WORLD PEACE FOUNDATION

Pax Africana or Middle East Security Alliance in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea?

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The Conflict Research Programme at the London School of Economics aims to understand why contemporary violence is so difficult to end and to analyze the underlying political economy of violence with a view to informing policy. The research sites are Iraq, Syria, South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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CONFLICT RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Summary

The Horn of Africa is located on a fault-line between two distinctly different strategies and philosophies for peace and security: the multilateral norms, principles and institutions that have been developed in Africa over the last 25 years, and the transactional politics of money and force of the Gulf monarchies. Today, the African peace and security architecture is jeopardized by the encroachment of the political marketplace of the Arabian Peninsular.

Middle Eastern powers including Turkey, Egypt, Oman and Saudi Arabia have long been engaged in the politics and security of the Red Sea and the Horn. However, the twenty years after 1990 marked an anomalous diminution of Arab engagement in the region, a period that coincided with unprecedented African activism on peace and security. In the last five years, old and new Middle Eastern actors have engaged with north-east Africa in full force. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are using African troops and African bases in their military operations in Yemen. The UAE has used its financial muscle to promote political alignments including the Eritrea-Ethiopia peace agreement. The Saudi-UAE coalition and the Turkey-Qatar alliance are rivals in bidding for the allegiances of political authorities in Somalia.

This paper examines current practices of Middle Eastern engagement in the Horn of Africa in historical context. It looks at the enduring paradox whereby the global powers of the day have ensured safety for shipping in the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden alongside tolerating recurrent turmoil in the littoral countries. The paper examines how the regional peace and security architecture and power balances have changed since the 1980s, with the emergence of the norms, principles and institutions of a 'Pax Africana' and the entrenchment of security-coalition politics in the Arabian Peninsular, turning to the question of how the encounter between these two regions, with their widely differing capacities and approaches, is playing out.

Introduction

On 24 July 2018, Eritrean President Isseyas Afewerki and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed jointly received the Zayed Award, the highest award of Abu Dhabi, from the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The award was in recognition of the peace agreement between the two countries, an initiative strongly encouraged by the UAE, with financial rewards to match. A second agreement was signed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in September. No details were made public.

Following reciprocal delegations to the two capitals in June, an agreement was signed bilaterally between Asmara and Addis Ababa at the beginning of July. However, it is notable that, for the first time in the history of the African Union and its predecessor the OAU, the Ethiopian leader did not attend the AU summit, held that month in Mauritania. The Eritrean leader has rarely attended, but it would have been expected that Ethiopia, as the host country of the AU headquarters, would been represented at the highest level. The AU is the custodian of the Algiers agreement of 2000 that ended the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and which was the basis for the 2018 agreement.

This appears to represent a shift in the centre of political gravity for the Horn of Africa. In this paper I ask, is the Horn of Africa an integral part of the African Union's peace and security architecture? Or is it becoming an extension of the Middle East's mercenarized security politics? Is Ethiopia abandoning its national security framework, based on economic development and autonomy of action, and shifting towards becoming a junior partner in an Arab coalition? I use as a frame of reference the 'Red Sea arena': the countries with coastline on the Red Sea, plus those neighbouring countries with great economic and political stakes in the Red Sea, such as Ethiopia and the UAE.

Two Geographic Axes

The Red Sea is one of the world's strategic arteries. Long neglected in scholarship and policymaking, it has suddenly emerged as a priority for security policy in the Middle East, Europe, China and the United States. Disruptions to maritime traffic through the Red Sea have historically had far-reaching implications for economics and security in three continents, but there is no multilateral framework for managing the security of the arena.

The Red Sea littoral countries are Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti. The Red Sea Arena includes nearby countries that may not have a coastline on the shores of the Red Sea, but which have an established legitimate interest in the Red Sea. This category includes Somalia, which has a coastline on the Gulf of Aden. It includes Ethiopia and South Sudan on the African shore, both landlocked countries that depend on Red Sea ports for most of their international trade and which are intimately connected to the politics and security of the Red Sea littoral states. On the Middle Eastern side, the Red Sea Arena includes Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Iran and Turkey, all of which have security and commercial interests in the sea.

