

THE RED SEA: NEW SPACES OF INTERDEPENDENT SECURITY ISSUES BETWEEN COUNTRIES OF THE GULF AND OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Historically, "Arabia Felix" was a continuum of diverse intertwined influences in the Horn of Africa. This region is at a crossroad for the empire-like appetites and conquest endeavors of global powers (China, India, the United States and Europe) and regional ones (Saudi Arabia / United Arab Emirates, allied to Egypt, vs Qatar, allied to Turkey). The Gulf countries have recently been involved in the region – for religious reasons for the Saudis initially (1980s), but later to block the emerging influence of Qatar in the Horn (2000s). The War in Yemen and the political rivalries between the monarchies of the Peninsula, especially when the Gulf Crisis broke out in June 2017, enhanced the region's strategic interest for Gulf countries. Moreover, those events have had direct consequences on the stability of the countries of the Horn. The purpose of this research paper is to analyze the growing entanglement of Horn/Peninsula/Gulf security issues and economic interests in the Horn of Africa.

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The Horn of Africa and Gulf Countries

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INTRODUCTION

The War in Yemen began on March 26, 2015, with the intervention of a coalition led by Saudi Arabia, and it since catalyzes the security and strategic issues common to the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. Then, a crisis broke out on June 5, 2017 between four member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Qatar¹ – in which Egypt took a prominent role as well. It magnified lingering tensions among the countries of the Horn which had already been facing many political upheavals. Indeed, three new states emerged in less than twenty years in the region: Somaliland (1991, but deprived from official international recognition), Eritrea (1993), and South Sudan (2011).²

The first part of this paper highlights the resurgence of strategic interests in the Red Sea as an international security issue, first in the fight against terrorism (late 1990s and early 2000s), then in the fight against piracy (mid-2000s), and, finally, through the consequences of China's arrival in the region and the development of the New Silk Roads. In the second part, we analyze the strategies of influence of Gulf states. The War in Yemen and the 2017 Gulf Crisis caused an unprecedented feud among a new generation of autocrats that took power in the region: most notably the crown princes of Abu Dhabi, in the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, but also the emir of Qatar. They are fighting a pitched battle with their regional allies – Egypt for the first two and Turkey for the latter – eyeing an hegemonic position in the Horn. The last part explains how the countries of the Horn, which are more than ever at the center of attention, respond to the multiple external appetites that have exacerbated fragmentation (Somalia, Ethiopia) but also generated hopes of a regional peace³ (*Pax Arabica*⁴).

THE HORN OF AFRICA: A STRATEGIC CROSSROAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Four extra-regional “initiatives” have made the Horn of Africa a strategic crossroad of the contemporary international system: the beginning of the “Global War on Terrorism,” the fight against maritime piracy, the New Silk Roads initiative and the War in Yemen.

1. The Gulf Cooperation Council is composed of six monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. It was founded on May 25, 1981 with the inaugural summit of the heads of state of the GCC in Abu Dhabi.

2. Sonia Le Gouriellec, “Trois trajectoires de sécession dans la corne de l’Afrique : le Somaliland, l’Érythrée, le Soudan du Sud,” *Sécurité globale*, 2011/4, No. 18, p. 95-106.

3. On peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia, see: Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, “‘Contre toute attente’, la paix entre l’Éthiopie et l’Érythrée. Causes, conséquences, scénarios,” Research Paper 72, IRSEM, March 6, 2019.

4. Alex de Waal, “Beyond the Red Sea: A new driving force in the politics of the Horn,” *African Arguments*, July 2018.

2001: The “Global War on Terrorism” and the American strategy in the region

In September 2002, Washington decided to open in Djibouti its only permanent base on the African continent, despite intense lobbying on the part of Eritrea.⁵ Indeed, the Eritrean government had circulated a report entitled “Why not Eritrea?” and launched an intense public communication campaign to solicit an alliance with the United States. Their main point was that Eritrea is the only non-Arab country bordering the Red Sea (aside from Israel). That said, that same month, the Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki pushed his country’s candidacy to the Arab League – on the ground that it had important ties with its Arab neighbors – which once again showed the ambivalent attitude of the country’s leadership. The U.S. Secretary of Defense deemed the proposal interesting: the country has a long coastal strip on the Red Sea, two ports, several air facilities and a mountain climate that is more pleasant than the one in Djibouti. But he was wary of the president’s bellicose tendencies.

In 2006, the U.S.-led coalition deployed in Afghanistan faced some difficulties and the Horn of Africa gave the administration additional reasons to worry: it looked like a tempting fallback region for jihadists. Thus, *Task Force 150* was deployed in the northern part of the Indian Ocean, as part of the operation *Enduring Freedom*, and tasked to prevent the exfiltration of terrorists from Afghanistan to the Arabian Peninsula or the Horn of Africa.⁶ The states in the region thus “facilitated” the fight against terrorism, under American supervision, and Ethiopia became a regional pillar in that fight. Finally, the international system provided additional opportunities for the states of the region, as we will see.

The internationalization of the fight against maritime piracy

2008 put these states at the center of the fight against piracy. Although the phenomenon is as old as sea trading, it had been more present in the Malacca Strait and in the Southeastern Asian waters, in the Caribbean and in the Gulf of Guinea until then. Therefore, we cannot portray it as a “resurgence,” even in the Gulf of Aden. The frequency of the attacks, their importance, and the international mobilization against it were however remarkable in the Somalian case.⁷ The whole effort consisted in using military means to crush a problem tied to on-land actors, sponsors and beneficiaries.

More than 40 countries took part in the military operations to fight piracy, on their own or in coalitions such as the European Union’s – with the *Atalante* operation – NATO’s – with the *Ocean Shield* operation, or the *Combined Task Force 151*. Djibouti managed to play a key

5. A. de Waal and A.H.A. Salam, *Islamism and its enemies in the Horn of Africa*, Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 236. The Ambassador of Eritrea in France, Ahmed Dehli, whom we met on May 2, 2006, did not confirm it (nor did he deny it) but he reaffirmed the independence of Eritrea and its unwillingness to host foreign troops.

6. The coalition brought together ten ships provided by eight countries: the United States, Great Britain, Pakistan, Germany, Spain, Italy, France and the Netherlands. Other ships from Australia, Canada and New Zealand also participated in the *Task Force 150*.

