

Concept Note | 11th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa 24 – 26 October 2025

Section I

1. Introduction: concept and origin

With the aim of playing a crucial role in bringing about sustainable peace and contributing to the implementation of the African Union Tripoli Declaration of August 2009, the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of Addis Ababa University convenes an annual flagship security conference called the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, now popularly known as the Tana Forum. This initiative responds to the Tripoli Declaration's appeal for 'African-led solutions' and the treatment of peace and security as a collective 'intellectual challenge.' For the past ten years, the Tana Forum has a flagship annual event attended by eminent personalities, including policy decision-makers, intellectuals, and stakeholders from the continent, and regional and global organizations.

From the outset, Tana Forum has witnessed the engagement of the political leadership and other stakeholders in an informal, open, and frank discussion on pressing peace and security challenges facing Africa. This has been a tradition for the subsequent ten forums. The current challenges confronting the continent necessitate frank and in-depth deliberations on pertinent global issues in which Africa is a key stakeholder.

The 11th Edition of the Tana Forum, scheduled to take place from **24 – 26 October 2025** in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the theme "**Africa in an Evolving Global Order**" aspires to continue the tradition of candid discussions. High-level policy decision-makers, heads of regional, continental, and global organizations, and thought-leaders from across the spectrum are expected to attend the event.

2. Overarching theme: Africa in an Evolving Global Order

Africa is a region of increasing strategic importance on a global scale. At the same time, the world is experiencing shifting power dynamics, technological advancements, and geopolitical rivalries in a complex evolving world order. In these fluxes, Africa stands at a critical juncture facing opportunities and challenges as it adapts to this changing landscape. One of Africa's biggest challenges is economic inequality, with some of the world's vulnerable countries and the fastest-growing economies found on the continent. This inequality creates social tensions and political instability, making it difficult to achieve socio-economic development. Another challenge for

Africa is security, with conflict, terrorism, organized crime, and climate change causing instability and discouraging investment. Despite these challenges, Africa has significant opportunities, including its rich natural resources, growing and dynamic youthful population, and avenues for innovation. This raises the question- can Africa overcome its obstacles and reach its full potential or will it be left behind in the evolving global order. Against this backdrop, overall discussions at the Tana Forum will:

1. Assess the evolving dynamics of contemporary global order and its implications for Africa, including vulnerabilities, challenges, and opportunities.
2. Examine Africa's unique assets, resources, and capabilities that can be leveraged in this evolving global context.
3. Highlight strategies and initiatives that can empower Africa to navigate and shape the global order to its advantage.
4. Explore avenues for encouraging dialogue and partnerships to maximize Africa's potential in a rapidly changing world.

3. Sub-themes

I. Situating Africa in an Emerging Global Order

Africa is part of the current unfolding global conflagrations. Marked by geopolitical fragmentation, increasing economic reordering, and strategic competition, these dynamics are fast transforming how states and Africa as a region interact in the ecosystem of a globalised world. The unipolar world order of the post-Cold War era that witnessed the Western world as an epicentre of dominant influence is now, as it seems, morphing into a geopolitical landscape marked by multiple centres of influence with a multitude of players, including the United States, China, the European Union, Russia, and increasingly, rising regional powers like India, Brazil, and Turkiye, who are actively courting Africa states for spheres of influence. Shifting foreign policy priorities of Africa's partners have also taken centre-stage within the last three years as the race for economic, technological, and political dominance intensifies. These geopolitical dynamics present both opportunities and changes for Africa.

