

Corridors & Chokepoints: From Hormuz to Bab el-Mandeb

Opening remarks | Med-Or Italian Foundation & IGAD Joint Seminar
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What is happening today in the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb is not simply a maritime security crisis. It is potentially reshaping the economic geography of an entire region - and perhaps the future of connectivity between Asia, Africa and Europe.

As Gulf countries invest in alternative routes and strategic infrastructure, and shipping companies reassess their operations in the Red Sea, we are witnessing changes that go well beyond the immediate disruptions.

They raise fundamental questions for the Horn and East Africa, but also for Europe, including the future strategic relevance of the Mediterranean.

For those I haven't had the opportunity to meet yet, I'm the Executive Director of Med-Or's Africa Office here in Nairobi, and I also serve as Director of Special Projects at our headquarters in Rome. These two roles are closely connected, and in many ways reflect what we are trying to achieve through today's initiative.

Med-Or is an Italian foundation that brings together the worlds of industry and institutions. Our mission is not only to develop projects, but also to stimulate strategic thinking, anticipate emerging challenges and create opportunities for cooperation.

We believe that geopolitics and economics can no longer be discussed separately, particularly in this region.

Too often, policymakers and diplomats discuss security and regional rivalries, while businesses and investors discuss ports, energy, infrastructure and connectivity. Yet these are increasingly two sides of the same conversation.

Our ambition today is to bring these perspectives together.

And to explore one question in particular: should we wait for greater political stability and regional integration before investing in major cross-border infrastructure? Or can strategic infrastructure itself become a driver of cooperation, stability and integration?

This is not an abstract question. Decisions being made today on ports, energy networks, transport corridors and digital infrastructure will shape the economic and political landscape of this region for decades.

There is also a more institutional reason why this seminar is important to us.

In February, Med-Or opened its Africa office here in Nairobi. Since then, we have been developing a growing portfolio of projects and partnerships across the continent.

A few months ago, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IGAD, and today's seminar is our first joint initiative. I would like to thank our IGAD colleagues for their partnership.

This is also the first event of this kind that Med-Or is organizing in Nairobi. Traditionally, we have held these discussions in Rome. But we believe that conversations about Africa's future should increasingly take place here, with the people and institutions directly shaping that future.

And this is only the beginning.

We want our Nairobi office to become a genuine platform for dialogue and cooperation. A place where institutions, businesses and experts can meet, exchange ideas, develop partnerships and return regularly.

I hope you will see this as a space that is open to all of you - and one that we can build together.

Today, we are not simply here to discuss the risks created by maritime disruption. We are here to understand how these disruptions can translate into strategic choices, new investments and opportunities for regional integration.

I hope we will have a frank, practical and forward-looking conversation, under the Chatham House Rule.

Thank you all for joining us, both here in Nairobi and online. I hope this will be the first of many conversations - and the beginning of many collaborations.