The geography and history of the Red Sea can be interpreted on two axes: along and across the sea.

Notably since the opening of the Suez Canal, the Red Sea became 'an extreme example of a sea on the way to somewhere else' (William Facey, quoted in Wick 2016, p. 21). Maritime security has been a global security issue, of pressing interest to the world's principal powers—the British in the 19th and the first

half of the 20th century, the Americans since, and increasingly the Chinese. But whatever maritime security regime has been established for the Red Sea has been largely oblivious to the peace and security of those who live on its shores. The safety of shipping has co-existed with onshore turmoil.

The other axis is across the Red Sea, linking Africa and the Arabian peninsular. In the post-colonial era, the superpowers have tolerated onshore turmoil has included inter-state rivalry and engagement in internal wars, on both shores and across the sea. The Red Sea arena has been a theatre for rivalries and power games by second order powers. In the Cold War years, Arab countries were all engaged in the politics of north-east Africa. This pattern was interrupted in the 1990s, but has recently resumed with a vengeance.

Ali Mazrui (1986) provocatively asked, if the North African countries are seen as part of the continent, why not the Arabian peninsular too? Having identified the historical ties that bind the two shores, he wrote, 'The most pernicious sea in Africa's history may well be the Red Sea. This thin line of water has been deemed to be more relevant for defining where Africa ends than all the evidence of geology, geography, history and culture.' (p. 29) For the scholar, the chasm of the Red Sea is one that undoubtedly needs to be spanned. But for Africans, the Red Sea has also protected it from the mercenary politics of the Gulf monarchies. While the continent has developed multilateral mechanisms for peace, security and democracy, the Arabian peninsular has deepened a form of transactional and militarized politics that can be characterized as an authoritarian and violent political marketplace (de Waal 2015).

The Red Sea divides policymakers in international institutions and western governments. Typically, a foreign ministry will have a Middle East department and an Africa department; the two will have different priorities and staff in them will have different backgrounds and mindsets. This divide has been accentuated by the historically anomalous situation during the period approximately 1990-2010, during which time there was relatively little Middle Eastern engagement in the Horn, which coincided with a period when Africa established the norms, principles and institutions of a continental peace security architecture. This architecture is not matched by anything comparable in the Arabian Peninsular, and it is in

danger of being recklessly cast aside by Middle Eastern powers that do not subscribe to its values.

The cross-Red Sea axis has been historically one of turmoil: of destabilization and the sponsorship of proxy wars. Meanwhile the maritime axis, from Suez to the Bab al Mandab, as part of the longer sea route between Europe and Asia, has been marked by safety for shipping. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made it into one of the world's most important maritime shipping routes. It cut nearly half the distance from the sea route between Britain and India. Today, somewhere between 7 and 10% of global maritime trade passes through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

Constructed by the French, the Suez Canal was of greatest strategic importance to the British. The colonial occupation of Aden and Somaliland (the latter administered from Bombay) followed, and most significantly, the British occupation of Egypt, ostensibly in order to collect debts owed to British banks for the canal's construction. In turn this led to imperial

competition for control of the sources of the Nile and the 'scramble for Africa.' The countries bordering the Red Sea and in the Nile Valley were no more than pieces of real estate to be seized or traded as part of this tropical variant of the imperial great game.

The British takeover of Egypt and the canal was a

reason why the monumental stature by Frederic Bartholdi, 'Egypt bringing light to Asia' was never built in Suez. Her sister was donated instead to the United States where she is known as the Statue of Liberty.

The laws of the freedom of the seas, in the form of Pax Britannica enforced by the Royal Navy, meant that the Red Sea was maintained in its paradoxical position of being the neglected axle of maritime imperialism, central to both intercontinental trade and the projection of naval power.