African states today are not mere passive actors. As a region, African states are progressively asserting agency bilaterally and through continental institutions such as the Africa Union and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to shape responses to peace, security, and socioeconomic policies. However, persistent internal fragmentation among African states, governance challenges, and security threats, particularly in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region and parts of Central Africa, has become a bane to Africa – individually and collectively as states. Furthermore, the weaponisation of debt, infrastructure diplomacy, technological transformation and AI, as well as energy transitions are shaping African state's strategic

geopolitical calculus at the intersection of China's Belt and Road Initiative, Russia's security engagements competing with Western development and security paradigm and the current US transactional approach. How Africa situates itself in this emerging global order: raises, two pertinent questions

1. How should African states - strategically navigate and influence the shifting global order while safeguarding its development agenda for the Africa We Want?
2. What institutional and strategic mechanisms are needed to assert Africa's agency and leadership and collectively position themselves to shape and thrive in the evolving multipolarity?

II. Redefining Pax African in an Evolving Regional and International Landscape.

Pax Africana has irrevocably been pertinent even before Ali Mazrui propounded it in 1967 in his idea of Africa's need for continental jurisdiction, which, at its heart, espoused the notion that Africans must take the lead and responsibility for resolving their problems. In today's terms, the concept of Pax-Africana resonates strongly with the pervading discourse of African-led solutions to its socioeconomic and political challenges. However, contemporary geopolitical realities of multipolarity test the foundations of Pax-Africana in the context of fluid and fast-changing global and regional security orders. What is being witnessed, and the impact so profound, is that the post-Cold-War architecture of global peace and security is fracturing and is exacerbated by geopolitical and economic competition, militarised conflicts, transnational threats including terrorism, cyber-attacks, health epidemics, and climate-induced instabilities. In the milieu of these dynamics, Africa's security spaces are increasingly being influenced by external military engagements, proxy conflicts, and growing reliance on non-African security guarantees.

As these dynamics are rapidly unfolding, Africa's security frameworks, including the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and ad hoc regional coalitions, have struggled significantly to respond effectively to emerging threats due to political fragmentations, capacity and capability constraints, and inconsistent funding. These are further compounded by the resurgence of military coups, prolonged intractable conflicts, and democratic backsliding that woefully undermine the spirit of Pax-Africana.

Redefining Pax-Africana requires boldly recalibrating Africa's security architecture toward greater strategic autonomy and implementing existing frameworks such as the APSA. This demands enhanced and better institutional coordination as well as innovative financing mechanisms, a stronger political will to operationalise the Africa Standby Force (ASF), and reinforcing early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms. Effective security governance has become an

imperative in a multipolar world. Redefining Pax-Africana demands a critical reflection, and two questions are essential in this regard:

1. What modalities within the African security governance structures need recalibration to anticipate, mitigate, and respond effectively in a multipolar world?
2. How can existing regional and continental mechanisms be revamped and leveraged to effectively enhance Africa's collective security framework to mitigate emerging and asymmetric threats?

III. Megatrends: Threats Without End

Is Africa at a crossroads intersecting megatrends, including but not limited to demographic shifts, climate change, and structural funding deficits? Responses to these questions will invariably dictate the actions African states take. Furthermore, is the idea that Africa is predisposed to socio-economic and political volatility a fact or fiction? As forecasts have indicated Africa's population is projected to double by 2050 with a significant composition of under the age of 25, highlighting population the potential dividends in this surge and useful composition. However, the spectre of unemployment, political instability, and migration pressures if economic opportunities remain marginal are realities that must be contended with. Further to these are issues relating to economic dependency and debt burdens the impacts of climate change as force multipliers. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, and extreme weather conditions compound food (in) security, exacerbate displacements, and increase resource-based conflicts. The Sahel and the Horn of Africa are stark reminders where inhabitants are witnessing the destabilising consequences of these environmental shocks.

In addition to the above-discussed megatrends, Africa must confront other emerging issues, such as technological disruptions, from artificial intelligence (AI) to automation, that potentially threaten to outpace regulatory and governance capacities, amplifying inequalities and social disenfranchisement. Altogether, these megatrends are not just a challenge of resilience but of governance and strategic foresight. In these contending realities, the following questions are pertinent:

1. What best practices in innovative financing mechanisms can African states draw upon in our own experiences? What coordinating modalities should be adopted to mitigate megatrends?
2. In what ways can African states recreate and assert themselves to shape rather than be passive bystanders amidst these complex megatrends?

