remains contested. The major geopolitical trend of the last 10 years can be divided into two areas, although they are connected.

One is that the Horn of Africa is becoming part of the Middle East arena and sphere. The distinction that emerged during and after the Cold War between Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa, or between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, reflects geographic divisions that are largely ahistorical. These distinctions do not really correspond to the way communities themselves are connected through linguistics, history, and ethnicity. However, those

distinctions are breaking down significantly, and this can be seen in real time in the geopolitics of the region.

Geographically, the Horn of Africa is also where the Sahel runs into the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula, while the Horn extends towards North Africa and the Mediterranean. This is particularly evident in the implosion of Sudan in the current war, where all these regions are by and large colliding into this extremely destructive war.

The second connected trend is the decline of the US role in the region. The United States remains a major player, but its influence has declined under successive administrations in terms of influence, both willingly and unwillingly. What has not emerged in that space is one major actor capable of filling the void. Instead, multiple actors have entered and begun to fill that space, with some pushing the US out and others moving in because the United States has left part of the space open. This has created a quite unique and contested space in the world, in which the regional middle powers could arguably be outpunching any of the superpowers.

This makes the region interesting and peculiar in the broader sense, particularly given its strategic position along the Red Sea coastline. There are currently serious concerns not only about the internal situations discussed by the previous panellists, but also about the way these conflicts are becoming interconnected.

There is the terrible war in Sudan, which has now become a regional and increasingly escalating war. Also, the situation in Ethiopia, with a new standoff in Tigray, as well as the broader standoff between Ethiopia and Eritrea, also related to Ethiopia's pursuit of sea. Somalia faces a host of challenges, some long-standing and others more recent. However, because these conflicts are becoming intertwined with broader regional and Middle East dynamics, long-standing fault lines in the Horn are also becoming regionalised and interconnected. So, one major trend that will be difficult to reverse is the regionalisation of the war in Sudan.

Middle powers are being drawn into the region in ways that will now be very difficult to reverse, not only in terms of arms, but also in terms of diplomatic investment and other forms of capital. The coalitions in Sudan (those backing the army versus those backing the Rapid Support Forces-RSF) are overlapping with these other crises.

In some ways, there are very old fault lines in the Horn. But another way of looking at the current situation is through the analogy of wildfire risk. As everything has become so interconnected, a spark in one location can spread rapidly in a way that would have been more difficult previously. One example

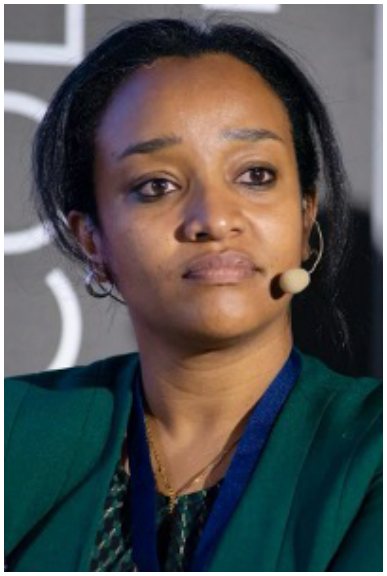
has already happened. In December, there was a major new offensive in Yemen along the Saudi Arabian border which, in this assessment, was very much linked to and represented a spillover from the regional tensions surrounding the war in Sudan, crossing the Red Sea into Yemen.

A major concern at present is the possibility of renewed conflict in Tigray, which has already been mentioned. During the previous war, the conflict was obviously extremely brutal, with an estimated hundreds of thousands of people having died. However, it could arguably be described as contained to a certain extent.

A new war there would be almost impossible to contain. One regional official reportedly told me that if there were a new war in Tigray, we would probably be looking at a belt of interconnected conflict stretching from Yemen in the east to Chad in the west. Frankly speaking, that sounds alarmist, and it is, but it is not something that would require several dominoes to fall. It could happen very quickly if just one domino were to fall.

Biography

Alan Boswell is Crisis Group's Project Director for the Horn of Africa, based in Nairobi, where he oversees the organisation's work on Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Kenya. His work centres on regional diplomacy, regional geopolitics and the role of outside powers, including the Arab Gulf states, in the region. Since its launch in 2019, he has also hosted Crisis Group's The Horn podcast. Having worked in East Africa since 2009, he joined Crisis Group in 2018. Before that, he advised organisations such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, published research papers with the Small Arms Survey, and was an associate of the Conflict Research Programme at the London School of Economics. Earlier in his career, Boswell worked as a journalist, serving as Africa correspondent for McClatchy newspapers and as a correspondent for Time magazine, covering conflicts in the Horn, Central Africa and the Sahel. He has also written for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy and The Atlantic.



Bitania Tadesse
Policy Specialist for Africa,
International Peace Institute (IPI), New York

BUILDING REGIONAL RESILIENCE IN THE HORN: SECURITY COOPERATION, PEACEBUILDING AND AFRICAN OWNERSHIP

Based on the recent discussions, there appears to be agreement on the transformation taking place within the Horn of Africa, the geopolitical competition we are witnessing, and how the shifting alliances within the region, as well as developments across the Red Sea and more broadly at the global level, are having a lasting impact on the Horn of Africa.

The topic of security cooperation, peacebuilding, and African ownership is closely tied to the current circumstances and context of the Horn of Africa. The question is how to build regional resilience in a context where security threats are becoming increasingly regionalised and interconnected, extending beyond the specific fragilities seen in individual states. At the same time, this is unfolding in a context where multilateral institutions and international support mechanisms are under immense pressure.

