

14th SeSaMO Conference

PATHS OF RESISTANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

University of Turin (Italy)

31 January–2 February 2019



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITLE: The Middle East's Interaction with Horn of Africa States and the Shifting Balance of Power: alignments and resistances

CONVENOR(S): Federico Donelli
Brendon J. Cannon

ABSTRACT:

Following the Arab Spring uprisings, the Horn of Africa has acquired a new centrality for Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies. Such renewed interest is said by some to be largely due to the Horn's geopolitical prominence and has therefore resulted in a modern-day scramble for influence among Middle Eastern players driven by both geo-economic and geo-security imperatives. The turmoil engendered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis has sharply infected the Horn of Africa, leading to uncertainty, sowing new regional divisions and rekindling old hostilities. A process that is tightly connected with the ongoing securitization of the whole region. Indeed, in the post-Arab Spring era, the activism of Middle Eastern states has contributed to the militarisation of the Horn and it has altered the existing balance of power in this conflict-ridden region. Yet a key factor is missing from this popular narrative: the interests and influence of Horn of Africa states. Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and other entities – to include de-facto independent or autonomous regions – have exhibited a gravitational pull of their own, wooing would-be investors and security actors and enmeshing these state actors, to include the Gulf monarchies, within their own rivalries and strategic gambits. Altogether, these developments have produced structural changes of the Horn of Africa geopolitical environment, generating alignment dynamics and expressions of resistance from state and non-state actors.

Drawing into the regional security conceptual framework, this panel intends to grasp such developments, seeking to explore the new system of alliances and counter alliances that ties the Horn and the Middle East in the post-Arab Spring era. The main argument is that traditional security dynamics of the Horn - domestic dynamics regionalized through various spillover mechanisms - have been intertwined and overlapped by others that are flowing in the opposite way. Specifically, the panel aims to analyse the reshuffle of security environment in the 'Greater' Middle East, identifying the actors, agendas and threats by using existing and new theoretical perspectives developed within the IR theory. Although many scholars (Fawcett, Hinnebusch, Korany, Halliday, Owen, Walt, Buzan, Waeber, Ehteshami and Murphy) gave their own original contribution to the matter, we are purposefully open to receive papers which even propose new ones. Potential topics for a productive discussion include, but not limited to: the role of a specific country, the rise of transnational resistance's movements, analyse specific relations between two or more countries and non-state actors, or even stress the importance on particular factors in shaping and altering alliances (power distribution, energy, religion, perceived threats).

CONVENOR'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Federico Donelli is Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Political Science and International Relations at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of Genoa, Italy, and Visiting Researcher at the Istanbul Şehir University, Turkey. His research fields have covered International Relations and Foreign Policy of the wider Middle East.

Brendon J. Cannon is an Assistant Professor of International Security at the Department of Humanities and Social Science of the Abu Dhabi Khalifa University, UAE. He is a former Fulbright scholar and his academic specializations are in the changing balance of power in the wider Middle East region, particularly the Horn of Africa.