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## The Interests of the Gulf Monarchies in the Horn of Africa

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to analyze the policy of the Gulf monarchies in the Horn of Africa. Close historical ties between two regions have given rise to deep cooperation between African and Arab states nowadays. Gulf monarchies competed for a long time to deepen their political, economic and security impact in the region.

Strengthening economic ties with the Horn of Africa has helped increase food security in the Persian Gulf. Investments by Arab monarchies in modernizing ports in Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti are helping to improve logistics infrastructure in the Northeast Africa. At the same time, the rapid militarization of the region due to the establishment of a number of Gulf states military bases in the Horn of Africa is increasing the level of conflict-generating in the region. The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden both have strategic importance for the armed support for the military campaign of the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates coalition in Yemen. That is why the Horn of Africa has also gained strategic importance due to the conflict in Yemen, and therefore the ambitious Gulf states have become increasingly have become increasingly involved in the regional geopolitics. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as the main ally of Riyadh in the Persian Gulf, are increasingly seeing the Horn of Africa as their “western flank of security.” They are united by the desire to prevent the growing influence of Turkey, Iran and Qatar in this part of the world.

The competition between Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Iran helps to attract investments, maintain general stability and improve the security situation in the Horn of Africa. Conflict mediation and asset build-up in the Horn of Africa have enabled Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar to establish political influence in the region. The Gulf states are using their growing economic, security and diplomatic influence in Africa to reduce the influence of competitors and gain international support on the world stage.

**Key words:** Horn of Africa, mediation in conflicts, Persian Gulf, Qatar crisis, Saudi Arabia, UAE

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### About the Horn of Africa Region – introduction

**T**he Horn of Africa is located in a crucial geostrategic position. Since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the region’s waters provide a swift naval connection between the Euro-Mediterranean region, the Middle East, eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean.

Currently, an estimated 10 to 20 per cent of global trade – including over 6 million barrels of oil per day – reportedly transits along the Horn’s shores. This makes the region a key geostrategic hub for countries all across the world (Lanfranchi, 2021).

The Horn of Africa is generally said to comprise the states of Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea. However, South Sudan and the Sudan are also directly affected by the Horn’s politico-economic factors.

The Horn of Africa region, one of the clusters of conflict in Africa, is unique in that it is triangularly hemmed by large bodies of water; the Nile River in the West; the Red Sea in the North, and the Indian Ocean in the East. With the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean defining the cluster's maritime limits two forces, external and internal, determine its geopolitical fortunes. With a potential combined market population of over 280 million people, the cluster suffers from the attention of extra-continental powers mainly because it is strategic to their interests. It seemingly was not ready for the attention in part because its landward orientation made it ignore sea threats (*Geopolitical Dynamics...*, 2022).

The security situation in this sub-region is highly complex due to several socio-economic, political and geopolitical factors which range from extreme poverty to maritime insecurity. The sub-region is also rich in natural resources including potash and diamonds, and a significant portion of the world's crude oil passes through the Aden-Suez Canal route, making the Horn of Africa one of the world's most critical regions in terms of security.

International relationships between the countries in the Horn of Africa have been significantly influenced by the international and regional power relationships over the last two decades. At the end of the 20th century the newly established State of Eritrea and Ethiopia, whose government was led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), attempted to create stability in the region. However, the war that broke out between these two countries (1998–2008) and the expansion of terrorist groups and piracy in the region brought about new security threats which made the sub-region volatile and susceptible to the influence of international and regional powers.

For external players getting involved in the Horn of Africa, the region is often an arena where they advance their own interests. This can entail cultivating alliances with local political actors, and potentially using them as proxies in broader international rivalries. These actions can have major repercussions for local political dynamics in the Horn. Alliances with foreign powers can significantly change the local balance of power, both between and within Horn countries. Moreover, through these alliances, international disputes can quickly spill-over into domestic politics, potentially magnifying existing local tensions if each party perceives that it can rely on strong foreign backing.

The Horn of Africa is currently one of the competition areas in which many global powers compete to exploit resources, maintain their influence and guarantee trade routes, particularly because it is next to one of the most important shipping corridors in the world (the Bab al Mandab Strait) and to the oil rich Arabian Peninsula and South Sudan. Some Middle Eastern countries, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), besides having economic interests also have religious motivations.

The Blue Economy, including the development of trade corridors, is important for the Gulf States, so Dubai World is a relevant player in the Horn of Africa. Dubai World is the Holding of Dubai, founded by Emir Muhammad bin Rashid al Maktum in 2006. It covers domestic and foreign investments of the Emirate of Dubai. Soon after its foundation it became prominent in the Horn of Africa. Among its activities were numerous investments, especially in Djibouti and its harbor. Finally, the Gulf States try to limit Iran's influence, including confronting Iran's intervention in the Civil War in Yemen from the western side.

Iran aims to compete with Saudi Arabia through private activities (FDI) by investing in industrial parks in Ethiopia and other East African countries. Networking with Lebanese Shia communities across Africa is relevant. The diamond trade of African Lebanese communities plays a role in financing Hezbollah, and probably Houthi rebels.

In Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia and Ethiopia, China exploits natural resources<sup>1</sup> such as crude oil and other raw materials (e.g., diamonds, lithium and potash) through Chinese mining companies. It aims to connect African Hubs by way of the New Silk Road to mainland China (Lusaka-Dar es Salam road and DRC-Djibouti/Kenya and Ethiopia roads). At the same time, it is also becoming more involved in peacekeeping missions and other humanitarian activities.