7. Three attacks in 2003, 2 in 2004, 35 in 2005, 15 in 2006, 31 in 2007, 111 in 2008, 153 in 2009, and 53 in 2010 according to the International Maritime Bureau.

role in this drive to protect one of the major maritime routes used by international trade. First, it took advantage of its position as a “garrison state,” and its geographical position at the entrance of the Red Sea, to welcome foreign ships. The multinational naval task force *Combined Task Force 150*, already based in Djibouti, rebranded itself as *CTF 151* to fight piracy. Additionally, the small state also hosts the operational base of *Atalante*, the Europe-led mission. Since 2009, German and Spanish contingents have also stationed in Djibouti, but without permanent bases. Furthermore, Djibouti became the rear base of private security and military companies. Finally, and more surprisingly, Japan opened a military base to fight piracy there as well – the first Japanese base abroad since 1945.⁸ Those are mere early signs of a renewed interest in the Red Sea.

The internationalization of the Red Sea with China’s New Silk Roads initiative

Securing that maritime area is essential for the EU, Japan, but also for China. The countries neighboring the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden benefit from an advantageous geographical position at the heart of the Chinese New Silk Roads initiative.⁹ In Djibouti, China invested close to 14 billion dollars in infrastructural projects (ports, railroads, roads, airports, free trade zones...) between 2012 and 2018. The port of Doraleh was built in less than two years, and nine other port projects have been launched in the country. The construction of these infrastructures has been linked to the promise of a good connection to Ethiopia, the neighboring emerging power. China’s import-export bank EximBank financed 70% of the 3.4-billion-investment to renovate and reopen the railroad connecting the two countries.¹⁰ In Ethiopia, Chinese companies have invested nearly 4 billion dollars in infrastructural projects: a new airport, the African Union headquarters, a ring road and tramways in Addis Ababa... In fact, these Chinese investments bear consequences on the foreign policy of these states, and it revives the competition between global powers in the region.

The War in Yemen, a catalyst of the rapprochement between the Horn and the Peninsula

The War in Yemen furthered the rapprochement between the Horn and the Peninsula. The Arab coalition, dreading the influence of Iran in the Yemenite conflict, has striven to keep Sudan and Eritrea at a distance from their adversary, cutting the supply chains between the Horn and Yemen.¹¹ Therefore, in 2015, Eritrea accepted to lease the Hanish Islands and the port facilities of Assab to the United Arab Emirates for 30 years, as part of

8. Sonia Le Gouriellec, “[Base militaire à Djibouti : le paradoxe de la puissance japonaise](#),” *Revue Défense nationale*, No. 734, November 2010.

9. It was officially announced in 2013. Since September 2015, the Chinese government has chosen to translate it as the *Belt and Road initiative* in English documents (a shortcut for the much longer *The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*).

10. Meanwhile, China has also set up its first military base in Djibouti to secure its own interests.

11. Harry Verhoeven, “The Gulf and the Horn: Changing Geographies of Security Interdependence and Competing Visions of Regional Order,” *Civil Wars*, 2018, p. 1-25.

a security agreement between the two countries.¹² In November 2020, amidst the Ethiopian Civil War, satellite imagery confirmed the presence of Chinese-produced drones at the UAE's military base in Assab.

For nearly two decades, the Horn states have been able to take advantage of the resources provided by the international system, despite their diversity of interests and objectives. Few studies have investigated the role of local governments in these extraterritorial initiatives. In fact, this statement applies to the whole continent: "Africa's role and position in international relations has often been studied by focusing on the role and impact of exogenous actors. Conventional attempts to search for an African voice in discourses [...] often focus on the victimhood of the continent..."¹³

STRATEGIES OF INFLUENCE AND RIVALRIES AMONG GULF STATES IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO CONQUER THE HORN

Qatar's diplomacy of international mediation intervenes in war zones, especially in the Horn of Africa, where the country has endeavored to compete with the Saudi religious *soft power*.¹⁴ Since 1996, Doha has been spreading its soft power everywhere in the Arabo-Islamic world through its proactive diplomacy and its satellite TV channel Al-Jazeera.¹⁵ Qatar creates connections and networks by setting up charity organizations charged with creating development programs, which are then publicized by Al-Jazeera. Doha has thus become a key player in Sudan, where it was the first Gulf country to finance assistance programs massively in a country that had otherwise been completely isolated by the international community. During the 1990s, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Pasdarans) were the only Iranian presence in the country, and for ideological reasons, due to the war of influence that brought Iran against the Saudi kingdom, which exported its Wahhabi version of Salafism there.

But Sudan broke its diplomatic relations with Tehran in January 2016, in solidarity with Saudi Arabia after its embassy and consulate in Iran were plundered in response to the execution of Cheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a high-ranking Saudi Shiite. The country later joined the Saudi-led Arab coalition in the War in Yemen (March 2015) where it sent almost 6,000 soldiers. Omar al-Bashir was overthrown by the military in April 2019, following nationwide protests against his 30-year rule, and he was replaced by the Transitional Military Council

12. Emile Hokayem and David B. Roberts, "The War in Yemen," *Survival*, 2016, Vol. 58, No. 6, p. 157-186.

13. Jo-Ansie van Wyck, "Africa in international relations: agent, bystander or victim?," in Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning and Amitav Acharya (dir.), *Africa in Global International Relations. Emerging approaches to theory and practice*, Routledge, 2016, p. 108.

14. Saudi Arabia has made the religious *soft power* as its most efficient tool of influence. It is structured around local and international Islamic NGOs, the most important of which is the Muslim World League (MWL), founded in 1962. The MWL spread a Salafist Pan-Islamist project to challenge Nasser's Pan-Arabism during the 1960s. Since then, it has financed programs for schools, mosques, institutes to spread the same Islamic faith worldwide. Moreover, important universities, such as Medina's, or WAMY (the World Assembly of Muslim Youth) have been training and funding students and international forums across the world. See Fatiha Dazi-Héni, *L'Arabie saoudite en 100 questions*, Paris, Tallandier, coll. "Texto", revised edition, 2018, question 20: "Qu'est-ce que le *soft power* religieux de l'Arabie saoudite ?," p. 76-78. See also the second, updated, edition, published in 2020.