The Suez Canal famously played a central role in Britain's post-imperial hangover. Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 spurred the kind of imperial adventure that would have been commonplace fifty or a hundred years prior, but in the era of decolonization it was instead a humiliation for Britain and its global standing. The aborted British-French-Israeli invasion closed the canal briefly, and led to the wind-down of British influence in the Red Sea and the Gulf.

Though it was a long unwinding. For example, Britain retained responsibility for maintaining lighthouses on the islands of the southern Red Sea until 1989, when they were handed over to Yemen. (Lefebvre 1998, p. 370) The European-led counter-piracy naval patrols, operation Atalanta, in the Gulf of Aden are coordinated by British officers from a base in the UK, though when Brexit comes into force these functions will be handed over to a Spanish admiral and a French command and communications center. As the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) also draws down, in part due to the fact that its EU funding is being reduced because of Brexit, it will also be hard for the UK to maintain its purported leadership of the international strategy for Somalia's recovery. This is perhaps the coda to Britain's significance in this part of the world.

The Suez crisis also illuminated the shared interests of the superpowers in freedom of navigation through

Bartholdi's 'Egypt bringing light to Asia'

the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. America was (and is) wedded to the security of maritime commerce, while for the Soviet Union, the canal was the principal naval route from the Black Sea-Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean.

However, the absence of a security Leviathan created scope for the Red Sea to become an arena in which the secondary powers, especially those of the Middle East, could contest. The Egyptian-Saudi rivalry in the 1960s, manifest in the Yemen war was one. Egyptian troops fought alongside Yemeni republican forces, with the clear intent of exporting revolution to the Gulf monarchies. That military-political agenda was ended by the 1967 war, which forced Egypt to bring its army home to fight against Israel.

The Arab-Israel wars of 1967 and 1973 closed the Suez Canal for eight years. This caused a major disruption to world maritime trade and contributed to economic crisis in countries dependent on the Red Sea for trade, such as Ethiopia and Yemen. It also illuminated that Israel shared with its Arab neighbors a key interest in maritime security in the Red Sea. Egyptian blockade of the Straits of Tiran, opposite Sharm al Sheikh in the Gulf of Aqaba, halted shipping to the port of Eilat in both 1956 and 1967. The Bab al Mandab is, for Israel, the forward gateway to the Straits of Tiran and Eilat: matters of strategic priority for its defensible borders.

The expulsion of the Soviets from Egypt and the Arab-Israeli wars heightened tensions in the Red Sea. More was to follow, notably the dramatic reversals of Cold War allegiances by Ethiopia and Somalia, and the war between the two in 1977 that famously left détente 'buried in the sands of the Ogaden' (Woodroofe 2013). But the turmoil along the shores of the Red Sea had almost no perceptible impact on the security of the shipping lanes, even at the narrowest point of the Bab al Mandab, where the parallel lines of merchant ships are well within range of shore-based rockets.

Onshore Turmoil and Maritime Security

In 1985, Boutros Boutros Ghali, then Egypt's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, wrote: 'It is my earnest hope that one day soon a conference of all the littoral States of the Red Sea will be convened, giving new impetus to co-operation and solidarity among these states' (Boutros-Ghali 1985, p. xi). He continued, 'Solidarity is the only valid means available for transforming the Red Sea into a zone of peace, co-operation and friendship, a factor of peaceful co-existence among the peoples of the area rather than a zone of instability, tension and confrontation.'

However, as Jeffrey Lefebvre wrote twenty years ago:

> In striking contrast to its security policy toward the Persian Gulf over the past five decades, the United States has never proposed a formal security regime for the Red Sea region. Enhancing US military capabilities in the Red Sea was deemed politically unwise as well as militarily unnecessary. Since the mid-1970s, Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia have patrolled the northern Red Sea, while, in the southern zone, French naval capabilities that surpass those of local powers have ensured the security of the passageway to the Indian Ocean. In spite of the wars that have been waged along the southern Red Sea littoral, through the mid-1990s, maritime traffic in the region has been disrupted only briefly by a few isolated incidents (Lefebvre 1998, p. 368).