In this extremely complicated African region, most of the challenges are communal, including river and water management, grazing land rights (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Kenya), poverty, authoritarian rule and weak civil society organizations. The main threats are violent extremism motivated by extreme religious beliefs, unemployment and marginalization as promoters of violent extremism and foreign terrorist networks, and maritime insecurity (Bab al Mandab; piracy/terrorist networks) all of which have led to increased intervention by regional and international powers (Geopolitical Dynamics 2019).

The Horn is one of the regions in the world most affected by conflict. This has a direct impact on population, thus the sub-region has the highest percentage of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP). Among the 12.6 million IDP in Africa in 2016, 8.6 million were from East Africa. By the end of 2016, more than a quarter of South Sudan's population was internally displaced due to intra-state conflict.

Poverty is a major problem in the Horn of Africa especially as it also fuels recruitment by terrorist groups. Somalia has become a center of home-grown terrorist groups such as Al Shabaab. It has well-established networks with Al Qaida and terrorist groups in Yemen. There is a spread of Yemen-based militants and arms, along with financial flows into Somalia. Up to one million refugees from Somalia are based in Yemen. There are parallel economic structures in the country which have facilitated regional trade in arms and the smuggling of people and fuel.

The Horn of Africa is vulnerable to external forces and does not control its own fate in part because it is of strategic value to competing external forces. It was subjected to European territorial colonialism which created colonial entities that became independent countries with strong reliance on external players. Colonialism created new identities mostly based on British, Italian, or French imperial thinking which also limited Ethiopia's territories and sense of being. Ethiopia ended up as a pod in imperial power play.

On becoming independent, the countries responded to geopolitical dynamics differently. There were those with irredentist desires and others were protective of the inherited colonial state territories. Tiny Djibouti, run as a family affair, is a virtual global colony because of its strategic location linking the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. It willingly accommodates many external powers by permitting them to have military bases on its soil. In the case of Somalia, the grandiose Greater Somalia dream served as a glue or cement to hold together people with serious colonial identity differences; it camouflaged the differences. When the glue melted, Somalia fragmented into various colonial entities, and evolved into a terrorist arena and a proxy state for extra-continental players. Eritrea,

on becoming independent from Ethiopia started as a pariah state by picking up quarrels with neighbours and supporting the al Shabab terror group but then evolved to be a regional influencer in Ethiopia and Somalia. Ethiopia, in the last two years, has blundered itself into a civil war to become a refugee generator.

The proxy propensity ensures that countries end up quarrelling rather than adopting a common stand on possible threats that are externally driven. The inability of the Horn of Africa region to adopt common positions on any global issue, therefore, reduces its ability to determine the fate of its geopolitical interests.

The geographical location of the Horn of Africa makes it a competitive hotspot for various global powers. Many regional powers are also involved, either in collaboration with global powers or separately, to maintain their influence. Being a major trade route towards western countries, collaboration with the states of the Horn of Africa is vital. Also, as the Horn of Africa is a network hub for religion-inspired violent extremist groups from the Middle East and Africa, it is of primary security interest for all international actors, including NATO, to closely monitor the global trade routes and regional security.

### **Gulf states and the Horn of Africa**

Due to the growing authority of the Gulf states on the world stage, their influence has spread to the vast expanses of the Middle East and beyond. However, nowhere in the world this presence is so significant and visible as in the Horn of Africa. The Horn of Africa region is a part of Northeast Africa. Northeast Africa includes Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Chad and Uganda. In addition, in scientific sources it is common to use the concept of the Horn of Africa, which generally includes Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia.

The Arabian Peninsula and the African continent combine many pages of history because of their geographical proximity. Geographically, they are separated only by the narrow Red Sea. Today, the Gulf monarchies are increasingly paying attention to Africa. The oil monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula primarily see partners among the states of the Horn of Africa in the diplomatic, economic, humanitarian cultural and religious spheres. In addition to trade, as well as linguistic and cultural ties, large diasporas from the Horn of Africa now live and work in the Gulf countries, and their remittances are an important source of income for local economies.

The countries of the Horn of Africa have an extremely advantageous geostrategic position, as they have access to the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden, strategic waterways through which maritime trade routes pass. In addition, the Horn of Africa has also gained strategic importance due to the conflict in Yemen, in which the Persian Gulf states are directly involved. Proximity to Yemen has served to intensify the policy of the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf in the Horn of Africa. KSA, as the leader of the coalition of Arab states in Yemen, is particularly interested in attracting the support of African states, which is why it is making significant efforts to improve relations with African countries. UAE is no less interested in maintaining the best relations with these countries, as it views the Horn of Africa as its “western flank of

security.” The goal of both countries is to prevent the strengthening of Iran’s position in the region.

No less important is the fact that the Horn of Africa region has become the scene of regional and global competition for important international actors in the last decade. Among them are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt, which have long been active in the region and fighting for the commitment of African states and are constantly competing to deepen their political, economic and security influence in the region. As a result, African states have significant benefits, including attracting Arab investment, as well as assisting Arab states in resolving conflicts between African states, which in turn contributes to improving the security situation in the region.

Since the 1970s, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other countries have made significant contributions to the region’s religious and cultural institutions. In the 1980s, the KSA brought investment from the Persian Gulf, buying and renting arable land to ensure food security.