This requires a rethink of how threats are addressed. When discussing security challenges experienced in the Horn of Africa, beyond the security concerns of individual states, there is an increasing regionalisation of threats. For example, the situation in Somalia, including violent extremism, terrorism, and the long-standing fight against Al-Shabaab, has repercussions for the security of neighbouring countries. Similarly, some of the threats emerging from the ongoing war in Sudan involve cross-border movements of people and arms, as well as illicit networks. While security threats are becoming increasingly interconnected, responses remain highly fragmented and state centric. Peace efforts tend to focus on national political settlements, often overlooking the cross-border dynamics that continue to sustain violence.

The second point is that, beyond military threats, it is important to connect developments in the Horn of Africa with other forms of non-military threats, particularly the impacts of climate change. Climate change is not necessarily new for the Horn of Africa, but it is becoming a threat multiplier by interfacing with existing conflict dynamics in the region. Climate change does not necessarily create conflict on its own or in isolation. However, its effects become more severe in contexts where governance is weak, and communities are unable to adapt.

When it comes to the African Union's response to this challenge at the climate, peace, and security nexus, increasingly more policies are emerging from the African Union, including efforts to establish a common position on climate, peace, and security. The Peace and Security Council has also been vocal about the nexus between climate, peace and security, but the same policy language is not necessarily reflected, for example, in the United Nations Security Council. There is nevertheless a growing consensus within the continent.

When African ownership is discussed, the first things that come to mind are the African Union, African states, or the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), but there is a wide civic space comprising civil society organisations that are the shapers and the leaders, in terms of building peace in their own communities. Sudan provides a relevant example. On the humanitarian front, the role of mutual aid groups and Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) are operating in very volatile contexts, particularly where international humanitarian systems are unable to access.

Three points can be highlighted based on these reflections, particularly regarding approaches to security. First, there is the issue of counterterrorism and violent extremism, including recent developments around the support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the role of the United Nations, which has been a long-standing partner of the African Union Mission in Somalia, with very dwindling financial support for United Nations peace

support operations, and also affecting African-led peace operations. The security arrangements currently in Somalia are therefore under severe financial pressure, but it is not purely a financial issue; it is also the result of political decision. This creates an opportunity for the international community to explore other forms of support approaches beyond the military support.

The second point concerns peacebuilding and the need to anchor it in the regional dimension, going beyond the national borders. Threats generate spillover effects from one crisis to another, and responses therefore need to adapt accordingly.

Finally, the impacts of climate change need to be incorporated into peacebuilding efforts across the Horn of Africa.

Biography

Bitania Tadesse is the Policy Specialist for Africa at the International Peace Institute (IPI) in New York, where she leads policy analysis and strategic partnerships and contributes to IPI's research project "Africa in a Changing Global Order". Her recent work includes an IPI issue brief on the African Union's engagement in the G20 and debt sustainability. Before joining IPI, she was Director of Programs at Amani Africa Media and Research Services in Addis Ababa and previously served as Policy and Advocacy Advisor at the Norwegian Refugee Council Pan African Liaison Office with the African Union. Earlier in her career, she held positions with Save the Children International and Femmes Africa Solidarité. Her academic background includes a Master of Science in African Studies from the University of Oxford and a Master in Peace and Security Studies from the Institute for Peace and Security Studies.



Jesutimilehin O. Akamo
Research and Policy Analysis unit Coordinator, Africa Peace and Security Programme (APSP), Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), Addis Ababa

FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION: POLICY FORESIGHT, RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS, AND PREVENTIVE SECURITY IN AFRICA

The analysis begins where the previous speaker concluded, addressing the critical question: with whom will these groups mobilise? This consideration remains central to the final section of this presentation. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) serves as the operational framework designed to respond to these conflicts and the corresponding data. That was the primary purpose for its establishment.

Historically, it was created in response to the operational deficits of its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, which evolved into the current African Union. At its inception, as articulated in the African Union Peace and Security Council Protocol the architecture derived its core mandate. The underlying expectation was a systematic progression from early warning data to early warning analyses or reports generated by think tanks, specialised institutions, and regional economic communities such as the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), or the East African Community (EAC). The ultimate objective was to trigger timely early action.



Unfortunately, this operational model has not materialised in the way it was intended. While early warning data, analyses, and reports are readily available, a disconnect persists. Numerous military coups across the continent, particularly in the Sahel, were accurately predicted prior to their occurrence. The decline in the situation in Mali was foreseen. The regional spillovers of the Arab Spring and the Libyan crisis were anticipated. Similarly, multiple contingencies across the Horn of Africa were projected in advance. Unfortunately, because there was no early action, we are where we are today.



This raises a fundamental question: what is the point of foresight if it provides knowledge but does not lead to intervention before violence? The Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) data over the past couple of years shows that conflicts have been increasing, which is a testament to the failure of conflict prevention. This is not because there is no early warning data, the right expertise, or the appropriate legal, normative, and political frameworks. It is simply because there is no early action.

