

Navigating Protracted Conflicts in a Multi-Aligned World: Closing the Chatham House XCEPT Research Programme

Chatham House, London | Tuesday, 12 June 2025 | 09:00–14:00 BST.

Modern conflicts are no longer neatly contained within national borders but are increasingly shaped by complex, transnational geoeconomic systems. This event marks the culmination of a five-year Chatham House research programme under the Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy, and Trends (XCEPT) initiative funded by UK international Development.

The research explores the evolving dynamics of transnational conflict ecosystems across the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel, and parts of West and East Africa. The programme investigates how conflict economies — sustained by both licit and illicit supply chains — are reshaping regional power structures and challenging the effectiveness of traditional Western policy responses. As regional middle powers pursue pragmatic, issue-based alignments and military actors evolve into significant political players, the urgency for a more adaptive and strategic Western approach grows.

This event's discussions unpack the key findings of this research and explore how policymakers can better respond to the complex realities of a multi-aligned global order.

Agenda

09.00 – 09.30 Reception

09.30 – 10.00 Three spot sessions on XCEPT case studies

In this set of short, parallel sessions, research leads will present case studies from the XCEPT research programme, highlighting the transnational dimensions of conflicts in their respective research areas.

- **Tim Eaton**, Senior Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, will discuss how conflict in Libya has enabled the transnational expansion of migrant smuggling and trafficking.
- **Renad Mansour**, Senior Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, will discuss how armed groups in the Middle East operate across borders, illustrating the transnational nature of conflict in the region.
- **Ahmed Soliman**, Senior Research Fellow, Africa Programme, Chatham House, will discuss the cross-border dynamics of conflicts in Sudan and Ethiopia and how conflicts in these contexts have wider transnational impacts.

10.00 – 10.15 Break

10.15 – 11.30 Plenary session 1: An overview of five years of XCEPT research

Conflicts such as those in Israel-Palestine, Libya, and Sudan remain stubbornly unresolved, with political settlements proving elusive and often short-lived. This enduring instability is a consequence of a rapidly evolving global order, where governments no longer adhere strictly to traditional geopolitical alignments or 'spheres of influence.' Instead, these conflicts unfold within a complex transnational ecosystem, where allies in one dispute may find themselves adversaries in another. Middle powers intervening in these conflicts often support Western interests on certain issues while opposing them on others. The intricate dynamics of these multialigned states contribute to a fragmented and unpredictable international arena, where alliances are fluid and transcend national borders. This new reality poses a significant challenge to Western policy instruments, which are rooted in binary frameworks that have become increasingly obsolete. In this panel, the culmination of a five-year research project, discussants will explore how the conflicts in Sudan, Libya, and Israel-Palestine persist without political resolution amidst a transforming global order.

Speakers:

Professor Jonathan Goodhand, Professor in Conflict and Development Studies at SOAS, University of London.

Dr Renad Mansour, Senior Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House; Project Director, Iraq Initiative.

Dr Sanam Vakil, Director, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House.

Mark White, Director, First Call Partners Ltd; Conflict, Security, and Governance Expert.

Moderator:

To be confirmed

11.30 – 11.45 Break

11.45 – 13:00 Plenary session 2: Multialignment and transnational conflict: policy challenges and implications

As global and regional powers navigate an increasingly multipolar world, multialignment has become a defining feature of international relations—particularly in conflict zones where state and non-state actors intersect. Conflicts are becoming increasingly interconnected, and challenging traditional policy frameworks. This high-level session brings together policymakers and experts to discuss how governments are adapting to these evolving dynamics and consider the strategic, diplomatic, and security implications of multialignment in today's interconnected conflicts. How should states engage with partners who balance competing interests? What are the risks and opportunities for conflict resolution and security cooperation? Which policy frameworks and tools are proving most effective and which need updating to better address the current context?

Speakers:

HRH Prince Khalid bin Bandar Al Saud, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Kingdom

Dr Alhadji Sarjoh Bah, Director of Conflict Management, Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department, African Union.

Ambassador Mary Catherine (Molly) Phee, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, United States Department of State.

Professor Mary Kaldor, Director of the Conflict Research Programme, LSE IDEAS

Moderator:

To be confirmed

13:00 – 14:00 Closing and Lunch

Please note that all sessions will be on live stream and all times in this agenda are in BST (GMT + 1)