The Horn has also emerged in recent years as a magnet for oil and gas exploration, with oil companies discovering significant fields in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Somalia, and making moves to tap the region’s suspected vast hydrocarbon potential. Countries that invest early in port, rail and pipeline infrastructure will enjoy an advantage when these resources come online. Moreover, the companies running Africa’s future ports will gain the ability to shape which other countries will benefit and by how much. With this potent mix of economic, security and political interests, Gulf states are likely to continue vying for power and influence in the Horn well into the future. Saudi Arabia seeks to quarantine the region from Iranian influence while boosting its credentials as the littoral states’ leader. The UAE aims to leverage its political and military presence to push back against an array of perceived foes: Islamist movements backed by Qatar and Turkey, as well as Iran. Qatar, for its part, sees vast potential for new friends and investments to bolster its independence, while outmanoeuvring the Gulf adversaries blockading it. Ankara is weaving a story of Muslim leadership, built on its accumulated credibility in Somalia (*Intra-Gulf Competition...*, 2019).

Geographical and historical ties, expanding trade partners, and the pursuit of regional and food security are all solid foundations for finding partners in the Horn of Africa. Large investments in the region have firmly tied several Gulf countries to Africa. The strategic interests of the Gulf monarchies in this region, regardless of cooperation or competition, are wide-ranging and far-reaching. Together with the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea is the most strategic maritime region for the countries of the region, thus attracting considerable attention and cooperation from them. This key strategic waterway also retains an important political dimension.

Although the Arabian Peninsula has historical, religious, economic and linguistic ties with sub-Saharan Africa, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have rapidly deepened their economic and security ties, as well as their growing diplomatic role on the African continent in the last decade. The Gulf states seek to demonstrate their status on the world stage by acting as mediators in African conflicts, as well as trying to secure the support of African states in their own disputes. As Gulf monarchies prepare to play a greater role on the world stage, they view sub-Saharan Africa as a kind of “laboratory” in which they can test their own international initiatives, including peace initiatives (Todman, 2018).

With regard to the peace initiatives of the Arab states on the African continent, first of all, it is worth mentioning the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which back in 1998 turned into a bloody conflict. And then few could have predicted where a peace agreement would be signed in 20 years. Finally, on September 16, 2018, Eritrean and Ethiopian leaders sat at tables at the Peace Palace in Jeddah. This agreement became known as the “Jeddah peace accord... 2018”. The Jeddah Peace Accords are the latest example of the increasingly persistent initiatives of the Gulf states in sub-Saharan Africa.

Building economic ties in Africa has helped the Gulf countries take advantage of their geostrategic location, increase food security and improve the reputation of generous Muslim entities. The expansion of its economic influence in Africa has given the Gulf states the most important levers to advance their security and diplomatic goals.

These countries have improved their economic diversification strategies and reduced their dependence on oil by investing in African markets, especially when oil prices fell sharply in 2014. The UAE invested \$ 11 billion in Africa in 2016, surpassing Saudi Arabia (ranked 5th with an investment of \$ 3.8 billion), becoming the largest investor in the Persian Gulf and the second largest in the world after China (*UAE, Saudi Arabia among..., 2017*).

In March 2018, Qatar signed an agreement with Sudan for \$ 4 billion to manage the port of Savakin on the Red Sea. Sudan is important not only for Qatar, as the KSA and the UAE are also promoting their projects and investing deeply in the country. In particular, according to the Sudanese Bureau of Statistics, KSA's investment in Sudan is \$ 12 billion. The United States, and the UAE has invested \$ 7 billion (Amin, 2019). Qatar's plans to modernize the port of Savakin, Sudan's second largest port and one of Africa's oldest ports in the Somali city of Hobio, is an important step in its vision of aid and development in the African Horn, which strengthens relations in the region (*Jeddah peace accord..., 2018*).

The crisis between Qatar and other Gulf states accelerated their turn toward the Horn. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt broke ties with Qatar, and imposed an economic and travel blockade. The dispute exposed an unofficial split over the role of political Islam in the region, as well as over Riyadh's dominance in shaping Gulf foreign policy. Both axes quickly embarked on a global tour to win allies to their side, nowhere more ruthlessly than Africa. Poorer countries on the continent at times found it hard to resist trading their loyalty for hard cash. To Gulf eyes, the Horn also superficially contains many of the same ingredients that were central to the Gulf rift: Islamist forces, a lingering Iranian influence and significant economic potential, factors that make it ripe for intra-Gulf competition. For countries already inclined to see a great game for dominance under way, the Horn was a clear next stop. Political and military actors in the Horn have seized on these rivalries to advance their own goals in ways both positive and negative. Eritrea's long-ruling strongman Isaias Afwerki has parlayed ties with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to earn sanctions relief and partially rehabilitate his international image, while offering no space for political reforms at home. Sudan's military rulers sought political cover from their Gulf allies to cling to power. Ethiopia turned to Saudi Arabia and the UAE for much-needed funding, while keeping an open line to Qatar. Neighbouring Kenya has in turn sought help from Doha as a potential mediator in its maritime border dispute with Mogadishu. In Somalia, duelling political

candidates see the cash-rich Gulf actors as some-times gullible conduits for campaign money. More positively, hinting at ways actors in the Horn can exploit the rivalry to draw wider benefits, Djibouti, Somaliland and Puntland have all at various times milked the competition for strategic ports between the Gulf and China to secure better deals (*Intra-Gulf Competition...*, 2019).