15. Claire-Gabrielle Tallon, *Al-Jazeera : Liberté d'expression et pétromonarchie*, Paris, PUF, 2011.

(TMC). Now, Sudan has a government led by a military-civilian ruling body known as the Sovereignty Council, tasked with leading the transition to a democratic civilian government by 2022. Then, in the wake of the Abraham Accords signed in Washington on September 15, 2020, the UAE, Bahrain and Israel are normalizing their relations.¹⁶ Sudan became the third Arab state where the prospect of a new normalization deal with Israel has been announced on October 20, 2020.¹⁷ This announcement was followed by Sudan and US' signature formalizing with Israel on January 6, 2021,¹⁸ alongside a financial aid promising 1 billion dollars annual for Khartoum. This makes Sudan the third Arab country to sign the "Abraham Accords" meanwhile Morocco has also agreed on normalization with Israel, December 22, 2020.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Khartoum has refused to take a side in the feud between Qatar and the four Arab states of the Quartet (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt) that decided to embargo Doha when the Gulf crisis enhanced on June 2017. It has maintained diplomatic relations with Doha while joining the Saudi-Emirati-led coalition in the War in Yemen. Sudan lies at the intersection of several conflictual power relationships: the diplomatic normalization with Israeli, a regime transition in which Egypt seeks to protect its regional and strategic role, and the broader competition between the United States and the EU on the one side and China and Russia²⁰ on the other.²¹

The key dates of the Gulf states' strategic reversals in the Horn

There were three stages in the evolution of the strategies of influence of Gulf countries, which started as a competition and turned into sheer rivalry. These rivalries were exacerbated by the outbreak of the Arab Springs: in Tunisia in December 2010; after 2011 in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was in command during the short presidency of Mohamed Morsi (May 2012-July 3, 2013), and later in Syria, Yemen and Libya (March 2011) where the revolts subsequently grew into civil wars – and regional war in the Yemeni case (March 2015).

However, it is mostly in the Horn of Africa that these rivalries are concentrated, starting with the outbreak of the War in Yemen on March 26, 2015, after the intervention of an Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and its main ally, the UAE. The War in Yemen became the vector of the current strategic reorientation,²² under official Saudi leadership, but, in reality, under the impetus of General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ), Crown

16. Anne-Laure Mahé and Amélie Ferey, "[Diplomatie du deal, diplomatie fragile ? Les enjeux du rapprochement entre Israël et le Soudan](#)," Research Paper 110, IRSEM, December 2020.

17. Fatiha Dazi-Héni, "[The Gulf States and Israel after the Abraham Accords](#)," *Arab Reform Initiative*, November 6, 2020.

18. "Sudan signs pact with US on normalizing ties with Israel," <https://www.dw.com/en/sudan-signs-pact-with-us-on-normalizing-ties-with-israel/a-56148309>.

19. Zineb Riboua, "[How Moroccans reacted to normalization with Israel](#)," Atlantic Council, December 24, 2020.

20. In November 2020, Russia confirmed its project to build a naval base on Sudan's Red Sea coast.

21. Nizar Manek, Mohamed Kheir Omer, "[Sudan Will Decide the Outcome of the Ethiopian Civil War](#)," *Foreign Policy* (blog), November 14, 2020.

22. Gérard Prunier, "Corne de l'Afrique dans l'orbite de la guerre au Yémen," *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 2016.

Prince of Abu Dhabi. The experienced soldier makes a point of erecting his little “Sparta of the Gulf”²³ as a symbol of the Emirati national identity.²⁴

MBZ engaged in the systematic conquest of the ports of the Gulf of Aden. In July 2015, during the War in Yemen, the Emirati army seized the ports of Mukalla (in the Hadramout province) and Shihr (at the mouth of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait) – which is only 27 kilometers away from the Horn – with American support. In early May 2018, the Emiratis took advantage of their successes to occupy the island of Socotra militarily, in the name of “historical and family ties” according to the Emirati Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Anuar al-Gargash.²⁵ This initiative angered President Hadi, whom the UAE meant to support, following the resolution 2216 voted by the UN Security Council on 14 April 2015. For that reason, the Saudi army was quickly deployed in Socotra to support Hadi and appease the strong tensions with Abu Dhabi.

The Emirati strategy of conquering Red Sea ports and the Yemeni coast highlights conflicts of interest within the coalition itself, both with the legitimate Yemeni government and its key ally Saudi Arabia.

That said, and while the UAE has registering some successes, it is also suffering serious setbacks. Djibouti is one example. The diplomatic relations were severed in April 2016 and Djibouti ended a 2006 contract with Dubai’s giant port logistics base DP World’s to develop the port of Doraleh.

The outbreak of the Gulf Crisis was the third stage. On June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt announced that they were breaking off diplomatic relations with Qatar, which they publicly accused of supporting terrorism and colluding with Iran. Immediately after, the Saudis, Emiratis, Bahrainis and Egyptians closed their air, sea and even land spaces to Qatar. A real war meant to isolate the country was initiated and it led to collateral damages on the vulnerable partners of these countries. Also, the crisis²⁶ led to a political and ideological confrontation²⁷ between the supporters of movements inspired by the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (Qatar, Turkey and Sudan) and their detractors, such as the UAE. The Crown Prince MBZ even advocated for their complete eradication as he sees the roots of Islamic radicalism in them, as several eminent representatives of Emirati think tanks have told us.²⁸

23. “The United Arab Emirates: The Gulf’s little Sparta,” *The Economist*, April 8, 2017.

24. A now-retired former French ambassador to the United Arab Emirates told us: “I remember one of my meetings with Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, at the time Chief of Staff of the United Arab Emirates Army, which he had merged into a single federal army after Dubai rallied in 1997. Thinking about it today, I am struck by the constancy that inhabited the prince when he confided to me that his ambition was to make the Emiratis identify not only with their Muslim and tribal identity but with their Emirati identity in a country where 90% of the population is foreign,” February 2019, Paris.

25. This refers to a tweet from Anuar al-Gargash, published on May 4, 2018.

26. Andreas Krieg (ed.), *Divided Gulf. The anatomy of crisis*, Singapore, London, Macmillan, 2019. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Gulf crisis*, London, Hurst & Company, 2020.

27. Fatima Dazi-Héni, “La guerre de l’information dans la crise du Golfe du 5 juin 2017,” Céline Marangé and Maud Quessard (dir.), *Les guerres de l’Information*, Paris, PUF, 2021.