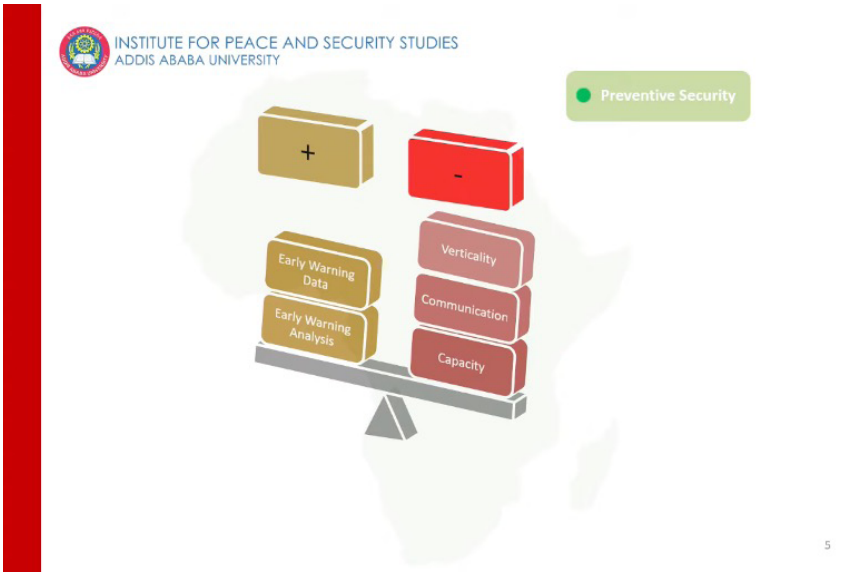


Why, then, is early action not being taken to reduce these numbers or prevent conflicts in the first place, including those highlighted by ACLED? There is an imbalance in scale. From this perspective, the issue can be summarised in three areas.

First, there is a significant political dimension. This relates to the excessive verticality between the African Union and its member states. How does the AU engage with its member states? How do member states respond to early warnings? This remains a major issue in Addis Ababa, and it is a question for which there are still no clear, satisfactory answers.

The structural setup of the African Union means that interventions cannot move forward without the member states. Second, a substantial communication barrier exists. When the African Union, other institutions, or research institutions discuss early warning, what do member states hear? When it is said that a conflict might break out in a particular region and the focus is on citizen security, what do they hear, and how do they respond? When the focus is on a threat to the regime, what do they hear, and how do they respond? There is no simple answer to how this can be resolved, but this aspect needs to be examined more closely.

The final issue is capacity. Do existing institutions have the continent-wide capacity to respond to the volume of early warning data they receive?



This is where think tanks come in. The first point is a reference to a book chapter on *Silence of the Gods* published last year: Why Organisms Feed: Silencing the Guns Through "Starvation" of Structures, Systems and Cycles of Violence. The second relates to work by the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS). The first looks at the issue from a holistic perspective, considering the structures, systems, and cycles of violence that continue to reproduce themselves.

If most conflicts on the continent are examined, they often involve unresolved issues rather than entirely new conflicts. The question, therefore, is what is feeding them? If conflicts are being fed, they can also be starved. What can be done to starve these structures, systems, and cycles of violence? The other aspect, based on work at IPSS, concerns the question of with whom. Monitoring relationship dynamics between different actors is very important, yet this is often overlooked: Monitoring Relationship Dynamics in Conflict-Intervention Contexts.

It is useful to have the numbers and the quantitative dimension. However, the relationship between two actors at the point when they sign a peace agreement may not necessarily be the same two or three weeks later, when they are discussing its implementation. Who is monitoring that change? Quantitative data would not provide the answer. Who is monitoring those relationships? Who is monitoring, for example, what kind of trust or alliances are developing between Amhara Fano militias and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in the region? And how quickly are we responding?



The earlier the response, the less political it is to intervene. At an early stage, there is no need to deal with a situation that has already escalated, where different actors have to be accountable to their constituencies. Instead, intervention takes place at a point when the situation is not yet too volatile and when there is not yet so much at stake.

The presentation therefore ends with one question: **How early is early action?**

Biography

Jesutimilehin O. Akamo is the Coordinator of the Research and Policy Analysis Unit of the African Peace and Security Programme (APSP) at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies. He is also the Youth Focal Person of the Institute. He obtained his bachelor's and master's degrees from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Modern War Studies at the University of Buckingham. Jesutimilehin is also a member of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA). The scope of his research interests broadly encompasses the following areas: peace and security interventions in Africa, peacebuilding, democratisation, theories of international relations, and African contributions to the philosophy of technology.



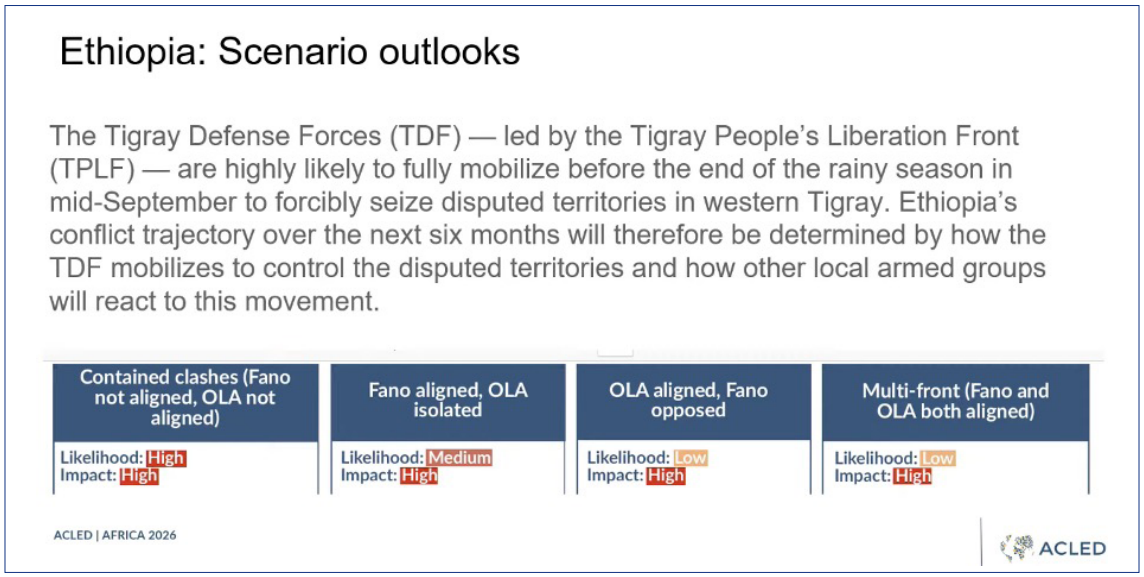
Jalale Getachew Birru
Senior Analyst, East Africa, ACLED, Frankfurt