### Food security

The geostrategic location of the region also explains why Africa was the center of economic activity of the Gulf states. By focusing on infrastructure and trade, these countries can benefit from Asian trade and investment flows to Africa. The Gulf monarchies have also identified investment in Africa as a way to achieve food security. They have previously considered investing in agriculture in Central Asia and Latin America, but have identified rich and underdeveloped agricultural lands of Africa as having the greatest prospects. The geographical proximity of Africa to the Persian Gulf is a great advantage. It contains 60 percent of the world's uncultivated arable land, and water shortages are not considered critical due to the corresponding investments. Saudi Arabia is Africa's largest investor in agriculture, investing heavily in investments such as the acquisition of 500,000 hectares of land in Tanzania in 2009 (Wilkerson, 2009).

The issue of food security is also critical in the UAE. That is why in October 2018, the UAE and Uganda signed an agreement to create a free zone in Uganda with an area of 2,500 hectares, where private Emirati companies will be able to invest in the agro-industrial complex (*UAE and Uganda...*, 2018). Also, the UAE and Saudi Arabia in August 2019 allocated \$ 3 billion to help Sudan (*UAE and Saudi Arabia...*, 2019). In November 2020, the Emirati holding company IHC Food Holding, based in Abu Dhabi, announced plans to develop and cultivate agricultural land in Sudan under a \$ 225 million agreement. The agreement provides for a five-year investment plan, transforming and developing more than 100,000 acres of land (*Abu Dhabi Firm...*, 2020).

Qatar is the most dependent on food imports among all the Gulf countries. As soon as the Qatar crisis erupted in 2017, a new political reality forced the Qatari authorities to seek new initiatives to address food security issues. In 2018, the Qatari government announced plans to invest half a billion US dollars in Sudan's agricultural and food sectors (*Qatar invests...*, 2019).

The other side of the coin is that Gulf agricultural investment in Africa is controversial, as some of the countries from which they leased land suffer themselves from a lack of food to feed their own populations. When Qatar entered into negotiations with Kenya in 2009 to lease 40,000 hectares of land in the Tana Delta, it was met with a violent backlash from local communities.

The Gulf states have also increased the provision of various assistance to African countries, largely motivated by a common religious heritage. In addition to large humanitarian donations from the Gulf States to the Horn of Africa, numerous Gulf charities have been active throughout Africa since the 1980s. In particular, the Saudi International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and the Kuwaiti Agency of African Muslims were among the first state-sponsored Islamic charities operating in Africa (Todman 2018).

### Charity activities & labor migration

The expansion of charitable activities in the African countries contributes to the strengthening of the reputation of these states among Muslims in Africa and other countries, as they are able to present themselves as benevolent entities pursuing charitable goals as well as their own economic interests in Africa. For many of the Gulf states, aid has been a way of earning – or indeed, buying – friends and influence abroad.

The six member-states of the GCC have not historically been seen as thought leaders in either foreign affairs or international development. Yet over the past four decades they have been the source of large amounts of overseas development assistance, humanitarian aid, and other forms of support for developing and crisis-afflicted countries, both through state-led channels and through the work of private organizations and individual donors. All of the GCC states are members of the Jeddah-headquartered Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), multilateral institutions that rely primarily on the GCC states for the billions of dollars in funding that they utilize. The major GCC oil producers are also key contributors to the OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries] Fund for International Development (OFID). GCC states – most notably Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia – have also become increasingly prominent donors to the World Bank and UN humanitarian and development programs over the past several decades (Salisbury, 2018).

However, the philanthropic sector is still in the early stages; activity is growing more quickly than information about where, how, and how effectively it's taking place. While most philanthropies in the Gulf still operate on annual budgets, meaning they can't offer grants with long time horizons, there is growing discussion in the sector about becoming both more sustainable and strategic. The coming years may see a rise in the number of foundations with endowments and multi-year funding commitments. Just one foundation alone, Alwaleed Philanthropies, stands to wield billions with the pledge by founder Prince Alwaleed bin Talal in 2015 to give his entire fortune to charity, signing the so-called Giving Pledge (Dickinson, 2017).

Foreign aid from the main Gulf donors (the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) have been controversial for many years. During the past fifteen years, humanitarian aid has transformed the Gulf states to become amongst the leading international humanitarian donors. However, the politicisation of humanitarian aid has done more damage to Gulf states than creating visibility and reputation. Although most of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are considered wealthy countries, yet there are only four main aid donors; the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The other two GCC states Oman and Bahrain, provide minimal aid (AlMezaini, 2021).

Since the emergence of the Gulf states as aid donors, humanitarian aid has received extremely little attention. This is because, during the 1970s and 1980s, aid for political reasons have been predominant. Gulf states perceive non-humanitarian aid as “solidarity aid” and as a duty under also the so-called “South-South cooperation.” There is no doubt that some humanitarian assistance provided during the 1970s and 1980s has very much been influenced by Islamic teaching and regional identities. For example, Qatar and Kuwait provide a significant amount of money to specific non-Arab countries, such as Chad



and some other African countries. Kuwait has painted itself as a “humanitarian state,” with its charitable role abroad promoted as part of national identity in schoolbooks.