IV. Navigation Transitions in an Evolving Global Order

Is the global order in flux? Is there a consensus about this position? Regardless of positionality, history has shown the ebb and flow of societies. Accordingly, it can be deduced that there are ongoing transformations in global order. Why is this so, and what factors are driving this flux? While many factors could be at play, contemporary dynamics of ongoing geopolitical, economic, technological, and environmental transitions are all contributing to the global shifts. These dynamics are further catalysed by the rise in multipolarity, shifting power dynamics between established and emerging powers that have calibrated and are signaling the reconfiguration of international governance architectures and styles. Economically, the reshoring of supply chains, energy transitions, and the increasing dominance of digital economics are transforming the patterns of global trade and investment. Climate change, demographic shifts, and technological disruptions, for good or bad, are also adding to the volatility of global flux.

Central to these broader shifts lies the critical but under examined dimensions of the complexities of political transitions. Across Africa, political transitions, including democratic consolidation, regime changes, and unconstitutional government changes, are transforming state-societies relations and governance models on the continent. Drawing from examples on the continent, the Arab Spring for instance, demonstrated the promise and perils of political transitions, underscoring how fragile gains can unravel without institutional depth and social consensus. military coups in West Africa, the failed promise of democracies and contested elections reflect the volatility of political transitions amid global uncertainty.

Political transitions are part of the bigger transitions, taking place on the African continent, and they will continue. They form part of the bigger picture of an evolving global order. Taking this into account, the following questions are worthy of consideration:

1. Are political transitions difficult to manage, and why? Why are political transitions and reconfiguration particularly difficult and what contributes to the complexity to navigate, and manage across regions. (in light of trends witnessed in the various RECS)
2. What are the missed opportunities and how can African states leverage lessons learned to strengthen and strategically position Africa in an evolving global order?

The 11th Edition of the Tana Forum for 2025 will continue its customary uncensored-approach to tackling crucial challenges with input from decision-makers. Additionally, frameworks will be in place to involve more stakeholders through side events, pre-forum and post-forum activities.

Section II: The Tana Forum in Context

1. Overall and specific objectives

The Tana Forum serves as a platform where African peace and security issues are discussed to allow high-level decision-makers and other partners develop new and innovative solutions to the myriad peace and security situations confronting the continent. Specifically, the Forum will:

- Provide opportunities for decision-making leaders and institutions to exchange experiences and insights on peace and security issues among themselves to gain new perspectives required to resolve critical peace and security problems.
- Give opportunities to political decision-makers to interact and consult with a critical mass of African constituency and key global actors in the peace, security, and development sectors.
- Contribute to an open and substantive debate on peace and security issues of strategic importance to the continent vis-à-vis the rest of the world.
- Facilitate inclusive dialogue among governments, African security stakeholders; including diverse African voices on the ground on various dimensions and components of peace and security concerns across the continent, thus facilitating the much-desired
- Sensitize and mobilizing a broad spectrum of actors and stakeholders to promote awareness of, and the imperative for, African ownership of peace and security solutions.

2. Expected results

In achieving its main and specific objectives, the Forum will result in:

- The continuous conceptualization and projection of the peace and security issues affecting the continent from the perspective of African citizens and governments. In that regard, substantial attention will be given to the emerging body of "home-grown" African approaches to peace and security challenges and prospects.
- The building of a vibrant and broad-based constituency on peace and security issues through the establishment of non-threatening platforms for dialogue, networking, and exchange of information between policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. To sustain such platforms, a cross-section of leaders from different sectors will be called upon to act as interlocutors and champions to mobilise "top-down" and "bottom-up" African voices on the peace and security priorities the continent should be pursuing.
- Progressively engaging Africa in the strategic and pro-active management of peace and security in the continent. Key to that effort will be the development of foresight capacities throughout relevant national, regional, and continental organizations across the public, private, and civil society sectors.

