



9th Edition

APSACO

African Peace and Security
Annual Conference

9TH EDITION - 2025

AFRICA AMID GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES

REPORT

June 19th - 20th, 2025 - Rabat



**POLICY CENTER
FOR THE NEW SOUTH**

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African Peace and Security Annual Conference – APSACO

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Introductory Remarks

Key Elements



KARIM EL AYNAOUI

Executive President, Policy
Center for the New South

Karim El Aynaoui welcomed participants to the ninth African Peace and Security Annual Conference (**APSACO**), emphasizing that the gathering holds an important place in the Policy Center for the New South's calendar of events, as it has become a tradition to set aside some time to reflect on security in Africa.

He continued by underlining that, as participants convened for this year's conference,

it is essential to learn lessons from the rapidly evolving global geopolitical landscape.

“We must ask ourselves what these shifts mean for us—the global challenges we face, the changing nature of multilateralism, and the ways in which foreign policy is being redefined. These changes have immediate and far-reaching implications for our relationships with global powers, including the BRICS and other emerging nations,” he noted.

El Aynaoui pointed out that, in many respects, Africa could benefit from this new global context. The continent's strategic relevance is growing, and its voice is becoming more sought after. Yet this moment is also marked by fragmentation. African countries often confront these transformations in isolation, and each nation's strength increasingly hinges on its internal stability, cohesion, and resilience.

Governments across Africa are dealing with rising pressures. Traditional forms of solidarity—including official development assistance—are being re-evaluated or, in some cases, disappearing altogether. This changing landscape calls for a fundamental rethink of long-standing structures. **“The era in which we could rely on external aid or conventional support**

mechanisms is fading,” El Aynaoui warned.

“Today, responsibility is more direct—and more urgent. This requires bold economic policymaking and deeper civic engagement.”

He emphasized that Africa must look beyond its borders and develop a clear, strategic vision for engaging with the world.

“We cannot afford to only focus inwardly. We must understand, in depth, the great transformations underway in global governance, and position ourselves as proactive contributors. Africa has real strengths. We have a foundation. The vision now is to build on it with clarity, determination, and a shared sense of purpose.”

This broader strategic orientation is also shaping the work of the Policy Center for the New South.

El Aynaoui explained that the institution is engaging in deep, long-term thinking about Africa’s role in the world, including its relationships with key global actors such as China, while also focusing on internal reforms and domestic policy frameworks.

“We are not only looking outward. We are asking how we, as institutions and individuals, can help reinforce governance at home and contribute more effectively to global discussions on peace and stability. These are not quick wins; they are structural goals that require time, rigor, and vision.”

He also noted the importance of generational renewal.

“One of our core missions at the Policy Center is to foster intergenerational dialogue and ensure the transmission of knowledge. In partnership with the university, we are investing in young people—especially here in Morocco—equipping them with the tools, skills, and values needed to shape the future. This is a long-term process. It demands autonomy, critical thinking, and above all, a strong moral compass in a world where core values are increasingly under pressure.”

Reflecting on Africa’s collective future, El Aynaoui stressed the urgent need for cooperation across the continent to improve business environments, develop strategic corridors, and strengthen domestic governance.

“There is a growing belief—and it is one I deeply share — that Africa can and must contribute to global peace and security from within. This is not only possible; it is already happening.”

He concluded by thanking all those who contributed to the conference and the annual report, reiterating a message of hope and purpose.

“Africa has much to offer, not only to its own citizens, but to the wider world. And that, I believe, is the deeper meaning behind the work we do here.”



Panel 1

Africa's Sub-Regional Landscape in 2024

Panel composition:

- **Mehdi Benomar**, Head, Department of Research in International Relations, Policy Center for the New South
- **Sait Matty Jaw**, Executive Director, Center for Research and Policy Development, The Gambia
- **Stevens Mokgalapa**, Former Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs, South Africa
- **Helio Sanches**, Former Secretary General of the Government, Cabo Verde
- **Moussa Touré**, Chancellor, Gao University

Session description:

This panel brought together experts and policymakers to assess the evolving state of Africa's sub-regional groupings amid growing fragmentation and political divergence. Discussions focused on the legitimacy crisis facing the Economic Community of West African States (**ECOWAS**), rising tensions with the Alliance of Sahel States (**AES**), and broader concerns about the effectiveness of the African Union (**AU**). The panel examined whether Africa's regional architectures can accommodate internal dissent without losing strategic relevance, and how competing political visions and external influences are shaping new dynamics of cooperation or disintegration.



SAIT MATTY JAW

Executive Director, Center
for Research and Policy
Development, The Gambia

Sait Matty Jaw opened the discussion by reflecting on the evolving political landscape of West Africa, highlighting how ECOWAS, once regarded as a pillar of regional unity, now finds itself at a crossroads.