28. Interviews with Dr. Rashid al-Nuaimi, President of the Hedayah Center (countering violent extremism), Dr. Ibtisam al-Ketbi, President of the Emirates Policy Center, Dr. Jamal Sanad al-Suweïdi, President of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research and Mohammed Baharoon, Director General of B’huth (Dubai Public Policy Research Center), March 2018, Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Saudi Arabia has subscribed to this analysis since the end of King Abdullah's reign. In March 2014, Riyadh labelled the MB as a terrorist organization – along with AQAP, IS, the Hezbollah and the Houthi rebel movement. As for the young Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), he shares the vision of his Emirati mentor, MBZ. But this vision is nevertheless attenuated by King Salman, who is more pragmatic and less exclusive than his son and the Emirati strongman, especially on the question of the Yemeni party al-Islah (an hybrid party of Salafist essence but with ideas of Brotherhood inspiration, just like the *Sahwa* in Saudi Arabia, whose leaders have almost all been jailed since October 2017).²⁹

The Egyptian president al-Sisi is of course part of this anti-MB group, and Bahrain has reluctantly joined as well, forced to align itself with the Saudi-Emirati axis. Indeed, the Bahraini dynasty Al Khalifa benefited from the military support of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi on March 14, 2011. Back then, the armed branch of the GCC, the Shield of the Peninsula, helped the dynasty crush a successful predominantly Shiite uprising in the country, hence reinforcing the ruling Sunni family's hold on power as its legitimacy is regularly being contested.

Gulf countries: from opportunistic and rival calculations to concerted strategies of influence: Abu Dhabi-Riyad versus Ankara-Doha in the Horn

The short-term opportunistic policies of the Gulf states, which monetize their influence and consider their African allies as clients,³⁰ have kept Horn countries dependent on their investments, trade and migration policies. The Dutch center of international studies demonstrated in an analysis of the local political economy untitled *Riyal Politik*³¹ that these Gulf states are themselves tied to unstable and volatile oil prices, which limits long-term strategic and economic projections. And China's arrival in the region offers an alternative to the Gulf "bosses" for the countries of the Horn.

This new political situation, combined with the conflict in Yemen and the Gulf crisis, divides the states into two camps. On the one hand, the Saudi-Emirati axis has gained momentum, notably since its active role in the peace agreement signed by Ethiopia and Eritrea in Jeddah on September 16, 2018.³² On the other hand, the Qatari-Turkish axis, which influence in the Horn has been challenged by the Saudi-Emirati strategic partnership, seeks to establish itself in a crucial region to control the Red Sea through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Each camp elaborates and structures its long-term activities as a great strategic game. Whereas the UAE focuses on the military conquest of the ports, Saudi Arabia stands back

29. Hence, on December 13, 2017, King Salman led a meeting between officials of the Yemeni party al-Islah of MB inspiration, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and his own son, MBS. King Salman considered al-Islah as an indispensable local actor to fight the Houthis effectively, which he painted as the primordial threat and a Fifth column paid by Tehran.

30. Roland Marchal, *Mutations géopolitiques et rivalités d'États : la Corne de l'Afrique prise dans la crise du Golfe*, Observatoire Afrique de l'Est. Security and Political Issues, CERi, Sciences-Po/Cedej Khartoum, Research Paper 4, March 2018.

31. Jos Meester, Willem Van den Berg, Harry Verhoeven, *Riyal Politik. The political economy of Gulf investments in the Horn of Africa*, CRU Report, April 2018.

32. *The United Arab Emirates in The Horn of Africa*, Crisis Middle East Group Briefing, No. 65, November 6, 2018.

and provides the UAE with the strategic structure that the small country landlocked in the Persian Gulf needs in order to project itself in South Yemen and on the Red Sea.

As it strives to conquer Red Sea ports, Abu Dhabi anticipates the strategic downgrading of the port of Jebel Ali, the flagship port located in the Emirate of Dubai that has been essential to the federation for the last 25 years. Its future is threatened by the expansion of new, better-situated ports in the Indian Ocean: Gwadar in Pakistan (financed by China), Chabahar in Iran (developed by India), Duqm on the coast of Oman in the Arabian Sea (with significant Chinese investment here as well), and even King Abdullah Economic City, on the Red Sea, which MBS wants to expand.

There remains a number of conflicts of interest between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, such as their bilateral land border dispute which has been left unresolved due to the presence of a gas field in the area. But they are set aside for the time being. Similarly, their actions and objectives in the War in Yemen are not always compatible. The Emiratis are dedicated to capturing ports in the south and west of Yemen while the Saudis seek to weaken the Houthi rebels lastingly, as they have been increasingly threatening the security of the Saudi territory over the past three years of the conflict.³³ In addition, in the very late days of his mandate, President Trump has designated Yemen's Houthi rebels a terrorist organization.³⁴ But this problematic measure could hurt efforts to end the war in Yemen. This decision is likely to be reversed by the new Biden Administration that has made the end of this war a top priority of its Middle East policy agenda³⁵ alongside with the restoration of the negotiations with Iran on arrangements on the JCPoA signed on July 2015 and then abandoned by Trump Administration on May 2018.

However, it is important to recognize that a concerted strategy to reduce tensions between yesterday's enemies in the Horn has been effective. Moreover, the strong shared willingness of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to oppose the Houthi rebels' stranglehold on strategic sites – such as on the ports of Hodeida and Mokha, and on the islets providing an access to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, – outweighs differences in their respective approaches that may become salient if comprehensive peace negotiations are opened in Yemen. It does remain an highly unlikely short-term prospect however. The UAE supports the Southern Transitional Council (STC), especially since it unilaterally proclaimed its autonomy on 26th April 2020, which deepened the crack with Saudi Arabia. The latter had signed a power-sharing agreement on November 5, 2019 to put an end to the struggle between Hadi's legitimate government and the STC. Nevertheless, it probably won't cause a direct confrontation between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh because both have too much to lose if divisions come to be open. Therefore, Abu Dhabi will probably use the threat of its financial withdrawal to force the STC to negotiate.

While this strategy may seem questionable, it shows some coherence. Both players, the UAE and the KSA, need each other. For example, the Emirati setbacks in Djibouti and

33. Fatiha Dazi-Héni, *L'Arabie saoudite en 100 questions*, question 72: "Quelles sont les forces et les faiblesses de l'axe Riyad-Abu Dhabi dans le Golfe ?," p. 234-236 and question 83: "En quoi les dégâts de la guerre au Yémen peuvent-ils à terme fragiliser l'axe saoudo-émirati dans le Golfe ?," p. 266-268.