This calm was disturbed by the short war between Eritrea and Yemen over the Hanish Islands in 1995-96, but neither country was able or ready to escalate this militarily minor confrontation into a war that would threaten shipping, while France stepped up as the guarantor of the security of the Bab al Mandab and its approaches, from its military base in Djibouti (Lefebvre 1998, pp. 382-3).

Writing in the mid-1980s, Roberto Aliboni identified three main trends in the politics of the region (Aliboni 1985). 'Firstly, Saudi Arabia's regional policies aimed at enhancing internal and external security have proven destabilizing and in a way even adventurous.' (p. 116)

Examples he provides, from the 1970s, are its foster-ing divisions in Yemen, its role in promoting Somali irredentism as a way of reducing Soviet influence (even to the extent of inadvertently encouraging Siyad Barre to start the Ogaden war), and its routine disregard for the norms of the OAU in supporting separatist movements in the Horn.

Aliboni's second trend is the Arab countries' piecemeal financial support for anti-Communist groups and for poorer governments ready to make friendly tactical moves. He argues that these tactical actions end up stoking local conflicts. He sees Saudi Arabia and Libya as guilty of this in different ways (p. 117).

Third, Aliboni identifies the dominant factor in the politics of the Red Sea as relations among Arab states, and especially the rivalry along the 'central axis' of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. He argues that Egyptian and Saudi policies towards the HoA were secondary outcomes of their primary axis of rivalry in the Levant and Peninsular.

All this is astonishingly resonant today.

Additionally, we can include a number of other ways in which the Middle Eastern powers were engaged in the Horn. During the Iran-Iraq war, both sides cultivated support in Sudan, where the Islamist movement under Hassan al Turabi had regional aspirations. Israel played a largely quiet game, occasionally bursting into the spotlight, for example with its dramatic operations to extract the Beta Israel, also known as Falashas, from Ethiopia.

Note how little focus is given to promoting Islam. Saudi state policy was, briefly, to favor the Muslim Brothers, and subsequently and more significantly its own Wahhabists, and it has provided a very conducive environment for private citizens and philanthropic organizations to promote Wahhabism across Africa. Labor migrants from African countries have also returned with many of the social mores and practices they acquired working in the Gulf. Wahhabi hostility towards Sufism has been very influential in Ethiopia and Somalia, but less so in Sudan, where it faced a sophisticated Islamist movement. However, Saudi state policy has been principally based on state interest and realpolitik.

Aliboni concludes his short book by drawing out the implications for western countries. He concurs with Boutros Ghali on the need for an explicit
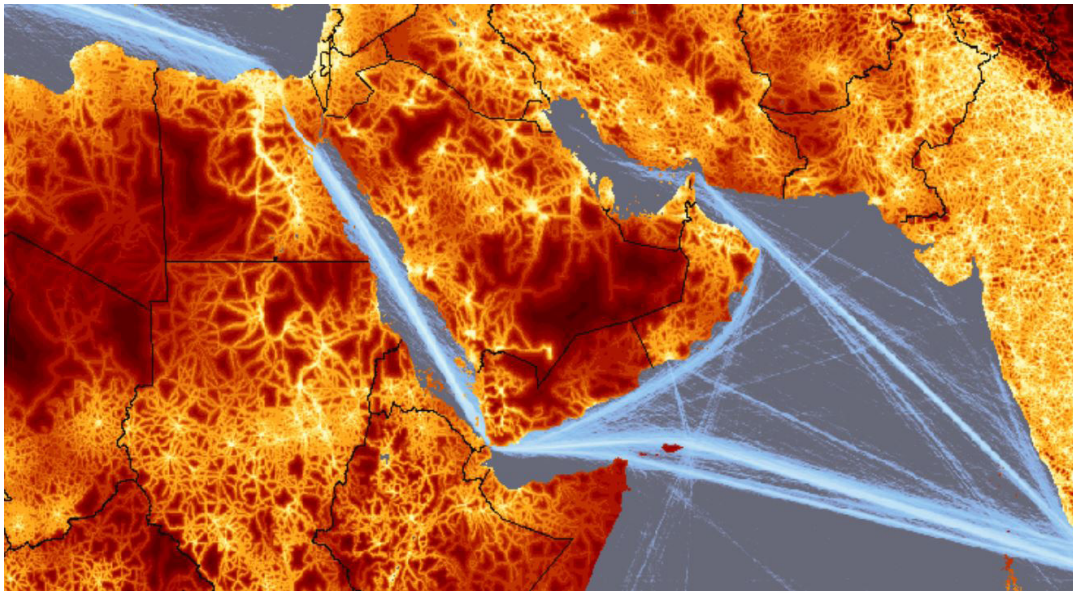
articulation of a security regime.