He emphasized that while many West Africans have traditionally viewed ECOWAS favorably, this sentiment is shifting.

Once seen as a symbol of regional unity, the bloc now faces rising skepticism, particularly in The Gambia, where initial support has turned into growing criticism.

Jaw pointed to the recent withdrawal of Sahelian states as a clear sign of disillusionment, citing ECOWAS's failure to address deep-rooted insecurity, poverty, and political instability. **"Sanctions alone cannot solve structural problems,"** he argued, noting that many view ECOWAS as increasingly punitive and disconnected from local realities.

He also criticized the bloc's selective application of democratic norms, referencing its endorsement of contested election results. **"Double standards are weakening ECOWAS's moral authority,"** he warned.

More broadly, **Jaw** highlighted a widening gap between ECOWAS and its citizens, fueled by limited transparency and public engagement. Once a leader in regional integration, the organization now risks losing its legitimacy.

Jaw closed with a call for renewal: **"To remain relevant, ECOWAS must reconnect with the people, rebuild trust, and rethink its approach to governance and cooperation."**





STEVENS MOKGALAPA

Former Shadow Minister of
Foreign Affairs, South Africa

Stevens Mokgalapa criticized what he sees as the African Union's limited impact, calling for a shift from symbolic unity to meaningful action.

"When most citizens don't even know the AU anthem, it's a sign that continental identity hasn't taken root," he remarked.

He warned that slogans like **"African solutions to African problems"** remain empty without concrete, context-driven implementation.

"Regional integration is still too top-down—rich in declarations but poor in delivery at the national level."

Addressing democratic stagnation, Mokgalapa pointed to growing youth apathy and leadership fatigue, particularly in countries such as South Africa, where liberation parties remain in power without addressing challenges. In contrast, he noted, Zambia and Malawi offer more hopeful models of peaceful political transition.

On economic integration, he criticized the reliance on outdated, colonial-era systems that fail to serve current realities. For the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to succeed, **"we need alignment between political leadership, economic reform, and grassroots participation,"** he said.

He concluded by stressing that the AU's credibility depends on enforcement. **"Protocols mean little if they're not implemented. Domestication at the national level is essential, even if it challenges traditional notions of sovereignty."**





HÉLIO SANCHES

Former Secretary General
of the Government, Cabo
Verde

Hélio Sanches posed a fundamental question:

is ECOWAS truly a regional integration body, or merely a platform for cooperation? The distinction, he argued, is not academic, it defines the legal authority of the organization and the enforceability of its decisions.

“True regional integration means binding commitments,” Sanches said, pointing as an example to the European Union, where member states have transferred sovereign powers to supranational institutions.

“In ECOWAS, that level of authority doesn’t yet exist. Its Parliament, Court, and Commission lack the power to enforce decisions, rulings remain recommendations, not obligations.”

This institutional weakness, he warned, undermines ECOWAS’s credibility and effectiveness.

“You cannot build integration on optional commitments. Without enforcement, the system is hollow.”

Sanches also stressed that integration cannot succeed without stability and governance.

“Political instability, authoritarianism, and weak institutions in some member states are major roadblocks,” he noted. The withdrawal from ECOWAS of Sahel states further threatens cohesion, raising urgent questions about the bloc’s future.

For ECOWAS to evolve, Sanches argued, democratic consolidation is essential.

“Sustainable integration requires more than treaties, it requires democratic values, good governance, and investment in human capital. Education, human dignity, and rights are the building blocks of any meaningful regional future.”



MOUSSA TOURÉ

Chancellor, Gao University

Moussa Touré described the Alliance of Sahel States (**AES**) as a pivotal response to shifting global power dynamics and the rise of civilizational multipolarity.

“The Sahel is no longer just a crisis zone, it’s becoming a new center of geopolitical meaning,” he stated, situating the region within broader global transitions from unipolarity to multipolar influence, led by actors such as China and the BRICS.

Touré argued that the formation of the Sahelian Confederation marks the beginning of a new order rooted in autonomy and historical identity.

“This is about reclaiming agency,” he said. **“Western models—liberal democracy, economic liberalism—are no longer viewed as universal. In the Sahel, they’re increasingly seen as tools of dependency.”**

Drawing on the region’s rich civilizational heritage, the Confederation emphasizes endogenous development, seeing value-added industries such as gold and lithium refining as a way to economic sovereignty.

Touré highlighted partnerships with countries including Morocco and China as strategic alternatives to traditional alliances, free from colonial baggage.