CONFLICT DATA AS AN EARLY-WARNING ASSET: WHAT LOCALISED VIOLENCE CAN - AND CANNOT - TELL POLICYMAKERS

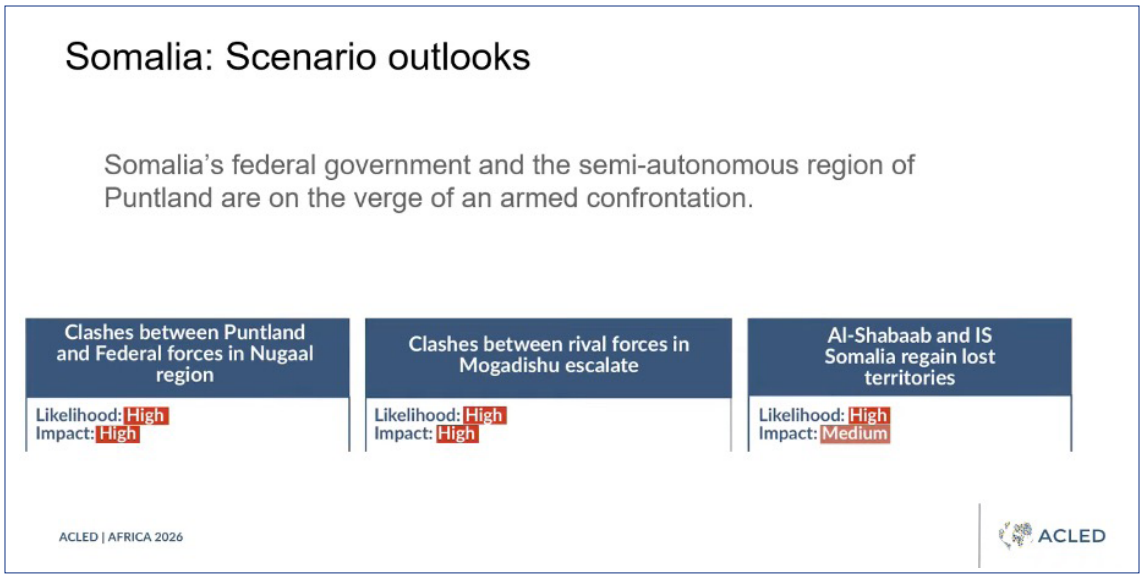
Although this workshop focuses primarily on Ethiopia, what happens in one country tends to affect the neighboring countries. Consequently, our three-to-six-month predictions evaluate the interconnected trajectories of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia. In Ethiopia, the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF), led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), are highly likely to fully mobilise before the conclusion of the rainy season in mid-September to forcibly occupy disputed territories in Western Tigray. This movement forms the baseline for our conflict trajectory over the next six months and dictates how other armed groups are going to align with TDF as well.

The most probable scenario is that Fano militias and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) are not going to align, continuing to fight in their own region where they have been active. A secondary, medium-probability scenario is for Fano to align while OLA does not, which remains the medium-likelihood scenario. This

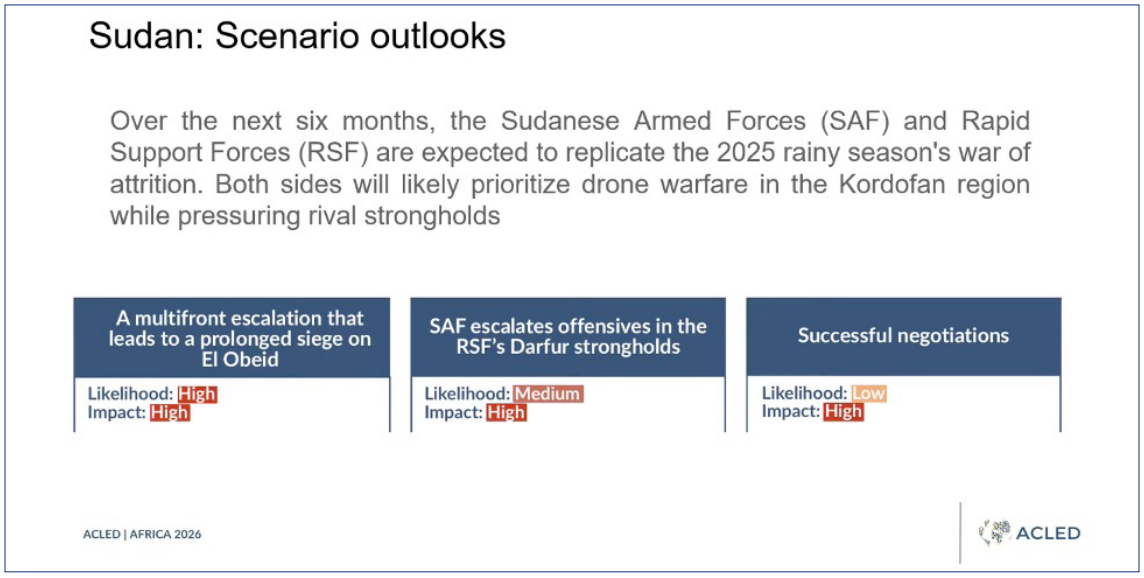
could happen, but Fano is not a centralised organisation. The other scenarios are considered less likely.