34. "[The US should reverse its Houthi terror designation](#)," International Crisis Group, January 13, 2021.

35. Bruce Riedel, "[A pragmatic view on Yemen's Houthis](#)," Brookings, January 11, 2021.

Somalia are offset by the less visible, but very complementary positions, of Saudi Arabia. The king, more than his heir, has guaranteed good relations with both Djibouti and Somalia. The latter's leaders have recently visited the kingdom on several occasions. To strengthen this new geostrategic dimension of the Saudi regional diplomacy, a Minister of State for African Affairs, Ahmed Abd al-Aziz Qattan, was appointed in March 2017. This very influential former ambassador to Egypt was chosen because he is very knowledgeable on the security and economic issues of the Horn of Africa.³⁶

This coordinated Saudi-Emirati strategy is working well. Linked to the conflict in Yemen, it is of course primarily motivated by the desire to keep Iran out of this strategic zone at all costs, but also by the rival strategies of Qatar and Turkey in their quest for influence, over the countries of the Horn especially.

The Ankara-Doha axis combines large investments and commercial contracts, a humanitarian presence through Islamic NGOs and aid to development and entrepreneurship. Turkey is also Ethiopia's fourth largest economic partner. Besides, Ankara and Doha have adopted the same strategy to settle in Sudan and Somalia.

Nevertheless, the War in Yemen is likely to endure long-lastingly, and the Gulf Crisis has durably affected confidence in Emirati, Qatari and Saudi leaders to the point where it is futile to imagine a true reconciliation within the GCC. Even the many American attempts have failed to convince its Gulf partners to come back to the table to tackle the Iranian threat more efficiently. This is notable because the intergovernmental institution has been the most resilient regional pact in the Arab world since its creation in May 1981. Today, it is facing the most serious crisis of its existence. The ideological rivalries of autocrats who personally embody their countries' ambitious policies of influence in the Horn, North Africa and in the Middle East have forced the latter countries to take sides. And these rivalries seem irreconcilable.

Biden's victory in the last US presidential elections of November 3, 2020 exert more pressure on Saudi Arabia and UAE in order to put an end to the Gulf crisis. Even though Riyadh and Doha moved for a rapprochement, Abu Dhabi's hostile attitude towards Qatar is reluctant to renormalize its relations. Even if GCC succeeded in formally re-establishing their diplomatic and Air, Maritime and Land borders, by signing the AIUla Agreement on last January 5th 2021 following the Saudi announcement to re-establish diplomatic relations and re-open all the borders with Qatar.³⁷ It remains unlikely to reach full reconciliation due to the trust' break between these States especially between UAE and Qatar according to the declaration of Yousef Al-Otaiba,³⁸ Ambassador of UAE to the US and closest advisor for US-UAE relations of Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince.

36. *Ibid.*, question 84: "Pourquoi le continent africain devient-il un enjeu stratégique pour le leadership saoudo-émirati ?," p. 269-272.

37. Hussein Ibish, "[Qatar Boycott Ends, But Core Issues Remain Unresolved](#)," The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, January 5, 2021.

38. Amélie Mouton, "[UAE and Qatar reluctantly agree to reconcile](#)," *The Africa Report*, January 13, 2021.

The personalization of monarchical power in the Gulf: an aggravating factor on regional rivalries and strategies of influence

The near-universal personalization of monarchies in the Gulf (with the exception of Kuwait and Bahrain, where no one figure embodies the state), coupled with a generational change and the diverging political culture of the new leaders, have opened a new chapter in inter-regional and international relations in the Gulf.

Mehran Kamrava shows that Qatar was the first Gulf country where two individuals embodied the state's foreign policy: Emir Hamad and his comrade Hamad Bin Jassem (HBJ). "In Qatar, the leaders are no longer content to simply replace the institutions, from now on they embody them."³⁹ They personified the strategies of influence for about twenty years, until Emir Hamad abdicated on June 25, 2013 in favor of his son Tamim. Now, and since the crisis targeted the Emirate on June 5, 2017, the young Emir has been facing unprecedented hostility from his competitors in the Gulf.⁴⁰

This hostility between four member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar), plus Egypt, has had unprecedented consequences because of the exacerbated personalization of monarchical regimes in the region. Traditionally, these regimes had been structured on an horizontal dynastic model, where the ruling family exercises power collegially, unlike the other two Arab monarchies – Morocco and Jordan – where family members are limited to a protocolary role.⁴¹ Today, these monarchies have grown less dynastic, more personalized, and embodied in more charismatic individuals than before. The Sultanate of Oman under Sultan Qaboos,⁴² who passed away on January 2020, was a good example: this is the most absolute monarchy in the region.⁴³ The sultan however ruled as an "enlightened despot" as he tried to mediate between the Persian and Arab shores of the Gulf on the one hand,⁴⁴ and between the United States and Iran on the other hand, since the two states no longer maintained diplomatic relations.

In the UAE, the cerebral embolism that the President of the Federation, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, suffered in early 2014, has led to a stricter hold and control over power by his half-brother, the powerful Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed Bin Zayed (MBZ). He has served as a mentor for his young Saudi peer, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), whose unstoppable rise to power is orchestrated by his father, King Salman, crowned on January 23, 2015. He appointed him as his successor after the palace revolution of June 22, 2017. In fact, he ousted his nephew Mohammed Bin Nayef, the former strongman of the kingdom and an intimate enemy of MBZ – and imposed a vertical line of control over the Saudi kingdom to give all the levers of power to his son.

39. Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big States*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013.

40. Fatiha Dazi-Héni, *L'Arabie saoudite en 100 questions*, question 71: "Pourquoi la crise avec le Qatar sonne-t-elle le glas du CCG ?," p. 231-233.

41. Fatiha Dazi-Héni, *Monarchies et sociétés d'Arabie. Le temps des confrontations*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2006.

42. His cousin Sultan Haytham succeeded him and tried to delegate more powers to close family members, install a more business-oriented leadership and he is still pursuing Sultan Qaboos' mainstream policy of mediation in the region.