He presented the Confederation as a serious alternative to ECOWAS, which he described as **“increasingly disconnected from local aspirations and aligned with external interests.”**

“The goal is not isolation,” he concluded, **“but the construction of a West African future defined on our own terms with vision, dignity, and strategic independence.”**

Policy recommendations:

1. **Increase public trust and civic participation** through transparent governance, regular public consultations, and inclusive political dialogue.
2. **Ensure consistent application of democratic standards**, avoiding selective enforcement or political bias.
3. **Establish internal accountability systems** within regional institutions to assess performance, correct inconsistencies, and enhance credibility.
4. **Promote inclusive economic cooperation**, including cross-border development projects, trade incentives, and investment in shared infrastructure.
5. **Adapt integration frameworks to fragile and conflict-affected contexts**, ensuring flexibility and sensitivity to local realities.
6. **Advance institutional reform** that embeds core democratic values such as accountability, rule of law, and citizen participation.
7. **Develop political will and ethical leadership** to transform integration from symbolic to substantive.
8. **Translate regional protocols into national law** to enhance enforceability and coherence between regional and domestic policies.
9. **Empower young people** through policies that promote political participation, economic inclusion, and access to education.
10. **Forge partnerships with new actors**, based on mutual respect, strategic interests, and non-interference.
11. **Build governance models grounded in local legitimacy**, emphasizing sovereignty, dignity, and stability over imported frameworks.
12. **Support the emergence of autonomous regional blocs** that reflect local aspirations and offer alternatives to externally driven institutions.



Panel 2

Sahel, Libya, Great Lakes: Conflict Trajectories in a Year of Uncertainty

Panel composition:

- **Abdelhak Bassou**, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South
- **Birama Apho Ly**, Director of the Center for Analysis & Research of the Sahelo Saharan Space, EMP Bamako
- **Lemine Ould Mohammed Salem**, Ambassador, Chargé de mission to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
- **Georg Charpentier**, Senior Advisor, Middle East and North Africa, CMI, Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation
- **Oussama Tayebi**, Senior Specialist, International Relations Research Department, Policy Center for the New South

Session description:

In this session, speakers explored the changing nature of insecurity across the Sahel, Libya, and the Great Lakes region, pointing to how weak governance, fragile institutions, and the decline of multilateral support are all deeply connected. They made it clear that these aren't isolated crises; rather, they reflect a wider breakdown in regional cooperation and the limits of peace efforts imposed from outside. While threats including terrorism, organized crime, and insurgencies were part of the discussion, the conversation dug deeper into what's really driving instability: rising demographic pressures, persistent state weakness, and evolving geopolitical dynamics. Participants emphasized the urgent need for Africa to build its own security architecture, reclaim ownership of conflict-resolution processes, and invest in locally-grounded governance and peacebuilding approaches that align with regional contexts.



**BIRAMA APHO
LY**

Director of the Center for
Analysis & Research of the Sahelo
Saharan Space, EMP Bamako

Birama Apho Ly offered a stark assessment of the Sahel's security environment, describing it as the worst global hotspot for armed violence since the Second World War.

He identified three overlapping threats: terrorism, transnational organized crime, and insurrectional movements, each feeding off the others and rooted in historical injustices, failed governance, and social exclusion.

Sahel has become a laboratory for experimentation, where

terrorist groups test new tactics and funding strategies, including kidnapping for ransom, trafficking, and resource predation.

He also pointed to aggravating factors, such as explosive population growth, climate change, and weak legal frameworks, all of which hinder coordination between states.

Current security responses, he warned, are too narrowly focused on counterterrorism and neglect the systemic nature of the crisis.

Without holistic and regionally owned strategies, long-term stability will remain elusive.





**LEMINE OULD
M. SALEM**

Ambassador, Chargé de mission to the
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Lamine Ould Mohamed Salem emphasized that the crises in the Sahel, Libya, and the Great Lakes should be understood as structural and long-term, rather than temporary disruptions.

Speaking in a personal capacity, he highlighted how weak institutions, the marginalization of populations, and militarized political transitions have created enduring governance vacuums.

In the Sahel, he argued that the withdrawal of international forces such as **MINUSMA** (the

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) has left grey zones where jihadist groups have taken root.

In Libya, he pointed to foreign interference and competing governments as major obstacles to political consensus.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (**DRC**) and Rwanda, he noted that persistent violence and limited state presence continue to fuel humanitarian crises.

Salem identified three major risks: the spillover of regional conflicts, the weakening of African states, and the erosion of institutional capacity.

He called for stronger investment in local governance, regionally led security partnerships, and the revitalization of endogenous actors, including civil society and traditional leaders.





GEORG CHARPENTIER

Senior Advisor, Middle East and
North Africa, CMI, Martti Ahtisaari Peace
Foundation

Georg Charpentier framed the discussion within the broader context of a global shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world.

He argued that Africa should not resist this transition, but rather seize the opportunity to promote diverse governance models that reflect regional realities.

Institutions such as the United Nations and the AU, he noted, are struggling to maintain relevance.

Their weakening risks leaving global conflicts without effective mediation.

