

Webinar
The US/Israel war on Iran:
Implications on Relations between the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa
Thursday, April 23, 2026
03.00 – 04.30 pm CET | 04.00 – 05.30 pm EAT
Via Zoom

Contextualization

- The current escalation in the Gulf region is significantly affecting the close ties between the Middle East—particularly the Gulf—and Sub-Saharan Africa across multiple dimensions.
- The ongoing war, which began on February 28 with Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran, followed by retaliatory attacks by the Islamic Republic targeting Israel and critical infrastructure in the Gulf such as oil refineries, gas fields, airports, ports, and hotels is disrupting regional stability and global energy flows, as evidenced by the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.
- Heightened uncertainty in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa is further undermining regional stability, increasing risks for local communities, governments, and the private sector.
- Trade relations between Gulf states and African partners are characterized by mutual dependency: the Gulf supplies fuels and fertilizers essential for African transport, energy, and agriculture, while African countries export minerals, gold, and food commodities critical to Gulf food security. Disruptions to air traffic are also weakening aviation connectivity. Consequently, rising prices and supply chain disruptions are generating reciprocal economic shocks in both regions.
- Across Africa, the conflict is exacerbating food insecurity and weakening social and economic resilience. As Gulf states face mounting domestic pressures to repair infrastructure and stabilize their own economies, their investment footprint in Africa may decline. In parallel, diplomatic engagement by key mediators such as Qatar in African conflicts is likely to be constrained.
- Overall, the crisis is drawing the African continent deeper into global geopolitical tensions, with potentially long-term consequences rooted in structural dependencies on external energy sources, trade corridors, and supply chains.

Aim of the webinar

- Bringing together leading experts from academia, civil society, and policy-oriented research across Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, this webinar will examine the political and economic intersections between the two regions in the context of the ongoing war.
- Participants will assess how Middle Eastern engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa ranging from infrastructure development and energy investments to mediation in regional conflicts is reshaping African agency, diplomacy, and long-term strategic autonomy in a time of crisis, and how established approaches may need to be reassessed and reconfigured.
- This webinar is part of the series “*The Middle East and Africa in Flux*,” organized by CARPO and the HOME Institute (Horn of Africa & Middle East Institute).

Experts

Shirley Achieng is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at the United States International University – Africa (USIU-Africa). She is also the Executive Director and inaugural co-convenor of the Africa Network of Critical Security Scholars (ANeCS). She holds a Ph.D. in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Otago, New Zealand. She also holds a Master’s degree in International Relations from the United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa). Her doctoral thesis titled *Towards an Indigenous African Approach to Counterterrorism in Kenya* was awarded the 2024 Exceptional Doctoral Thesis Award by the University of Otago. Shirley has extensive experience in the civil service spanning over eight years. She has worked in various capacities in government providing policy and technical advice on matters of peace and conflict. She doubles as the co-founder of the Decolonial Terrorism Studies Network, where she is currently working with other scholars and stakeholders in the Global South to advocate for local solutions to the terrorism problem. Her research interests include counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), decolonial methodologies, restorative justice, criminal and transitional justice, peacebuilding and security studies. She has published many articles and book chapters on these topics in various journals, including *The African Review* and *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.

Damyana Bakardzhieva is the Senior Research Fellow leading the Economic Diplomacy programme at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (UAE). She is a seasoned economist with a wealth of experience in international economic research, teaching, training, and consultancy. With a dual PhD in Economics from the University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis (France) and Sofia University (Bulgaria), Dr Bakardzhieva has taught Economics and Sustainable Development in Bulgaria, France, Monaco, the United States, and Egypt. Prior to joining AGDA, she was Chief Consultant for Global Economics and Finance Consulting (Monaco), and Associate Professor of Economics and Sustainable Development as well as Campus CSR Advisor at the International University of Monaco. She also held the positions of Associate Department Chair and Director of Graduate Programmes at the Department of Economics of the American University in Cairo, where she received a Research Excellence Award in 2021. She is the Senior Editor, Economics, for the International Journal of Emerging Markets. Her research focuses on international macroeconomics, comparative economic studies, and sustainability.

Eyad Alrefai is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah. He heads the Middle Eastern Studies unit at the Centre of Arab Eurasian Studies. Eyad is a Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies and De-sectarianisation (SEPAD) project at Lancaster University. His research interests include international relations of the Middle East, identities, state weakness, security, and legitimacy.

Bob Wekesa is the Director of the African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), South Africa. Dr Wekesa teaches and supervises postgraduate projects in the disciplines of media and geopolitics. He is the coordinator of the Africa-U.S. Universities Network and lead convenor of the annual Amplifying African Voices for Strategic Action Conference. He is the Inaugural Africa Visiting Fellow, Africa–U.S. Initiative, USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy (CCLP), University of Southern California; visiting professor at the Center for African Studies/Department of African Studies, Howard University, Washington, DC; and Adjunct professor, Department of Diplomacy and International Studies, University of Nairobi. He earned his doctoral and master's degrees from the Communication University of China (2012 and 2015, respectively). He is a widely published scholar and public intellectual in media and geopolitics with a focus on African agency toward global powers, Africa-US higher education partnerships, and public and digital diplomacy. His books are *“Africa’s Policy Towards the U.S.: The Biden Era”* (Good Governance Africa, 2021), *“China’s Footprint in East Africa”* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), and *“Africa in the Global South”* (Emerging

Scholars Initiative, expected in November 2025). He is an editorial board member of three international journals and a board member of the Georgetown/Michigan State University-based Chinese in Africa/Africans China Research Network. An alumnus of the Commonwealth Press Union (UK), Dr Wekesa is a member of the African Studies Association (USA), International Relations Society of Kenya, South African Association of Political Studies, and South African Communications Association, among others.

Moderators

Nimo Jirdeh is a leading Governance and Public Sector Specialist, widely recognized for her visionary leadership, deep community insight and a strong track record in advancing peace, governance and development across the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. She is the Director of the HOME Institute (Horn of Africa and Middle East Institute), the first academic and policy research institution dedicated exclusively to bridging the strategic, political and socio-economic dynamics of the two regions. Through HOME, Nimo has created a credible and inclusive platform for knowledge exchange, dialogue and collaborative action among thought leaders, civil society, academia and policy actors. With over 15 years of experience in international development, governance reform, and policy advisory, Nimo is known for her ability to navigate complex political landscapes, lead cross-sectoral partnerships and design transformative and inclusive programs to strengthen state institutions and independent civil-society. She has completed higher education and advanced trainings at prestigious institutions including Harvard University, the Graduate Institute of Geneva, the University of Basel and Edith Cowan University-Australia.

Dr Sebastian Sons is Senior Researcher at CARPO. Previously, he served as an advisor for the Regional Programme “Cooperation with Arab Donors” (CAD) of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. He holds a Ph.D. from the Humboldt University Berlin with a thesis on media discourses on labor migration from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia. Sebastian studied Islamic Studies, History and Political Sciences in Berlin and Damascus. Prior to that, he was trained as journalist in print, TV and radio media at the Berlin School for Journalists (Berliner Journalisten-Schule). Prior to his advisory position at GIZ, he was Head of Research and Editor-in-Chief of the academic magazine Orient at the German Orient-Institute from 2009-2014 and project researcher at the Program Near East and North Africa at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) in Berlin.