One of the main characteristics that can also explain why the volume and the geographical distribution of Gulf aid tend to be directed towards particular states is bilateralism. There is no doubt that the majority of the Gulf aid, whether it is humanitarian or developmental, is mainly bilateral. Between one and six per cent of Gulf aid is channelled through multilateral organizations. Bilateral aid puts more pressure on aid recipients to conform with some of the Gulf donors’ political or economic conditions. For example, Saudi Arabia allocated 1% of total Official Development Assistance (ODA) as core contributions to multilateral organizations. Saudi ODA also includes humanitarian aid. Another example of the low contribution to multilateral aid organization is the UAE: in 2015, multilateral ODA accounted for 1% of the country’s total ODA, provided primarily through the United Nations (75%). Qatar provided even much lower; in 2012, it gave 0.55 per cent of government aid and assistance to international organizations and bodies. Consequently, the small contribution to international multilateral aid organization shows that Gulf donors’ preference to channel aid bilaterally is due to some political consideration, solidarity and support to “Global South”. However, political gains and influence appear to be predominant in recent years.

A number of personalized agencies, quasi-nongovernmental organizations operating under the auspices of senior members of ruling families, were also formed during this period. These included bodies like the Qatar Foundation and the UAE’s Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation. Most of the Gulf states have local branches of the Red Crescent Society, an affiliate of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

GCC countries have been the source of direct fiscal support for other states. Following the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, the GCC pledged \$20bn to Bahrain and Oman, the GCC states that were most affected by unrest, and many billions more to the governments of Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen, in many cases helping stave off fiscal and foreign exchange crises (Salisbury, 2018).

Despite recent improvements, such issues have been a source of concern – and embarrassment – for the GCC states’ Western partners. The U.S. government has attempted to maintain a steady relationship with Saudi Arabia despite the passage of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, designed to allow 9/11 victims’ families to sue the Saudi state, while the UK government has actively prevented the publication of a report on foreign support for UK-based jihadist groups, allegedly because of the report’s focus on Saudi Arabia. According to well-connected researchers and diplomats, governments in southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa with large and majority Muslim populations have also expressed serious concern over the work of Saudi-backed groups in promoting a conservative Salafist interpretation of Islam.

Another reason for the significant activity of the Gulf states in Africa is the opposition of Iran. Saudi Arabia has allocated \$ 118 million, and the UAE another \$ 35 million to finance joint armed forces (*Saudi Arabia and Iran...*, 2018). Support for these joint forces allows Saudi Arabia to claim that it is leading the fight against global terrorism by forming an Islamic military counter-terrorism coalition of 40 Muslim states (*Saudi Arabia and Iran...*, 2018). Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in particular, wants to

demonstrate his leadership in this rivalry. The initiative also enables Saudi Arabia and the UAE to plan a long-term presence in the region to counter Iran.

Labor migration is another important element of economic relations between the Gulf states and sub-Saharan Africa. Many migrant workers from the Horn of Africa provide the Gulf States with cheap unskilled labor. Although the Middle Eastern monarchies do not disclose details of migrant communities, the Sudanese, Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas are considered the largest communities in the region among African countries.

The United Nations estimates that in 2015, there were 540,000 Sudanese living in the Persian Gulf, which is about a third of the entire Sudanese diaspora abroad. It is estimated that half a million Ethiopians work in Saudi Arabia and 100,000 Eritreans in the UAE. Qatar employs 60,000 Sudanese and a slightly smaller number of Ethiopians (Augé, 2018). At the same time, it should be noted that Africans are not the largest migrant communities in the Gulf states, and they are significantly lower to Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos and others. At the same time, their remittance flows are a critical source of income for the Horn of Africa, meaning they are an important source of economic influence for the Gulf states in Africa.

The Gulf states have extensive experience as donors, in development, and in the use of foreign aid as a tool of soft power both in relatively stable contexts and in fragile and failed state contexts including Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen. The GCC states are likely to become increasingly influential donors, and to have growing sway over how funds are spent at a country level. The Gulf states are longstanding and prolific donors and are likely to become increasingly prominent players in the humanitarian and development space, particularly in the Middle East and Horn of Africa, in coming years (Salisbury, 2018).

### Security issues

The war in Yemen has strengthened the security interests of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in East Africa. These states established their first foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa to expand their capabilities in the region. Both countries originally planned to use Djibouti as a base for their operations in Yemen, but a diplomatic split in 2015 led to the removal of Gulf troops from the Djibouti base. As a result, the UAE returned to the Eritrean port of Assab in 2015 and established a military base there in exchange for the development of the port for further use by Eritrea. Assab is currently the UAE's main logistics center for operations in Yemen, which houses helicopters, jets, drones and ships (*Why are Gulf...*, 2019).

In addition, the UAE in 2017 began construction of a second base in the port of Berbera, in unrecognized Somaliland, adjacent to the port that DP World is developing under an investment agreement worth 442 million US dollars (Todman, 2018). Instead, Saudi Arabia signed an agreement to establish its first foreign military base in Djibouti in 2017, similarly seeking to protect its strategic interests in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. Interestingly, the presence of military bases in Djibouti brings the country more than \$ 300 million annually (Igrouane 2019).