In Libya, he observed that the population has not been empowered to lead its own peace process, with international involvement sometimes proving more obstructive than helpful.

In the **DRC**, he pointed to decades of state fragility that have stalled meaningful nation-building.

Charpentier called for greater openness to a variety of global perspectives and respect for political diversity, cautioning against the imposition of Western models of democracy and governance.

He emphasized that Africa must be supported in crafting its own context-specific solutions, with future peace mechanisms designed to be long-term, preventive, and rooted in local realities.





OUSSAMA TAYEBI

Senior Specialist, International Relations
Research Department,
Policy Center for the New South

Oussama Tayebi analyzed the eastern DRC crisis as a clear example of post-conflict relapse and regional instability, driven by unresolved grievances and regional rivalries.

He highlighted the resurgence of the M23 group, the rise of new armed actors, and the declining credibility of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (**MONUSCO**) as signs of a deepening crisis.

Tayebi underscored the lack of coordination between the East African Community-led Nairobi

Process and the Luanda Process, arguing that this fragmentation has limited their effectiveness.

He questioned the current application of the ‘African solutions to African problems’ principle, noting that external actors—though building on African efforts—have sometimes been more effective.

For African-led peace processes to succeed, he stressed the need for stronger institutional alignment, local legitimacy, and consistent regional commitment.



Policy recommendations:

1. **Address root causes systemically:** African conflicts are structurally interconnected; strategies must therefore go beyond terrorism to address governance breakdowns, social exclusion, and illicit economies.
2. **Build a cohesive African security architecture:** The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) needs reform and reinvestment to become a credible and operational continental tool.
3. **Strengthen regional and local governance:** states should prioritize endogenous approaches, empower civil society, and reinforce local governance structures, especially in areas abandoned by central authorities.
4. **Avoid one-size-fits-all solutions:** external actors must stop imposing rigid governance models; peace solutions must be adapted to regional histories and political cultures.
5. **Reclaim ownership of peace processes:** African institutions must lead, not follow. Conflict resolution must reflect local legitimacy and regional alignment, not donor-driven templates.
6. **Coordinate African-led regional peace efforts:** the AU and regional economic communities must avoid duplication and rivalry, and should instead align strategies, competencies, and timing.
7. **Plan for long-term stability, not short-term fixes:** peacebuilding must move away from reactive approaches toward sustained, preventative diplomacy supported by credible institutions.



Panel 3

Rethinking Counterterrorism and Defense Policies in Africa: From Vision to Capacity

Panel composition:

- **Abdelhak Bassou**, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South
- **David Akrong**, Air Commodore, Acting Commandant, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre
- **Luis Miguel Escudeiro da Costa Cabral**, Navy Captain OF5, Deputy Coordinator, Atlantic Centre
- **Abishek Mishra**, Associate Fellow, MP-IDSA
- **Henry Pambi Sini**, Deputy Director Intelligence, Nigeria National Counter Terrorism Centre





HENRI PAMBI SINI

Deputy Director Intelligence,
Nigeria National Counter
Terrorism Centre

Henri Pambi Sini said that honest, inclusive dialogue was essential to addressing Africa's complex and evolving security threats.

He urged the continent to reclaim its narrative and move beyond externally imposed perspectives.

He noted that regional frameworks such as the AU and ECOWAS often fall short because of weak coordination and limited political will.

Pambi Sini warned of growing terrorist threats, particularly

efforts to gain coastal access, which significantly increase in Drawing on his counterterrorism experience, he stressed the importance of accurate threat perception and strategic foresight, pointing to emerging links between extremist groups and criminal networks.

He also highlighted the hybrid nature of modern conflict—fought both on the ground and in cyberspace.

For **Pambi Sini**, lasting solutions require more than military action: they need stronger regional cooperation, better analysis, and a shift from talk to sustained, effective action.





**LUIS MIGUEL
ESCUDEIRO DA COSTA
CABRAL**

Navy Captain OF5, Deputy Coordinator,
Atlantic Centre

Luis Miguel Escudeiro da Costa Cabral highlighted a key omission from the security discourse: the maritime domain.

He warned that overlooking Africa's sea corridors risks missing a critical contemporary threat, as terrorist groups increasingly aim to control coastal routes for strategic and financial gain.

Escudeiro pointed to the evolving reasons for extremism—not just ideology, but also access to land, resources, and trade routes.

He stressed that Africa's explosive population growth, combined with disillusionment among young people, is creating fertile ground for radicalization.

Escudeiro emphasized the need to go beyond military responses and address the structural drivers of insecurity through sustainable development, strategic cooperation, and a shared vision.

He concluded that winning the fight against terrorism will depend not just on force, but on ideas, partnerships, and long-term investment in resilience.