In this uneasy regional context the western countries are practically absent. ... While Western absence appears remarkable, in view of the crucial importance the Red Sea region is supposed to have in the wider frame of the area South-east of NATO, this absence can hardly be explained today and could hardly be excused tomorrow.... On the other hand, a direct Western presence in the region may be neither necessary nor politically wise. The West has powerful and prestigious allies, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, in the Red Sea. If these allies were to discard the destabilizing policies they have carried out in the past and promote instead policies of co-operation both on the inter-Arab and Afro-Arab levels, the Western countries' preoccupations with the area will lessen remarkably. In the end this would be the most correct path to the stabilization and security of the region, and in this sense the most important conclusion of this book may be that it is up to the regional countries to manage stability around the basin by promoting co-operation among all the regional actors (pp. 118-9).

Terrorism and Piracy

It is striking that the two security issues that were top of the agenda for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden for the first decade of the 2000s, did not disturb this formula. One of those was terrorism. The Al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the USS Cole while it was refuel-ing in Aden in October 2000 raised concerns about maritime terrorism. Subsequently, U.S. concern with AQAP in Yemen and Al-Shabaab in Somalia caused a counter-terror focus on the wider region. This led to the U.S. increasing its military footprint.

In 2003, the U.S. established Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, as the headquarters of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HoA), the U.S. military's only permanent presence on the African continent. It was initially under CENTCOM and was transferred to AFRICOM in 2008. From Djibouti, the U.S. flies aircraft and drones on missions in Yemen and Somalia. The U.S. has six other drone bases in the Horn (Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya). It conducts special forces operations in Yemen and Somalia.

On both shores of the Red Sea, the U.S. had tactical partners (the Saleh government, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya), but their security partnerships were not guided by any political strategy for the region as a whole.

Much the same was true for piracy in the Gulf of Aden and western Indian Ocean. Attacks on commercial shipping by pirates based in Somalia led to wide ranging cooperation among the world's navies to patrol the area. The biggest component was the EU Naval Force, known as Operation Atalanta (not confined to EU member states), set up in 2008. It is likely that an equally important factor in reducing piracy was the alternative employment provided by private security contractors conducting anti-piracy operations and also providing military services to

Somali political leaders.

The key point is that there has been excellent operational coordination among security actors on operations necessary to keep the sea lanes open, but that cooperation has not extended to any efforts to create a wider political order.

Israel

The U.S.'s closest security partner in the Red Sea arena is Israel, and the two states' security interests have converged over the decades. Israeli policy and operations are conducted (for the most part) with extreme discretion. The basic element in Israeli policy is defense of its borders and access to the sea. The port of Eilat is on the Gulf of Aqaba, from where Israel conducts maritime trade through the Straits of Tiran and the Red Sea. Not only is Eilat a vulnerable location because of its geography—a tiny strip of coastline adjacent to Egypt and Jordan and close to Saudi Arabia, but the Straits of Tiran are also a potential chokepoint. Israel's defensible borders require an extended security perimeter reaching to the Bab al Mandab. Israel's most pressing concerns for Eilat and reliable access to the Red Sea were secured in the 1970s with rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and the Camp David accords with Israel. Its security in the southern Red Sea has required working with the U.S., France, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and more discreetly with Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