For Somalia, there has been significant mobilisation between Puntland Security Forces (PSF) and federal government forces. The resulting assessment is that clashes between Puntland and the federal government are likely to occur before the end of the rainy season.

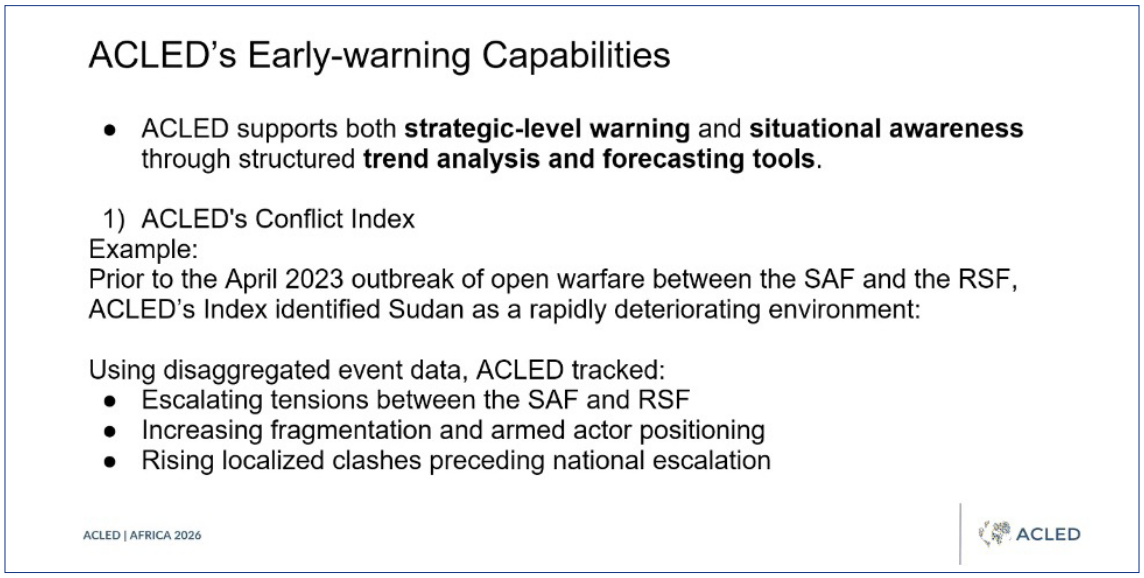


In Sudan, the expectation for the next six months is that the parties will replicate the approach observed during the 2025 rainy season, focusing on the use of drones rather than direct confrontation. While both main actors seek control over El Obeid, current assessments indicate the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) will not succeed in securing the city.

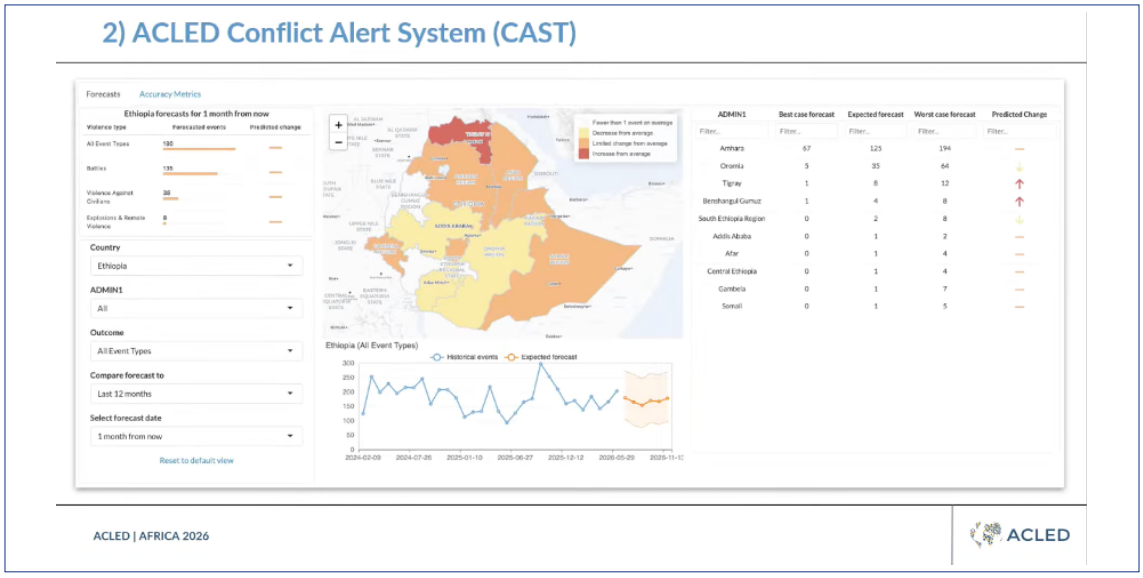


Turning to early-warning capabilities, ACLED provides two open-access tools:

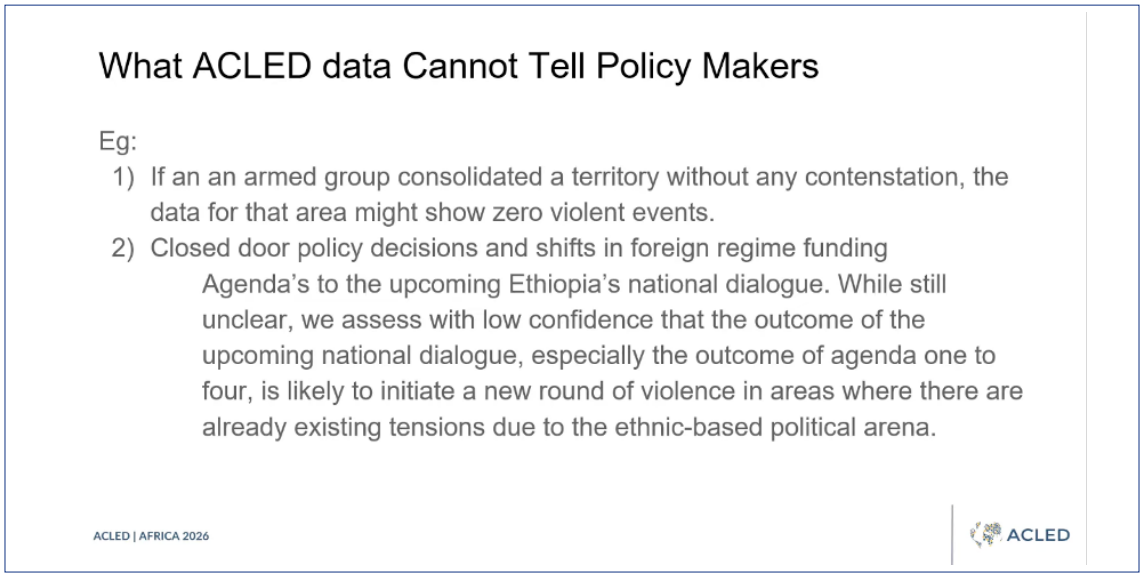
- **The ACLED Conflict Index:** identifies high-risk crisis zones, as demonstrated prior to April 2023 when it successfully forecast the outbreak of conflict in Sudan.



- **The ACLED Conflict Alert System (CAST):** users can select any country; for this purpose, Ethiopia is used as an example. CAST predicts the number of events expected over the following month based on data from the previous 12 months. It also shows, by region, whether a high or low number of events is expected.



However, ACLED data cannot tell policymakers, for example, if an armed group controlled an area without any contestation, there may be no recorded violence events, creating the impression that the area is peaceful, but that may not reflect the reality on the ground. That area may be controlled by an armed group which is not the government, meaning that ACLED data may not reveal what is happening politically. If violence occurs, it will be captured by the data.



Another factor that cannot be shown is how closed-door policy decisions and shifts in foreign policy change conflict. For instance, Ethiopia is expected to hold national dialogue. The agenda is known, but it is not possible to determine in advance what decisions will be taken. Some of those decisions could potentially

lead to violence, particularly in areas affected by ethnic-based territorial disputes and other local tensions. It is therefore not possible to know exactly what is coming, but it is possible to identify indicators that something may occur.

Biography

Jalale Getachew Birru is a Senior Analyst at the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project (ACLED), where she specialises in the Horn of Africa, producing regular reports on political violence and conflict trends and advising partners, donors and journalists on developments in the region. Alongside this role, she is a Non-Resident Policy Fellow at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy at the University of Erfurt. Earlier in her career, she taught master's students at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, was a Guest Researcher at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt and served as a public prosecutor and an attaché. Her qualifications include a Master of Public Policy and a doctoral degree (Dr. rer.pol.) in the social sciences, with a focus on peace and conflict, both earned at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy at the University of Erfurt.



CONCLUDING REMARKS



African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Source: Office of the President of Rwanda



Nicoletta Bombardiere
Director General for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The task of closing a discussion is almost a mission impossible, and even more so after today's discussion, which has been very rich and articulated. So, of course, I have no ambition to draw conclusions, but rather to highlight some threats from the perspective of Italian foreign policy in the region, and I think threats that have been running through today's discussion.

Before doing this, let me warmly thank my colleague, Ambassador Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, for inviting me to today's event and for keeping this focus on a region which is really a strategic one. Now, the Horn of Africa is not a distant concern because it sits really on the axis that runs from the Mediterranean through the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, an axis along which increasingly European security and prosperity are increasingly decided. So, if I had to see one single threat running through today's discussion, it is that the security of the Horn and of the supply lines that pass through it is a political question as much as, or more than, a military one.

Security and naval presence matter as it address the symptoms, but the conditions for a lasting stability are found onshore: in governance, in the resilience of states, and in the legitimacy of institutions, the improvement of which has traditionally been, and still is, a key commitment of the Italian government in Africa in general, and in the Horn region more specifically. A narrow strait, the Bab-el-Mandeb, carries a crucial share of world trade and of Europe's energy. We are passing, moreover, through a peculiar moment in which pressure on the Red Sea coincides with renewed tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, so that the two passages framing the Arabian Peninsula are under strain at once.

The conclusion might be obvious, but worthy to be highlighted. Freedom of navigation rests on political conditions along the coastlines that command these waters. For that reason, the Horn cannot be considered apart from the Gulf, as highlighted also by the implementation of the Mattei Plan, our main partnership framework with the African continent, which is increasingly open to strategic cooperation with regional actors.

The states of the Arabian Peninsula have tied their security and their economies to these waters, through ports, bases, and investments along the African shore. Their interests and ours converge on one essential point: that the sea lanes remain open, and there is room here for effective dialogue between Europe, the Gulf, and the African states.

Another consideration is related to malign influence and hybrid threats. Where legitimate partners are absent, others are not, and what occupies the space are armed groups, illicit economies, and external actors that rarely serve the population's concerns. To this, we must also add the more corrosive instrument of our time: disinformation, manipulation of grievance, and deliberate cultivation of instability. For certain actors, instability is not a problem to be resolved, but an objective in itself.