DAVID AKRONG

Air Commodore, Acting Commandant,
Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping
Training Centre

David Akrong highlighted the growing gap between Africa's security goals and practical implementation.

While initiatives such as the African Standby Force have marked progress, he noted that weak coordination and preparedness continue to limit their impact.

The continent's evolving threat landscape, he argued, demands more adaptable and integrated responses.

He called for stronger inter-agency collaboration, cross-border

focus on four priorities: technology and cybersecurity, sustainable defense financing, public-private partnerships, and whole-of-society security planning.

With new international support, including UNSC Resolution 2719, Akrong emphasized the need to revitalize African-led peace operations.

To succeed, he stressed, Africa must pair military action with development and cooperation—turning **“African solutions to African problems”** into concrete strategy.





ABISHEK MISHRA

Associate Fellow, MP-IDSA

Abishek Mishra emphasized the absence of strong coordination between regional institutions as a core weakness in Africa's fight against terrorism.

He stressed that without transparency and local inclusion, counterterrorism efforts will continue to fall short.

Mishra emphasized the importance of a bottom-up approach, noting that frontline communities must play a central role in shaping prevention strategies.

He also warned of the evolving nature of terrorist threats: fast-

moving, asymmetric, and increasingly difficult to predict.

On maritime security, he raised concerns about the growing presence of external actors in African waters, framing it as a militarization dilemma: foreign involvement may invite geopolitical tension, yet many African states lack the capacity to secure their own coastlines.

Mishra called for carefully balanced cooperation frameworks that preserve African ownership, while leveraging targeted external support.



Policy recommendations:

1. **Improve coordination** among African regional bodies, and enhance inter-agency collaboration through standardized protocols and shared intelligence.
2. **Shift to proactive threat assessment and foresight**, especially in coastal and high-risk regions.
3. **Empower local communities** in prevention, early warning, and stabilization efforts.
4. **Address root causes of insecurity**, including unemployment, marginalization, and weak governance.
5. **Invest in digital infrastructure, surveillance, and early warning systems**, with a focus on local capacity.
6. **Ensure sustainable defense financing** and involve the private sector in innovation, especially in cybersecurity and logistics.
7. **Integrate maritime security into broader counterterrorism strategies** and develop African-led frameworks to manage external military presence.
8. **Counter online radicalization** through digital literacy and alternative narratives.
9. **Align external support and partnerships** with African-led priorities and initiatives.



Panel 4

Owning the Story: Africa's Strategic Agency in the Geopolitics of Ideas

Panel composition:

- **Kidane Kiros**, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South
- **Thembisa Fakude**, Director, Afrasid
- **Dahan Ahmed Mahmoud**, Executive Director, Mauritanian Institute for Strategic Studies
- **Zineb Benalla**, CEO, Eirene Peacebuilding

Session description:

The world is undergoing profound transformations, driven by technological disruption, geopolitical shifts, and environmental pressures. In this time of uncertainty, nations must adopt adaptive, forward-looking strategies grounded in collaboration and pragmatic policymaking. This session shifted the focus to the power of narrative, with participants exploring how reclaiming control over language and storytelling can challenge inherited stereotypes, redefine African realities, and safeguard the continent's interests as multilateral systems weaken.



THEMBISA FAKUDE

Director, Afrasid

Thembisa Fakude emphasized that language shapes how Africa is perceived, noting that dominant languages have long reinforced external and reductive narratives.

He argued that Africans have transformed colonial languages including English and French into tools of cultural expression, and that using them need not compromise African identity.

Instead of rejecting these languages, he called for their reclamation—alongside the preservation and elevation of indigenous languages.

True decolonization, he said, requires creating original concepts that reflect African realities, rather than relying on imported terms that obscure complexity.

Fakude also criticized the tendency of African voices within global media to reproduce external narratives, often out of fear or institutional pressure.

He stressed that editorial responsibility lies with individuals, and that strengthening African agency in the media is vital.

Finally, he warned that the erosion of multilateralism threatens Africa's voice in global affairs, making it more urgent than ever to reclaim linguistic, intellectual, and editorial power.





DAHAN AHMED MAHMOUD

Executive Director, Mauritanian
Institute for Strategic Studies

Dahan Ahmed Mahmoud argued that the world is at a pivotal moment, shaped by rapid technological, economic, and geopolitical shifts—from AI and drones to the erosion of the dominance of the U.S. dollar.

He warned that new global and regional dynamics, including environmental stress, demographic pressure, and institutional fragility, are fueling instability and migration.

Mahmoud criticized the tendency of governments to adopt foreign policy models

without adapting them to local contexts, stressing the need for collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches.

He highlighted the critical role of strategic studies centers in developing bold, realistic solutions.

Speaking from a Maghrebi perspective, he lamented the region's declining global economic share and low intra-Maghreb trade, despite its significant potential.