3. Forum strategy

Participation: The Forum will bring together high-level decision-makers on peace and security

drawn from the governmental spheres (Heads of States and Governments, AU organs, and RECs), non-African regional institutions (UN, EU), the African private sector and civil society networks, and scholars and practitioners of peace and security.

Discussion format: Discussions at the Forum aim to achieve three main goals: (i) encourage an open and informal exchange of views and experiences, (ii) focus on action-oriented and forward-looking outcomes, and (iii) remain a consultative forum rather than a decision-making one. To achieve this, the Forum will primarily use interactive panel discussions that actively involve all participants.

Impact and effectiveness: The Forum is convened annually. In its short existence, it has become a flagship platform and institution in its own right. This contributes to a continuous dialogue among top African leaders and various stakeholder groups. It enables leaders to explore options for innovative and joint action in peace and security. The Forum also allows for trust building among key players who would often only meet in settings that are mediated and constrained by diplomatic protocol.

4. The Tana Forum Secretariat

IPSS at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, acts as the Forum's Secretariat. Parallel to the Forum and hosting its Secretariat, IPSS hosts the Africa Peace and Security Programme (APSP), a joint project with the African Union. The APSP's mission is to build African capacities to develop and implement African-led solutions in the peace and security sector. In this context, the outcomes of the Forum will also feed into and inform the Institute's activities in education, research, and policy dialogues.

5. Forum status

The maiden Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa took place from 14 to 15 April 2012 in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, on the theme *"Managing Diversity and State Fragility."* It attracted sitting and former Heads of State and Government, distinguished leaders of regional and sub-regional bodies, representatives from the private sector, concerned civil society from Africa, eminent personalities from politics and media, representatives of African and non-African multi-lateral bodies, and other important partners, who attended the Forum.

2nd Tana Forum: 20 to 21 *"Security and Organized Crime in Africa"*

Paid tribute to the Forum's foremost champion, the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi¹

3rd Tana Forum: 26 to 27 April 2014 *"Impact of Illicit Financial Flows on Peace and Security in Africa"*

¹ The annual Meles Zenawi Lecture Series was also established this year.

- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: President Nelson Mandela.
- 4th Tana Forum: 18 to 19 April 2015 *"Secularism and Politicized Faith"*
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: President Kwame Nkrumah.
- 5th Tana Forum: 16 to 17 April 2016 *"Africa in the Global Security Agenda"*
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: President Patrice Lumumba.
- 6th Tana Forum: 22 to 23 April 2017 *"Natural Resource Governance in Africa"*.
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: Dr. Wangari Muta Maathai.
- 7th Tana Forum: 21 to 22 April 2018 *"Ownership of Africa's Peace and Security Provision: Financing and Reforming the African Union"*.
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: President Gamal Abdel Nasser
- 8th Tana Forum: 4 to 5 May 2019 *"Political Dynamics in the Horn of Africa: Nurturing the Emerging Peace Trends"*.
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the South African anti-apartheid activist and politician.
- 9th Tana Forum²: 24 to 26 April 2020 *"The AfCFTA: A Milestone for Pan-Africanism and Conflict Transformation."*
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: President Julius Nyerere.
- 10th Tana Forum: 14 to 16 October 2022 *"Managing Security Threats: Building Resilience for the Africa We Want"*
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: President Kenneth Kaunda.
- 11th Edition: 24 to 26 October, 2025 *"Africa in an Evolving Global Order"*
- Meles Zenawi Lecture Series: **President Samora Machel.**

6. Participation

According to the Secretariat's policy, participation is exclusively by invitation, and these invitations are non-transferable.

² The only time the Forum is held in Sheraton Addis in hybrid format because of COVID-19, otherwise all the previous forums had been held in Bahir Dar, near the Tana Lake.

7. **Contact**

For more information, please visit our website, www.tanaforum.org, or forward enquiries to the organizing team at tanaforum@ipss-addis.org.

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