Since a region kept unsettled weakens us at little cost to them. No situation illustrates this more gravely than Sudan, the largest displacement crisis in the world, a conflict neither party can win. Sudan deserves a central place in any serious treatment of this region, as exemplified by Italy's increased commitment in this crisis. And here, we need to support more staunchly an Africa-led settlement and less interference from external actors. The work of the African Union and of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) should not be seen as auxiliary to our own. Increasingly, it should be the principal effort, and our task is to support it.

This also requires a clear division of labour among NATO, the European Union, the African Union and IGAD, but with one fundamental strategic perspective. We need to act before crisis rather than after them. Preventive diplomacy and

strategic foresight are quite simply the least costly instrument we hold, because prevention always is.

Ethiopia features prominently, and understandably so. It is a democratic, demographic, and economic anchor of the Horn, and its stability is strategic for the region. Italy continues to be a key partner for Addis Ababa, and Ethiopia stands as a partner of a vast and ambitious array of Piano Mattei projects, and the main recipient of our Development Cooperation funds in all of Africa, south of the Sahara.

Somalia and Eritrea also complete this picture, each through the lens of a distinct bilateral dialogue cultivated by Italy. With Mogadishu, our engagement remains close and multifaceted, including support to institutional consolidation and the fight against Al-Shabaab, a reminder that terrorism continues to represent one of the most direct threats to regional stability. With Asmara, we maintain a channel of cooperation and dialogue that we consider valuable to progressively contribute to a more integrated and inclusive Horn.

Overall, and remembering the tensions and the risk of fragmentation in the region, what is needed is a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the different aspirations and concerns, in full respect for the sovereignty of all states concerned. A Horn connected by shared corridors, energy links, and cross-border value chains generates its own resilience and can contribute to the perspective of an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Connectivity creates stability.

But stability is also built within existing borders, and by strengthening institutions, governance, the resilience of society, prospects for the youth, human capital investments, and economic development. Italy regards the Horn as part of an enlarged Mediterranean, of which the Red Sea is a natural extension. I already mentioned Piano Mattei as our principal instrument of policy in the African continent.

Its premise is straightforward. Development and security advance together rather than in sequence. Partnerships are built with our partners, not for them. And then we should listen at least as much as we propose. We see it not as an alternative to Europe's efforts, but as a contribution to it, complementary to the European gateway, and to the work of the African and international financial institutions. Furthermore, it offers synergic opportunities for NATO's wider Southern Neighbourhood strategy.

The supply lines we have discussed are a matter of trust, as much as of capability, secured not only by military assets, but more by our diplomatic presence and political engagement in the region. The whole of Africa is a neighbourhood we share, and the measure of our collective ability to anticipate events rather than merely respond to them. And with these words, I once again thank the

Foundation for the privilege of these closing words, and I really appreciate the time you have spent on these very inspiring and crucial issues for our collective stability.

Biography

Ambassador **Nicoletta Bombardiere** has served in the diplomatic corps of the Italian Republic for over 30 years. Since May 2024, she has held the position of Director General for Globalization and Global Issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Following her graduation in Political Science from the University of Florence in 1988, Ambassador Bombardiere entered the diplomatic career in 1989. In 2010, she was promoted to the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary and became Head of the "Unit for Afghanistan and Regional Dimension" within the Directorate General for Political Affairs and Security, overseeing political and security matters related to Italy's commitment in Afghanistan, including within the NATO framework. In 2013, she was appointed Deputy Diplomatic Advisor at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Office of the Diplomatic Advisor, supporting the Prime Minister's international engagements. In 2015, she was named Diplomatic Advisor to the Minister of Defence at the Ministry of Défense, serving in this capacity until January 2020. From February 2020 to May 2024, she served as Ambassador of Italy to Lebanon. In 2023, she was promoted to the rank of Ambassador.

Ministero degli Affari Esteri
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Perspectives from the Horn of Africa

Preventing Malign Actions. Vital Supply Lines.

High-Level Workshop

Organised by the **NATO Defense College Foundation (NDCF)**

In co-operation with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione CSF,** *and the* **NATO Defense College**

***Rome**, 9 July 2026*
*Venue: **NH Roma Centro** (Via dei Gracchi, 324, 00192)*

16:00 – 16:30 CET
PARTICIPANTS ARRIVAL

16:30 – 16:45 CET
WELCOME REMARKS

- ***Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo***, President, NATO Defense College Foundation (NDCF), Rome
- ***Marjorie Apruzzese***, LTC Air Force, Senior Research Advisor, NATO Defense College (NDC), Rome
- ***Nicoletta Pirozzi***, Member of the Board of Directors, Fondazione CSF (Scientific Advisor Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo), Turin

16:45 – 16:55 CET
OPENING REMARKS

- ***Sem Fabrizi***, Ambassador of Italy to Ethiopia, accredited to Djibouti, South Sudan and IGAD, Embassy of Italy, Addis Ababa

16:55 – 18:00 CET
SESSION I
Deterrence and Strategic Resilience in the Horn of Africa

Chair: ***Francesca Fraccaroli***, Chief Global Security Information Centre, UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), New York City

- ***El Hadji Ibrahima Diene***, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia; Head of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia, African Union, Addis Ababa
- ***Giuseppe Mistretta***, Former Director for Sub-Saharan Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome
- ***Fabio Massimo Ballerini***, Counsellor, Office of the Diplomatic Adviser to the Prime Minister and Mattei Plan for Africa Task Force, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Rome
- ***Luca Miehe***, Chef de Cabinet, EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, European External Action Service (EEAS), Brussels
- ***Alberto Munisso***, Senior Analyst, Knowledge & Engagement Branch, NATO Strategic Direction South Hub, Naples