He called for investment in infrastructure and deeper regional integration, urging Maghreb states to move beyond divisions and embrace cooperation as a shared national interest.





ZINEB BENALLA
CEO, Eirene Peacebuilding

Zineb Benalla described her experience working in northern Mali during Operation Serval in 2013, where, she noted, contrary to dominant media narratives, local women shared stories highlighting historical resilience, such as the legacy of Timbuktu.

She used this example to argue that building lasting peace and stability in Africa requires institutional development, economic growth, and internal reform to be prioritized.

Benalla cautioned against the continent's entanglement in

Great Power rivalries, noting that Africa's interests are best served by a stable global environment.

She highlighted the importance of narrative power and cited the work of African think tanks, civil society, and strategic partnerships as essential tools.

She concluded by referencing Agenda 2063 as a comprehensive framework for Africa's long-term development and integration.



Policy recommendations:

1. **Assert ownership of colonial languages while promoting and valuing indigenous languages** as part of a broader decolonization of language.
2. **Develop original African terms and concepts** to create narratives that reflect local realities, moving beyond foreign academic and media frameworks.
3. **Promote collaborative thinking and interdisciplinary cooperation** to address complex and rapidly evolving challenges.
4. **Support and strengthen strategic studies centers** to generate innovative ideas and guide bold, realistic policymaking.
5. **Prioritize the strengthening of institutions** through economic development and by effectively addressing internal challenges.



Panel 5

Competing Influences: Africa and the New Geopolitical Order

Panel composition:

- **Nouzha Chekrouni**, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South
- **Chris Alden**, Director, LSE Ideas
- **Stephen Klingebiel**, Head of Department, IDOS
- **Ibrahima Silla**, Senior Lecturer in Political Sciences, Gaston Berger University
- **Emebet Getachew**, Independent consultant and expert on regional peace and security and peacebuilding





CHRIS ALDEN
Director, LSE Ideas

Chris Alden highlighted South Africa’s foreign policy doctrine of ‘active non-alignment’, which enables the country to participate in global affairs without formally aligning with any major geopolitical bloc.

This principle has shaped South Africa’s neutral stance on the Russia–Ukraine war and its assertive legal action at the International Court of Justice on the Israel–Palestine conflict.

Despite international tensions, South Africa views BRICS as a crucial strategic platform

to assert its influence and navigate Great Power competition.

Alden noted that the country’s firm commitment to international law has come at a diplomatic cost, straining relations with both the Trump and Biden administrations.





STEPHEN KLINGEBIEL

Head of Department, IDOS

Stephen Klingebiel said that the shifting global order is creating new opportunities for African agency, but capitalizing on this moment requires African states to proactively build their strategic capacities.

He observed that multi-alignment is increasingly shaping African diplomacy, offering diversification of partnerships while heightening the risk of political and institutional fragmentation.

Klingebiel emphasized the need for the African Union

to play a stronger, more assertive role to ensure that Africa's voice is structurally embedded in global decision-making processes.

He also pointed to China's elimination of tariffs on African goods as a sign of a broader realignment in global trade dynamics and geopolitical influence.





IBRAHIMA SILLA

Senior Lecturer in Political
Sciences, Gaston Berger
University

Ibrahima Silla offered a conceptual reflection on the nature of influence in Africa, arguing that it must be understood not as coercion but as a subtle extension of power, largely through soft power and foreign-policy continuity.

He observed that traditional powers such as France are losing ground to emerging actors such as China, India, and Gulf states, which are increasingly present through infrastructure projects, trade, and financial engagement.

Silla emphasized that African states are not simply subjected to influence; rather, they are capable of leveraging their strategic resources to attract and negotiate influence on their own terms.

Yet this increasing multiplicity of actors creates strategic ambiguity, particularly in domestic politics, elections, and policy formulation.

Silla called for African countries to stop mimicking external models and instead develop distinct geopolitical identities, rooted in regional realities, internal legitimacy, and long-term strategic thinking.





EMEBET GETACHEW

Independent consultant and expert on regional peace and security and peacebuilding.

Emebet Getachew focused on the intensification of great power competition in Africa, particularly between China and the U.S., with the Horn of Africa emerging as a key battleground.

She pointed to the American withdrawal from several peacebuilding and development initiatives, creating a strategic vacuum that neither Europe, because of internal constraints, nor China, have fully addressed.

In parallel, Gulf countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia are expanding their footprints through mediation and military presence, especially in the Red Sea and Horn regions.

Getachew also drew attention to the rise in both intra- and inter-state conflicts, including cases such as the DRC–Rwanda standoff.

She argued that Africa must respond by strengthening institutional resilience, promoting regional cooperation, and maintaining a firm commitment to democratic governance, widely supported by African citizens.