Oman is also "looking" to Africa. In particular, the Sultanate signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Oman State General Reserve Fund and the Djibouti Ports

and Free Zones Authority in order to establish a strategic partnership between the two institutions. Executive Chairman of the State General Reserve Fund of Oman Abdul Salam bin Mohammed al-Morshedi said that “the agreement will allow both parties to cooperate in the development of ports and invest in them; operate and manage ports, as well as other major logistics facilities” (*Uman tadhul...*, 2019).

An agreement was reached on the development of the port of Dorale, one of the most important ports in Djibouti on the Red Sea. This has intensified competition between the Gulf countries in the region, in particular over who has the greatest geopolitical influence. The UAE tops the list of Gulf countries that have invested in the Dorale container terminal for more than 10 years. While they control the territory, it becomes a military base to support the Saudi coalition in the war in Yemen. However, Oman’s involvement as a regional investor forced Djibouti to terminate its investment contract with the UAE, “depriving DP World of its privileges under a law passed by parliament in February 2017 that gave the government the right to terminate the contract due to conflict with the state’s core interests” (*Harb almanacs...*, 2019).

In recent years, the Gulf countries have stepped up their commitments to peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations in the Horn of Africa. Qatar has been deploying peacekeepers on the border between Eritrea and Djibouti for almost a decade, starting in 2010, when the Eritrean authorities supported the blockade of Qatar as far as Saudi Arabia was concerned (*Qatar withdraws troops...*, 2017).

However, the Gulf countries have shown the strongest interest in combating extremism in Somalia. Hundreds of Somali soldiers were trained and equipped from 2014 to 2018 as part of the African Union’s military mission to defeat the Islamist insurgents. In 2016 Saudi Arabia has launched the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition to Combat Terrorism, which has significantly expanded military cooperation and information exchange between the Gulf States and sub-Saharan Africa, as all Gulf countries participate in a coalition of 41 and more than half member countries are sub-Saharan African states (*Saudi Arabia And Counterterrorism...*, 2019).

In strengthening their relationships in the Horn, Gulf states and Turkey hope to secure both short- and long-term interests. In the short term for example, the Yemen war made it imperative for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to obtain a Red Sea military base. The inter-necine Gulf crisis that burst into the open in 2017 accelerated efforts by both sides of the rift to seek new allies. In the long term, each country is jockeying for a prime position in the Red Sea corridor’s economy and politics. Economically, they seek to enter the Horn of Africa’s underserved ports, energy and consumer markets as gateways to rapid economic expansion across the continent. All four describe China as the emerging dominant force in the Horn, and hence one with which they will need to ally, as U.S. and European influence recedes. The UAE, Qatar and Turkey, in particular, view China’s Belt and Road initiative (BRI), with projects planned across East Africa, as a chance to bolster their relationships with China (*Intra-Gulf Competition...*, 2019).

This competition for influence raises risks of new conflict. The Gulf states and Turkey each say they are seeking “stability” in the Horn, but their definitions differ dramatically and put their interests directly at odds. Saudi Arabia and the UAE view civil unrest as something to control lest the region become a playground for Sunni Islam-inspired political movements or Iran. They privilege short-term stability imposed by strong se-

curity states. Although they urge allies to open their markets to investment, they would rather bandage economic grievances and postpone hard reforms that would threaten the *status quo*. Qatar and Turkey, meanwhile, are more inclined to see popular uprisings as a way to empower groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood that they believe will promote their interests in the long run. Yet the Brotherhood and its local spinoffs have overreached in some cases since the 2011 up-risings by imposing their ideological agendas and thus creating as many new grievances as addressing existing ones (*Intra-Gulf Competition...*, 2019).

### **Diplomatic presence & conflict mediation**

The next factor is the diplomatic presence of Arab monarchies on the African continent. The Gulf countries have expanded diplomatic ties with sub-Saharan Africa to strengthen their growing economic and security interests, while advancing their ambitions to play a more prominent role in international relations. In recent years, Gulf monarchies have opened dozens of new embassies across sub-Saharan Africa and carried out persistent diplomatic interventions in African conflicts. Conflict mediation is a key element of these states' goals to enhance their international prestige, and their neutrality and ability to use significant economic incentives to strengthen peace agreements have made them significant successes compared to less successful previous attempts by Western countries (Todman, 2018).

Qatar has opened the largest number of embassies in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to other countries except Turkey. Doha established 11 new embassies between 2013 and 2015, while the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait opened nine, six and two diplomatic missions between 2010 and 2018, respectively. Qatar currently has diplomatic missions in 23 African countries (Todman, 2018). In addition to the benefits of more stable diplomatic relations, the establishment of embassies allows the Gulf states to better protect their economic and security interests and to coordinate foreign policy more effectively.

The Jeddah Peace Treaty of 2018, signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea, is the latest success of the Gulf peace mediation. The region's monarchies have been promoting peace talks in sub-Saharan Africa for more than a decade. In addition, in an effort to end bloodshed and instability, the Gulf states are participating in peace talks to strengthen their international prestige, gain influence in strategic regions and create new economic opportunities. For example, shortly after talks with Qatar on a ceasefire between the Sudanese government and Darfur's largest opposition group, the Justice and Equality Movement, Doha acquired part of its agricultural land in Sudan to improve its food security.

The perception that the Gulf countries are relatively neutral in African conflicts has only intensified their success in mediation initiatives. Yes, they do not carry the burden of the legacy of European colonialism. The UAE maintained ties with Eritrea even when it was isolated by the international community, strengthening its image as a balanced negotiator between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Qatar has sought to build a reputation as an honest and credible mediator by helping to resolve the various conflicts in the Middle East and

Africa, and has played a prominent role in the negotiations between Eritrea and Sudan, Chad and Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti.