43. Marc Valéri, *Le Sultanat d'Oman. Une révolution en trompe-l'œil*, Paris, Karthala, 2007.

44. Fatiha Dazi-Héni, "[Oman: national challenges and regional issues in the post-sultan era](#)," Research paper 41, IRSEM, July 21, 2017

The Gulf crisis – which threatens, to an unprecedented level, the relations between the “brother” monarchical regimes, all members of a same regional pact (GCC) – is a direct byproduct of the transformation of the regimes into idiosyncratic powers, to quote Bernard Haykel’s apt formula.⁴⁵

These powers are now defined by the personal interests and egos that determine their foreign policies. Indeed, Khaled al-Mezaini and Jean-Marc Rickly explained in their book that the leaders “embody the states they lead.”⁴⁶

Hence, it is easier to understand the aggressive and personalized character of the crisis that has been raging in the Gulf since June 2017, with its significant consequences on the strategies of influence conducted by Gulf states in the Horn. The states in the region are then withstanding the consequences of the inter-Gulf crisis as it spreads on the African continent following Egypt’s joining of the fray. As the central Arab state standing between the Horn and the Gulf, Egypt has played a key role alongside the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in exacerbating the crisis with Qatar.⁴⁷ Indeed, President al-Sisi has tried to eradicate the MB from Egypt, which aligns the regime with its Emirati ally.

Not only is Cairo deeply involved in the Gulf crisis, alongside its main allies and donors, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, but Egypt has traditionally maintained tumultuous relations with the two largest powers in the Horn: Sudan (which supports the MB) and Ethiopia (because of water disputes and Egyptian support for the Eritrean regime). However, these countries hope to consult each other more often, for different reasons.

A PAX ARABICA⁴⁸ IN THE HORN OF AFRICA? NEW THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE STATES IN THE REGION

The Horn of Africa has long been at the crossroads of the rivalries between global powers. In that regard, the battle over control of Red Sea ports,⁴⁹ described above, is helping redefine alliances and antagonisms there. The involvement of extra-regional powers is changing the distribution of power, creating new threats and opportunities for Horn countries. Given the growing interest of Gulf actors in the strategic geographical areas bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the countries of the Horn have attempted to exploit this new dynamic. They took advantage of reshaped political alliances in the Gulf to consolidate their regimes, but also defend and pursue their strategic interests.

45. Bernard Haykel, “Qatar’s Foreign and Security Policy,” Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, February 2013.

46. Khalid al-Mezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli, *The UAE and Foreign Policy: Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests*, London, Routledge, 2012. For the Saudi case, see Fatiha Dazi-Héni, *L’Arabie saoudite en 100 questions*.

47. Extract from an interview with a retired Saudi diplomat who served as a senior official in the political section of the Cooperation Council headquarters in Riyadh, December 2017.

48. Alex de Waal, “Beyond the Red Sea: A new driving force in the politics of the Horn.”

49. Gérard Prunier, “La Corne de l’Afrique dans l’orbite de la guerre au Yémen,” *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 2016.

A relationship of economic dependence between the two regions

Ethiopia aspires to become a regional hegemon, and it has grown closer to Gulf countries⁵⁰ to that end. Although it has successfully established itself internationally as a security provider and the largest contributor of peacekeeping troops, its neighbors continue to question its legitimacy. The 2002 *Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy* (a sort of White Paper on Foreign and Security Policy) listed economic development as the primary objective of Ethiopian diplomacy. Indeed, it is perceived as the only way to prevent the country's disappearance, but also as the basis of its security policy.⁵¹

This economic factor weighs heavily on ongoing internal transformations and on the rapprochement with Gulf countries. The Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has embarked on a new foreign policy to establish its authority and legitimacy at the regional level. In 2018, he became the first Oromo head of government in a country where the Tigrayan minority had controlled the levers of power since the early 1990s. The liberalization of the economy was one of his major reforms, as the state has long been a major economic player. Private companies did exist, but their boards of directors were mainly composed of senior officials and members of the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The state was the main investor and he fully controlled the financial and telecom industries. Besides, private endeavors were encouraged only when they aligned with government priorities. Since 2015, successive social movements have brought together Oromos and Amharas in an unprecedented way to denounce the unequal distribution of the wealth generated by the country's development.

In fact, and despite one of the fastest economic growths on the continent, the country has been facing a major currency crisis. The stability of its currency was only narrowly secured thanks to a \$3-billion payment made by the United Arab Emirates. Nevertheless, Ethiopia is trying to maintain its autonomy from the Emirates and it is playing a skillful diplomatic game with the states on the Peninsula. Hence, it broke off diplomatic relations with Qatar in 2008, but only to see to their reestablishment in 2012. It is also the country in the region that benefits from the largest percentage of Turkish direct investments. But when Abiy started talking about privatizations and economic liberalization, the UAE took it as an opportunity to invest.

One of the many constraints on the growth of Ethiopia is the absence of an access to the sea. The country is dependent on Djibouti as an outlet for its exports. For that reason, the port management contracts recently signed by the UAE could help Ethiopia diversify its maritime access points in the region. In fact, DP World announced in March 2018 that Addis Ababa would take a 19%-participation in the Somaliland port of Berbera.

50. Sonia Le Gouriellec, "[Ethiopia, an 'imperfect hegemon' in the Horn of Africa](#)," *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 5, September 2018, p. 1059-1075.

51. Published in 2002, the document remains relevant for three reasons. First, it provides a comprehensive and long-term analysis of the regime's objectives; then, all of our interlocutors continue to refer to it; finally, this document was updated in 2012 with a complementary document untitled "Ethiopia's Foreign Policy and its Achievements."

Nevertheless, these projects are called into question by internal conflicts. On November 4, 2020, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Abiy Ahmed, embarked in the territorial reconquest of Tigray, a de facto secessionist region of Ethiopia. This crisis risks weakening the regional ambitions of Ethiopia, as the country must overcome its institutional weaknesses first.