She urged African policymakers and institutions to invest in proactive diplomacy, to diversify partnerships, and to raise the profile of local peacebuilding initiatives, including those led by think tanks and civil society.



Policy recommendations:

1. **Invest in strategic capacity** by strengthening diplomatic training, policy foresight, and independent foreign policy development.
2. **Approach multi-alignment with clear, coherent strategies** that protect national interests and prevent external manipulation.
3. **Reform and empower the African Union** to enhance internal coordination, legitimacy, and participation in global decision-making.
4. **Develop a distinct African geopolitical identity** rooted in regional realities, soft power, and long-term vision.
5. **Use Africa's assets** such as infrastructure, trade, and demographics as tools for negotiation; don't view them as vulnerabilities.
6. **Strengthen institutional resilience** to manage Great Power rivalries and reduce reliance on external peacebuilding support.
7. **Prioritize regional diplomacy and locally-led initiatives for peacebuilding and governance**, leveraging civil society and think tanks.
8. **Diversify international partnerships while safeguarding autonomy** and avoiding new forms of dependency.



Conversation I

- **Khadija Ihsane**, TV Anchor, Medi 1 TV
- **Kainga Patricia Wellington**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Malawi

The conversation focused on Malawi's climate-related vulnerabilities and food insecurity, highlighting the urgency of African-led solutions through stronger coordination between the AU and the Southern African Development Community (**SADC**), and improved regional preparedness. Key points included inclusion of young people, cross-border climate impacts, and the need to reduce aid dependency by strengthening internal cooperation.





KAINGA PATRICIA WELLINGTON

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Malawi

Kainga Patricia Wellington highlighted climate change as the most pressing threat facing Malawi, pointing to increasingly severe and unpredictable natural disasters, including floods, droughts, and cyclones.

With 80% of Malawi's population reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods, these climate shocks have direct and devastating impacts, particularly on food security, which is worsening because of both climate variability and limited access to essential inputs such as fertilizers.

She stressed that the effects of climate change transcend national borders, making regional cooperation and solidarity essential.

Strengthening AU and SADC coordination, she argued, is key to building resilience and improving preparedness across the region.

Kainga called for Africa to take full ownership of its challenges by shifting from aid dependency to collective self-reliance and internal capacity building.

She also underscored the importance of inclusive approaches, noting that young people and women remain underrepresented in decision-making, despite their potential to drive meaningful change.

Empowering these groups, she suggested, is not only a matter of justice but a strategic necessity.

Lastly, she advocated for stronger diplomatic collaboration to unlock shared resources, harmonize economic policies, and create new job opportunities, helping to build a more sustainable and self-sufficient future for the continent.



Policy recommendations:

1. **Develop preparedness and early response mechanisms** to manage climate-related shocks effectively.
2. **Strengthen coordination between the AU, SADC, and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)**, to reflect African priorities and reduce reliance on external aid.
3. **Establish rapid response capacities within APSA** specifically for addressing climate-related security risks.
4. **Enhance food security**, including by investment in storage, distribution, and disaster-resilient infrastructure.
5. **Promote inclusive governance** by integrating young people and women into decision-making through economic opportunities and entrepreneurship support.
6. **Use regional diplomacy to align economic policies and unlock cross-border employment opportunities**, as part of a broader continental integration strategy.
7. **Treat suspensions of external aid—such as U.S. aid freezes—as a signal** that resilient, Africa-funded development and financing models must be put in place.
8. **Design and institutionalize permanent climate cooperation mechanisms** that are tailored to Africa's specific vulnerabilities and built on collective action.



Panel 6

The African Peace & Security Architecture in the Face of Emerging Threats

Panel composition:

- **Abdessalam Jaldi**, Senior Specialist, International Relations Research Department, Policy Center for the New South
- **Zakaria Abouddahab**, International Relations Professor, Mohammed V University
- **Norman Sempijja**, Associate Professor, FGSES-UM6P
- **Rida Lyammouri**, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South
- **Jérôme Mellon**, Head of Policy & Operational Support, and Coordinator for West & Central Africa, United Nations

Session description:

This session examined the evolution of the African Peace and Security Architecture (**APSA**), a critical pillar of the African Union's conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. Amidst rising transnational threats, including terrorism, the misuse of emerging technologies (like drones and AI), and complex financial and organized crimes, APSA's structural and operational challenges have become more pronounced. These threats are not confined by borders and demand coordinated, swift, and context-specific responses. The session addressed key questions around governance deficits, institutional overlaps, growing African agency, external interventions, and the disconnect between frameworks and effective implementation on the ground.



**ZAKARIA
ABOUDDAHAB**

International Relations Professor,
Mohammed V University

Zakaria Abouddahab focused on the principles and legal frameworks that should guide African peace efforts, emphasizing the importance of conflict stabilization and crisis prevention.