The Gulf states used their growing economic, security, and diplomatic influence in sub-Saharan Africa to reduce the influence of their rivals and gain international support in their own disputes. They pledged aid and investment, offered to strengthen security cooperation and even agreed to improve the rights of African migrants in the Gulf states to encourage sub-Saharan Africa to provide them with diplomatic support (Todman, 2018).

Moreover, the Gulf countries have successfully used these instruments of influence to convince African states of the need to deteriorate ties with Iran, thereby curbing Iran's presence in the Horn of Africa. But African countries have suffered the most from the aftermath of Qatar's internal Gulf conflict in 2017, as it highlighted the risks and opportunities created by rivalry between countries in the region. The Gulf crisis has also limited the influence of the Gulf states, showing that they have not yet succeeded in gaining the loyalty of most African states.

Saudi Arabia has long sought to hold Iran's influence in Africa, especially in East Africa. However, Iran has developed military cooperation and intelligence exchanges with Sudan, using it as an arms delivery point to Iranian partners in the Middle East by 2015 (Todman, 2018). Saudi Arabia's proposals for significant diplomatic and economic incentives to sever ties with Iran have been sufficient. Riyadh helped free Sudan from its diplomatic isolation and transferred \$ 1 billion to Sudan's central bank in 2015, shortly before Sudan severed ties with Iran. Saudi Arabia has also signed a security agreement with Djibouti and signed an agreement to establish a military base there (*The Strategic Relations...*, 2017). These diplomatic, economic and security instruments have significantly reduced Iran's influence in the Horn of Africa.

Certain African countries have been able to benefit from the Gulf dispute by strengthening economic ties with them. In particular, South Africa increased its bilateral trade with Qatar by 70 percent after the blockade, and specifically offered to help Qatar overcome its continued food security due to regional isolation. And that hasn't stopped South Africa from receiving a \$ 10 billion investment bail from the UAE for the mining and tourism sectors of the economy, as well as an additional \$ 10 billion bail from Saudi Arabia for the country's energy sector. In turn, South Africa offered its help and shared its experience in organizing the FIFA World Cup, which is to take place in Qatar in 2022 (*Qatar, South Africa...*, 2018). Thus, certain African states have been able to profit from attempts by the Gulf states to force them to take their side.

It is safe to assume that the situation is unlikely to change in the near future, despite the softening of relations between Saudi Arabia and its allies with Qatar. On January 5, 2021, the summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council was held, which was visited by the Emir of Qatar for the first time since 2017. The summit agreed to end the diplomatic crisis against Qatar (*Katar i kraïni...*, 2021). However, such a turn does not mean a change in the policy of the Arab states by 180 degrees. Distrust between Qatar and the blocking states, constant rivalry between Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, sharp differences in policy towards Iran and Turkey and geostrategic disputes in Africa may soon heat up the Gulf crisis. Until recently, on December 22, 2020, former UAE Secretary of State Anwar Gargash condemned the Qatari media for what he claimed was an obstacle to

reconciliation in the Persian Gulf. On December 24, Qatar filed a complaint with the UN against violations of airspace by Bahraini fighters. Although recent polls conducted by the Washington Institute for Middle East Policy have shown that 56% of UAE residents and 61% of Qataris support ending the Gulf dispute, these figures may represent pragmatism and fatigue from blocking more than mitigating major differences (*The Qatar Blockade...*, 2021).

The UAE and Qatar are also fighting for influence in Somalia. The Emirates have close ties with the self-proclaimed state of Somaliland, and Qatar maintains relations with the government of Somali President Mohammed Abdullahi Mohamed Formaggio. The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified soft power rivalries in the UAE-Qatar relations, as both countries are using humanitarian aid to diversify their partnerships in Africa and are likely to continue to do so in the near future. For example, a delegation from the Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation of the UAE opened two hospitals in Somaliland in January last year (*UAE opens two...*, 2021). The Qatari side, namely the international organization Qatar Charity, opened a hospital in Somalia in 2018, which allowed 150 thousand residents of Yakshid to gain access to medical services (*Qatar Charity's...*, 2021).

It is worth noting that the Gulf states also see strategic risks in leaving the Horn of Africa to potential adversaries. The presence of pro-Iranian Hussites at a vital point in Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the southern end of the Red Sea has provided another significant incentive for both Saudi Arabia and the UAE to establish their presence on both sides of the Strait to maintain maritime security. The military campaign in Yemen has undoubtedly been a decisive factor in further attracting the Gulf countries to the Horn of Africa, although the potential de-escalation in this conflict is unlikely to lead to their further retreat from the east coast of Africa.

Increasing rivalry has prompted regional and global forces to fight for influence in two key areas: Bab el-Mandeb, located between Yemen, Djibouti and Eritrea, and the Suez Canal in Egypt. According to the US Energy Information Administration, approximately 10 percent of the world's oil exports pass through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the lion's share is exported from the Persian Gulf (Šmelëva, 2018). From this point of view, it is not surprising that although none of the GCC members border the Red Sea, except Saudi Arabia, but this region is still of interest to them because they export more oil than any other region in the world (Šmelëva, 2018).