***Pax arabica*, “imported peace,” “peace under influence:” what are the prospects for the states of the Horn of Africa?**

The peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia was encouraged and supported by many foreign powers. The former acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and current U.S. Ambassador to Somalia, Donald Yamamoto, is said to have played a key role in this historic rapprochement,⁵² to which the UAE and Saudi Arabia also contributed significantly. The Eritrean President visited the two countries on several occasions before the agreement was laid out (see appendix for a chronology). And yet, Alex de Waal emphasizes that if the *Pax Arabica* replaces the *Pax Americana* in the region, it can only be a temporary achievement: “[a] momentary “*Pax Arabica*” may emerge based on Gulf money used to meet African leaders’ urgent cash needs. But any peace agreements that result will be only as good as the transitory alignments of political interests from which they arose. Today, the UAE’s immediate need for a friendly African hinterland as it presses forward with its war in Yemen creates such a configuration. But that is not a foundation for a durable peace and security order.”⁵³

In the present situation, the Yemeni quagmire in which the UAE and Saudi Arabia are stuck into could explain their motivation to achieve the peace agreement. It was intended to correct their disastrous image on the international scene, following the humanitarian damage caused by this conflict. Indeed, both public opinion and the international community are putting pressure on the Arab coalition, dominated by the Saudi-Emirati axis, to stop the fighting in Yemen.⁵⁴

The part played by Gulf states in the pacification process is reflected in the marginalization of Djibouti: the calmer relations between Addis Ababa and Asmara are opening up other ports to Ethiopia. Hence, Djibouti’s President Ismael Omar Guelleh is nowhere to be seen in the ongoing reconfigurations, despite his country’s position as a mediator, guarantor of peace and stability in a region troubled by conflicts. The reshuffling of alliances seems to be taking place without Djibouti playing a part in it. Numerous clashes between the president and MBZ, the most important of which was the nationalization of the port of Djibouti in 2018, can explain this marginalization. Indeed, the Djiboutian authorities filed a complaint against the operator DP World in 2014, in spite of the company’s 400-million-dollar investment to build a terminal managed by Doraleh Container Terminal. If 66 % of the

52. Gérard Prunier in “La mer Rouge peut-elle s’embraser ?” *Géopolitique, Le débat*, March 9, 2018.

53. Alex de Waal, “Beyond the Red Sea: A new driving force in the politics of the Horn.”

54. On March 14, 2019, the US Senate voted to end US military support for the Arab coalition in the War in Yemen. The resolution could have been adopted by the House of Representatives, but President Trump threatened to veto it.

company was owned by the Djiboutian port authority and 33 % by the Emirati operator, the government of Djibouti accused DP World of illegally paying several million dollars in secret commissions to Abdurrahman Boreh, who presided over the Ports and Free Zones Authority between 2003 to 2008.

A former close associate of President Guelleh, Abdurrahman Boreh is accused of financial fraud and embezzlement of public funds. He has taken refuge in Dubai, which has denied all extradition requests issued by Djibouti. In February 2017, the Djiboutian government's request for unilateral termination of the extradition was rejected by an arbitration body in London. Immediately, the Djiboutian government promulgated a specific law allowing it to unilaterally terminate public contracts related to the construction of major infrastructures for reasons pertaining to national interest. In February 2018, on the eve of the legislative elections, the Djiboutian government announced that it was unilaterally terminating the concession contract signed with DP World in 2006 for a 30-year period.

However, China's massive support, which has made Djibouti one of the cornerstones of its New Silk Roads initiative, has given the country strategic depth. It is up to the Djiboutian diplomacy to reassure its traditional partners, such as the United States, who has taken umbrage of the installation of a Chinese base near its own.⁵⁵

Systemic challenges remain to be addressed in all states in the region. For example, Jean-Nicolas Bach and Jeanne Aisserge⁵⁶ believe that it was too early to speak of a democratization in Ethiopia, although one can observe "an authoritarian decompression."

Abiy has played a risky game. Without electoral legitimacy, he tried to turn the political game around to pave the way for the 2020 elections: he notably released political prisoners and gave more space to the opposition parties. This reconfiguration of the political landscape provoked hostility from parts of the ruling oligarchy almost immediately, including among Tigrayans. And the prime minister tried and failed to ease the tensions. On the contrary, he stirred them up. Since then, we have observed the rise of regional nationalisms that had otherwise been contained and channeled by an authoritarian central power until then. The peak of this instability was reached in November 2020, with the launch of the punitive military attack against the *de facto* secessionist Tigray region, in the north of the country. Now, the constitutional order and the future of Ethiopia as a state are at stake. The war against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) is part – but only a part – of a multidimensional crisis. In the early 1990s, when the Tigrayan-led coalition took power, they adopted a new Constitution setting up ethnic federalism in Ethiopia. Today, the political landscape pits unionists, ethno-federalists and federalists against each other. Hence, everyone has a different reading of the 1994 Constitution.

Eritrea is currently the unknown element in the regional equation. If peace has finally been achieved, the inner workings of the Eritrean political system are no longer relevant. For the past 20 years, the country has been internationally considered as either a totalitarian, pariah, or uncooperative state. Indeed, after the Ethiopian refusal to implement the

55. Sonia Le Gouriellec, *Djibouti : La diplomatie de géant d'un petit État*, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2020.

56. Jeanne Aisserge and Jean-Nicolas Bach, *L'Éthiopie d'Abiy Ahmed Ali : une décompression autoritaire*, Observatoire de l'Afrique de l'Est (CEDEJ Khartoum-Sciences Po CERI), November 2018.

2002 Decision on Delimitation of the Border between Eritrea and Ethiopia and to withdraw its troops from parts of the Eritrean territory, the regime has closed in on itself with a paranoid⁵⁷ mode of operation. The constitution is not implemented, the president not elected, the National Assembly has not met since 2002 and the press is not free. A compulsory national service, set up to deal with external threats, is causing a real migratory outflow of young people towards neighboring countries and Europe. Ethiopia's handover of the symbolic city of Badme was a considerable political gesture that opened up dialogue. It came at a time when the regime was beginning to emerge from its international isolation while keeping the domestic political scene closed.

The United Arab Emirates have provided vital economic and military resources to ensure the survival of the regime. However, the Eritrean President, Isaias Afewerki, is aging and internal disputes are increasing. It is in his interest to embark on a new logic: regain his place in the international game, develop the country's economic potential in order to weaken his internal enemies and prepare his succession. With the peace process, Isaias Afewerki's persistence seems to have paid off; he is, once again, the master of the multi-band billiard game currently being played in the Horn of Africa. But the country is very non-transparent and it is difficult to analyze the ongoing power relationships there. With population control no longer justified, how will the regime evolve? It is too early to answer this question. Can a totalitarian regime change from within? Will there be an evolution from a totalitarian regime into an authoritarian regime, a "decompression," or only some change in the totalitarian regime – a diplomatic opening not necessarily entailing a regime opening? Eritrea's long game is to become the Horn's mightiest military and diplomatic power. And Isaias is the first beneficiary of the civil war in North Ethiopia. According to Alex Dewaal, "[he] has longed for Ethiopia to be in turmoil. In the 1990s he described Ethiopia as like Yugoslavia, destined to fragment. His two biggest fears are the Ethiopian army and the TPLF. Today they are locked in mutual annihilation."⁵⁸