He highlighted the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) as a key international doctrine that affirms the duty of states and regional organizations to intervene when populations face the risk of mass atrocities.

However, he expressed concern that, framework, its implementation

in African contexts has been largely symbolic, with limited practical enforcement.

Abouddahab strongly advocated in favor of increased pressure on belligerents, pushing them to comply with international humanitarian law, arguing that the widespread impunity of armed actors undermines peace initiatives and also erodes the legitimacy of regional institutions.





NORMAN SEMPIJJA

Associate Professor, FGSES-
UM6P

Norman Sempijja analyzed the evolving nature of African agency within a shifting global power landscape.

He argued that Africa is experiencing a reconfiguration of state behavior, with national sovereignty increasingly reasserted, often at the expense of regional cohesion.

This trend is particularly evident in the actions of Sahelian states, which are pushing back against what they view as externally imposed norms, those implemented by ECOWAS and the African Union.

Sempijja described this as the “re-emergence of the state” as the dominant actor, with governments prioritizing survival, national interests, and political legitimacy, even if this undermines regional cooperation.

He also noted the growing role of Gulf middle powers, including Qatar and the UAE, in African conflict mediation.

While their involvement may bring resources and influence, it also risks sidelining African-led mechanisms such as APSA, and raises important questions about the continued relevance of the African Union.





RIDA LYAMMOURI

Senior Fellow, Policy Center for
the New South

Rida Lyammouri shifted the conversation to the evolving nature of threats facing the continent, particularly terrorism and technological warfare.

His presentation drew attention to the adaptive strategies of terrorist organizations such as JNIM (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin) and Al-Shabaab, which are no longer confined to rural zones but are increasingly targeting urban areas and strategic centers of power.

He stressed that these groups are exploiting the existing fragility of African states, the Great Lakes, where governance vacuums persist.

Lyammouri was especially concerned about the use of emerging technologies by these groups, citing ten confirmed drone attacks by JNIM since March 2025, and similar tactics by Al-Shabaab.

He revealed that some groups have even begun using offline AI tools, indicating a rapid and dangerous increase in technical capability.





JÉRÔME MELLON

Head of Policy & Operational Support, and Coordinator for West & Central Africa, United Nations

Jérôme Mellon took a more institutional angle focused on capacity-building.

He highlighted the operational and political limits of APSA, especially when it comes to early response and conflict prevention.

Mellon argued that APSA's real strength lies not only in its early-warning systems but in its ability to act swiftly once risks are detected.

He called for an upgrade of both the technical capacity and political will required

rapid deployment and preventive diplomacy. Mellon also advocated the deployment of mobile rule-of-law teams in conflict zones to prevent institutional collapse and ensure accountability.

These teams, composed of African legal experts, could offer crucial support in pre-crisis phases, when gaps in governance can make or break peace efforts.



Policy recommendations:

1. **Clarify and coordinate institutional mandates:** establish clear roles for the AU and subregional bodies (e.g. ECOWAS, SADC), in order to avoid overlap and competition, and harmonize interventions through a unified framework for greater coherence.
2. **Strengthen preventive mechanisms and early action:** expand and better resource the Continental Early Warning System; develop political will and mechanisms for timely responses; and embed human rights and governance indicators into APSA operations, to shift from reactive to preventive action.
3. **Invest in technology and data-driven strategy:** create centralized conflict databases and integrate AI specialists and data analysts into policymaking, to improve strategic planning and anticipation of threats.
4. **Improve regional military cooperation:** conduct joint military exercises to enhance preparedness and improve interoperability, especially in areas affected by transnational threats, such as the Sahel.
5. **Promote inclusive, localized peacebuilding:** support community-rooted solutions that reflect local grievances and empower local actors in mediation, avoiding top-down or externally imposed frameworks.
6. **Leverage African expertise and foster South-South cooperation:** utilize African professionals in international institutions to influence global policy and promote intra-African knowledge sharing.
7. **Modernize APSA to address evolving threats.**
8. **Deploy mobile rule of law and justice teams** during early stages of crises to strengthen governance and accountability in conflict settings.

Closing Remarks



ABDELHAK BASSOU

Senior Fellow, Policy Center for
the New South

To close the conference, **Abdelhak Bassou** reflected on the complex and interconnected challenges facing Africa: from conflict and emerging threats to climate change and demographic pressures.

The discussions were marked by insightful exchanges aimed at clarifying these issues and identifying concrete, actionable responses.

A clear message emerged: Africa has the capacity not only to endure these challenges but

to overcome them through resilience and innovation.

Achieving this, however, requires moving beyond theory toward practical, results-oriented strategies.

He noted that panelists consistently emphasized the need to shift from reactive responses to proactive planning: an essential step in turning uncertainty into opportunity.

He underscored the shared conviction that it is action, not just analysis, that will shape the future Africa aspires to build.



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