The Red Sea is also the last line of defense on the Arabian Peninsula from many threats. In the early 2000s, piracy swept the coast of Somalia, where criminals hunted for merchant and fishing vessels. Somalia is widely known in the world for outbreaks of violence and terrorist attacks, as well as separatist sentiment in the regions. Yemen has many similar problems with its neighbor on the other side of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. Since 2014 Yemen has been torn apart by a Hussite uprising against an internationally recognized government. Conflicts on both sides of the Red Sea have brought cooperation between the Gulf countries and other coastal countries to the forefront to keep commercial sea routes safe.

This desire to maintain stability in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is opposed by the KSA and the UAE regional rivals in the region. Iran-backed Hussites have allowed official Tehran to gain a foothold in the Red Sea, pushing the Saudi-led Arab coalition

to defend its own interests and those of its allies. The KSA-led coalition aims to protect Yemen's internationally recognized government and curb Iran's influence in the region (*Why Saudi Arabia and Iran...*, 2019).

### Conclusions

In the end, it becomes quite clear why Saudi Arabia and the UAE are concerned about protecting each other's vital interests. These issues underlie the creation in January 2020 of a separate Council for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden countries, so that these states can discuss and resolve issues that affect them directly, with limited outside intervention. No matter how weak and idealistic the plan of the Council may seem at first glance, it is hoped that this initiative can pave the way for regional cooperation and multilateralism. The Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf have the opportunity to diversify their economies thanks to the opportunity provided by a tense global supply chain, which is now being intensified by the US-China tariff war. However, this would require organized management of the Red Sea. Nevertheless, real cooperation will require a truly comprehensive framework within which actors in the Horn of Africa must coordinate their actions (*Why Saudi Arabia and Iran...*, 2019).

Thus, the Horn of Africa continues to be a strategically important region for the Gulf states. The interests of the Gulf Cooperation Council are only growing day by day, as competition in the region intensifies.

The military campaign in Yemen has increased the security interests of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in East Africa, which together have become the largest investors of all the Gulf states on the continent. Gulf states often offer economic incentives in exchange for gains and to achieve their goals. The Gulf states have used the most powerful tools, namely economic and political influence, to persuade African countries to reduce their relations with official Tehran, and thus managed to curb Iran's presence in the region. However, the Qatar crisis of 2017 between the GCC member states had a limited impact on the African continent and failed to take the loyalty of most African countries. This had a "shaky effect" on the African continent, and also revealed a lack of homogeneity in the attitude of the Gulf states to Africa.

Despite the recent easing of relations between Saudi Arabia and its partners with Qatar, geostrategic interests and key differences remain stable, and African countries will be able to continue to exploit these differences by attracting as much investment and humanitarian assistance as possible, thanks to diplomatic support.

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## Interesy monarchii Zatoki Perskiej w Rogu Afryki

### Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza polityki monarchii Zatoki Perskiej w Rogu Afryki. Bliskie więzy historyczne między dwoma regionami dały początek głębokiej współpracy między państwami afrykańskimi i arabskimi. Monarchie Zatoki Perskiej przez długi czas rywalizowały o pogłębienie swojego wpływu politycznego, gospodarczego i bezpieczeństwa w regionie. Wzmocnienie więzi gospodarczych z Rogiem Afryki pomogło zwiększyć bezpieczeństwo żywnościowe w Zatoce Perskiej. Inwestycje arabskich monarchii w modernizację portów w Sudanie, Erytrei, Somalii i Dżibuti pomagają poprawić infrastrukturę logistyczną w północno-wschodniej Afryce. Jednocześnie szybka militaryzacja regionu spowodowana utworzeniem wielu baz wojskowych państw Zatoki Perskiej w Rogu Afryki zwiększa poziom konfliktów generowanych w regionie. Zarówno Morze Czerwone, jak i Zatoka Adeńska mają strategiczne znaczenie dla zbrojnego wsparcia kampanii wojskowej koalicji Arabii Saudyjskiej i Zjednoczonych Emiratów Arabskich w Jemenie. Dlatego też Róg Afryki również zyskał strategiczne znaczenie ze względu na konflikt w Jemenie, a ambitne państwa Zatoki Perskiej coraz bardziej angażują się w regionalną geopolitykę. Arabia Saudyjska i Zjednoczone Emiraty Arabskie, jako główny sojusznik Rijadu w Zatoce Perskiej, coraz częściej postrzegają Róg Afryki jako swoją „zachodnią flankę bezpieczeństwa”. Łączy je chęć zapobieżenia rosnącym wpływom Turcji, Iranu i Kataru w tej części świata. Rywalizacja między Arabią Saudyjską, Zjednoczonymi Emiratami Arabskimi, Katarom i Iranem pomaga przyciągnąć inwestycje, utrzymać ogólną stabilność i poprawić sytuację bezpieczeństwa w Rogu Afryki. Mediacja w konfliktach i gromadzenie aktywów w Rogu Afryki umożliwiły Arabii Saudyjskiej, ZEA i Katarowi ustanowienie wpływów politycznych w regionie. Państwa Zatoki Perskiej wykorzystują swoje rosnące wpływy gospodarcze, bezpieczeństwa i dyplomatyczne w Afryce, aby zmniejszyć wpływy konkurentów i uzyskać międzynarodowe poparcie na arenie światowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Róg Afryki, mediacja w konfliktach, Zatoka Perska, kryzys katarski, Arabia Saudyjska, ZEA