Q&A Session

18:00 – 18:25 CET
SESSION II
Pre-Emptive Diplomacy and Hybrid Anticipatory Action: Case Study Ethiopia

Chair: ***Gaja Pellegrini-Bettoli***, Independent Journalist and Author, Rome

- ***Niagalé Bagayoko***, Chair, African Security Sector Network (ASSN), Paris
- ***Nicola Minasi***, Head of the Crisis Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome

Q&A Session

18:25 – 19:30 CET
SESSION III
Predictive Security and Strategic Foresight: Building a Resilient Future

Chair: ***Patrick Smith***, Editor-in-Chief, Africa Confidential & The Africa Report, London

- ***Alan Boswell***, Project Director, Horn of Africa, International Crisis Group (ICG), Nairobi
- ***Bitania Tadesse***, Policy Specialist for Africa, International Peace Institute (IPI), New York
- ***Jesutimilehin O. Akamo***, Research and Policy Analysis unit Coordinator, Africa Peace and Strategy Programme (APSP), Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), Addis Ababa
- ***Jalale Getachew Birru***, Senior Analyst, East Africa, ACLED, Frankfurt

Q&A Session

19:30 – 19:45 CET
CONCLUDING REMARKS

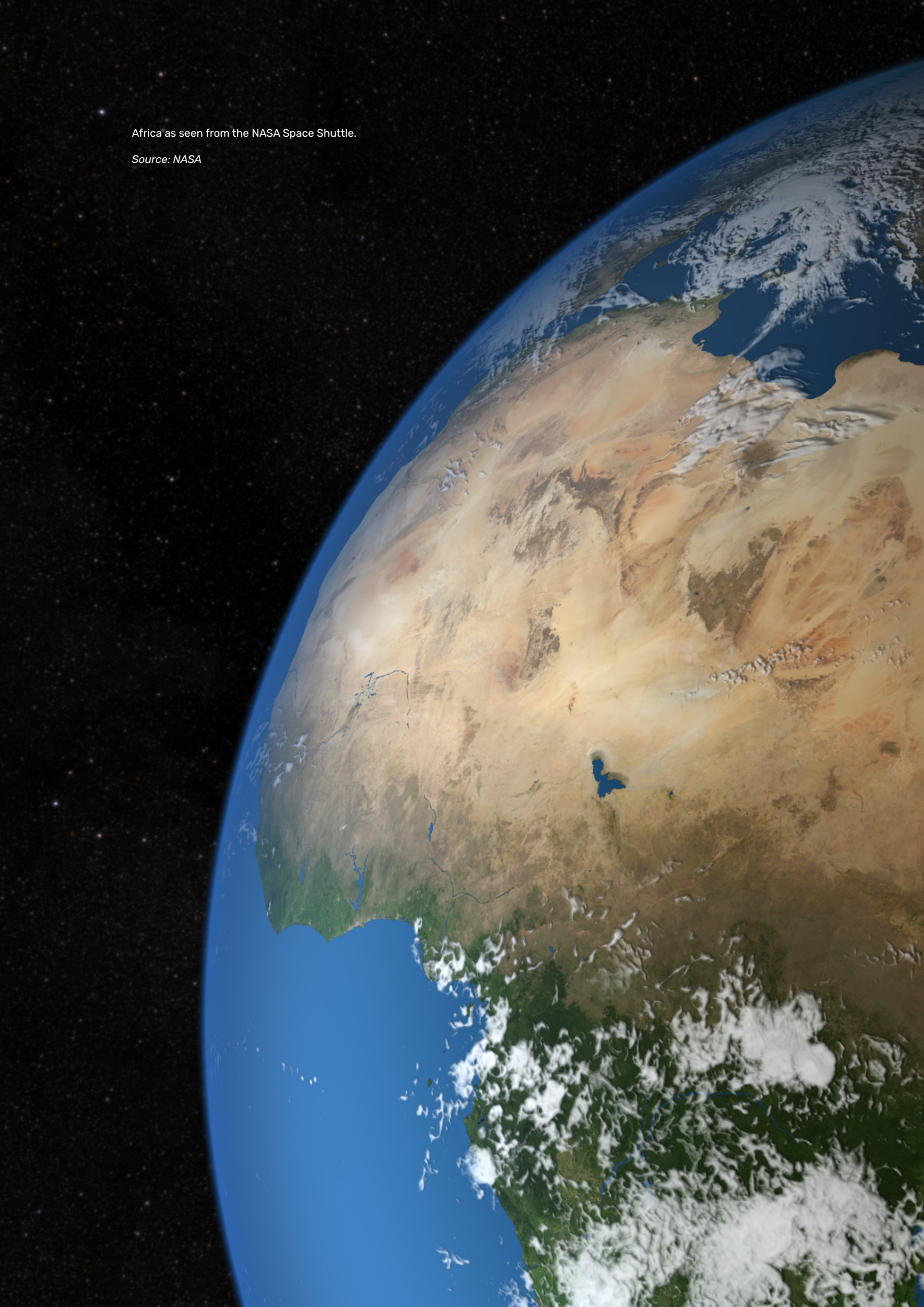
- ***Nicoletta Bombardiere***, Director General for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome

19:45 – 20:30 CET
NETWORKING COCKTAIL

An opportunity for informal exchanges among speakers and participants.

END OF THE WORKING DAY

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Africa as seen from the NASA Space Shuttle.

Source: NASA