Finally, this rapprochement between the states of the two regions could once again be achieved at the expense of the stability of Somalia, where the damages caused by the rivalries between Gulf countries have been clearly demonstrated.⁵⁹ Frictions between Gulf states and the Somali government of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" have exacerbated tensions over the distribution of power and resources between Mogadishu and the federated states.⁶⁰ The UAE is putting pressure on Somalia to take a stand in the Gulf Crisis. However, the Somalis have always chosen neutrality, due to Doha's alleged funding of the Somali president's election campaign and the presence of Qatari supporters in the country. Since then, tensions have continued to rise. The UAE halted the operation of

57. Some research has been published on the consolidation of the authoritarian Eritrean regime: International Crisis Group, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, Africa Report, No. 163, September 21, 2010; Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer and Franck Gouéry, *Érythrée, un naufrage totalitaire*, PUF, 2015; Martin Plaut, *Understanding Eritrea: Inside Africa's Most Repressive State*, Oxford University Press, 2017, and so on.

58. Alex DeWaal, "[Who Benefits from the Destruction of Ethiopia?](#)," *Reinventing Peace* (blog), November 19, 2020.

59. Sonia Le Gouriellec, "La Turquie en Somalie : un concurrent à l'approche globale de l'Union européenne," in Maurice de Langlois (dir.), *L'Approche globale de l'Union européenne en Somalie*, Report 35, IRSEM, 2014; Barouk Mesfin, "Qatar's diplomatic incursions into the Horn of Africa," *East Africa Report*, No. 8, Institute for Security Studies, November 2016.

60. International Crisis Group, *The United Arab Emirates in the Horn of Africa*, Briefing No. 65, November 2018.

an hospital it was financing in Mogadishu and ended its military cooperation program. In September 2018, the European Parliament warned the UAE against any attempt to destabilize Somalia. In response, the UAE strengthened its ties with the federated states of Somalia at the risk of undermining the federal state-building process.

CONCLUSION

The growing interdependence of security issues between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula does not imply equality between the states: the countries of the Horn are falling behind the rich states of the peninsula. The efforts made by the Saudi-Emirati duopoly are linked to their getting trapped in the War in Yemen, which entered its sixth year in March 2020. Moreover, the highly individualized nature of the Gulf Crisis – where the ambitions and strategies of influence of the leaders are determined by egos driven to their limits – does not encourage the perception of an emerging comprehensive and concerted collective security architecture in the Red Sea. However, the announcement made in December 2018 by King Salman, of his desire to establish a “pact” bringing together the countries bordering the Red Sea, – with the exception of Israel and Eritrea, which have remained in the background – deserves our full attention. This project to secure the Red Sea has been formalized successfully under the patronage of Saudi Arabia with the signing in Riyadh of the charter of the new organization on January 6, 2020.⁶¹ The Council of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden brings together eight countries overlooking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, with the exception of Israel. Nevertheless, Israel is partly included considering its strategic rapprochement with Arab Gulf states and especially with the “Abraham Accords.” Despite his tacit approval, the Saudi Crown Prince cannot afford to openly normalize relations with Israel, notwithstanding a recently-revealed secret meeting between the Israeli prime minister and MBS in Neom (the Saudi futuristic city on the coast of the Red Sea).⁶² Israel has also maintained close relations with Eritrea, Egypt, Jordan and signed a normalization of its relations with Sudan.

The indebted Horn countries are not in a strong position to negotiate with the Gulf monarchies that are strengthening their influence in the region by supporting the reconciliation process. Hence, and according to Alex de Waal, a *Pax Arabica* is replacing the *Pax Americana*, despite the latter’s limits in the region.⁶³ Nevertheless, according to us, this *Pax Arabica* is itself deemed by many conflicts of interest between Arab states, that could endanger its effectiveness. Thus, according to our statement it is unlikely to function due to Saudi-UAE divergent interests on the Yemen conflict, and mainly due to Egypt and UAE growing disagreements following UAE and Israel normalization. The Egypt-UAE honeymoon Trump’s

61. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1609121/saudi-arabia>, January 6, 2020.

62. Lahav Harkov, “Netanyahu meets Saudi crown prince MBS, Pompeo in Saudi Arabia,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 2020; Ben Caspit, “Netanyahu, MBS concur on Iran, but normalization no closer,” *Al-Monitor*, November 24, 2020.

63. Alex de Waal, “Beyond the Red Sea: A new driving force in the politics of the Horn,” *op. cit.*

presidency ushered in is over.⁶⁴ From Israel-Palestine to Libya and Qatar, from Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, both countries' Foreign policy interests have increasingly diverged. A new balance of power is expected to merge since the new US Administration is keen on appeasing tensions and ending conflicts in that strategic region. Putting an end to the war in Yemen could impact also the States of the Horn of Africa. The end of Qatar boycott could also ease this process for Biden Administration.

CHRONOLOGY OF DIPLOMATIC VISITS BETWEEN THE STATES OF THE HORN OF AFRICA AND OF THE GULF BEFORE THE PEACE AGREEMENT BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

- May 2018: Abiy Ahmed visited Abu Dhabi just one month and a half after his election (Ethiopia → UAE).
- June 2018: The Emirati Crown Prince visited Addis Ababa (UAE → Ethiopia). A 3-billion-dollar agreement was signed (1 billion in aid + 2 billion in investment pledges).
- July 2018: The Eritrean president was hosted in Abu Dhabi at the beginning of the month (Eritrea → UAE).
- 16 September 2018: Isaias Afeworki (Eritrea) and Abiy Ahmed (Ethiopia) received the medal of the Order of King Abdelaziz in Jeddah. Signing of a new agreement to cement peace in the presence of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.
- 17 September 2018: A meeting took place in Jeddah between Ismael Omar Guelleh (Djibouti) and Isaias Afeworki (Eritrea), who have been in bad terms for 10 years because of a border dispute. The two heads of state did not neglect to thank their Saudi sponsor for his mediation efforts.
- 6 January 2020: signature of the Charter of the Council of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to address the threats and challenges facing the region and to safeguard the security of the Red Sea and of the Gulf of Aden. This council comprises Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea.

(Translation by Maxime Chervoaux)

64. "[A gulf of difference : How the UAE and Egypt's close coordination fell apart and what's next](#)," Mada Masr, December 17, 2020.

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