Israel and Ethiopia have had a longstanding shared interest in containing Arab-Islamic influence in the southern Red Sea. Their relations took an unexpected turn in the 1980s on the question of the Ethiopian Jewish community, known in Ethiopia as Beta Israel or Falasha. The extraction of Ethiopian Jews clandestinely through Sudan in Operation Moses in 1984-85 created controversy in Khartoum when it was revealed that Israel and the CIA had paid off senior Sudanese intelligence officers (Karadawi 1991). The later operation to airlift most of the remaining Ethiopian Jews from Addis Ababa in the last days of the Mengistu regime was briefly a prominent element in U.S. policy towards Ethiopia.

In the last decade, one of Israel's security priorities has been containing Hamas, including stemming arms flows to Gaza. One of the routes for these shipments was from Iran to Sudan, from where they were smuggled up the Red Sea coast through Egypt. On several occasions, the Israeli airforce attacked and destroyed convoys of weapons in Sudan's Red Sea state.

Pax Africana & Pax Ethiopica

In the 1990s, Middle Eastern political influence in the Horn dramatically ebbed, and African leaders began to construct their own continental peace and security order, an exercise that culminated in the African Union's peace and security architecture.

Arab Disengagement from the Horn

Let me first examine the withdrawal of Middle Eastern political engagement. This came about through several conjunctures.

First, in 1990 Sudan came out in support of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iraq. This happened when Hassan al Turabi overruled President Omar al Bashir, publicly humiliating him and violating a longstanding precept of Sudanese foreign policy, which is that the country should be on good terms with Egypt and Saudi Arabia—preferably both, but always at least one. Turabi expected Islamist revolutions to sweep the Middle East. When that didn't happen, Sudan became isolated. Turabi set up the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference to challenge the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which brought together Iran and a host of extremist organizations, including most famously Al-Qaeda.

This meant that the established modes of Middle Eastern engagement in Sudan were cut off. Egypt and Saudi Arabia applied diplomatic, financial and occasionally military pressure, but their modes of doing business with Sudan, through the governing institutions and prominent individuals, didn't work.

The polarization culminated in the attempted assassination of Husni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995. This led to efforts by Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the U.S. to expel Al-Qaeda from the Horn. The intelligence services coordinated tactically, under the umbrella of pressing Sudan to cease being a state sponsor of terror alongside giving a green light to Ethiopian military incursions into Somalia. This was successful: Al-Qaeda, which was born in Afghanistan but came of age in north-east Africa, was a spent force in that

region by 2001.

It is notable that this, the most successful counter-terror project of the last 25 years was undertaken without a U.S. or Middle Eastern blueprint. It is also intriguing that the presence of Usama bin Laden in Sudan, and other jihadists throughout east Africa, did not result in the region being enveloped by Middle Eastern politics.

Second, the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 and the failure of the U.S.-U.N. intervention in 1993 meant that the Arab countries didn't know how to deal with Somalia. They had been accustomed to dealing with recognized leaders, and could not adapt their modus operandi for a stateless political system.

Third, the resolution of the Eritrean conflict and the new, albeit brief, Asmara-Addis Ababa axis shut out most Middle Eastern influence in those two countries. The brief Eritrea-Yemen war over the Hanish Islands in 1995-96 meant that Eritrea was at odds with its nearest Arab neighbour. Relations didn't normalize after an agreement was reached, and for the next twenty years Eritrea hosted some Yemeni dissidents, including the Houthis, and maintained links with Iran.

African Peace and Security Architecture

Turning to the African peace and security order, this had continent-wide elements and Horn-specific elements.

Continent wide, what happened was that just as the Organisation for African Unity achieved its ultimate triumph—the liberation of South Africa from racist rule—its shortcomings as a mechanism for continental peace and security became terribly apparent. This occurred with the genocide in Rwanda, followed by the coup in Sierra Leone and the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The old OAU principles of respecting national sovereignty to the extent of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, and recognizing de facto rulers regardless of how they had come to power, were jettisoned in favor of new principles of 'non-indifference' and opposition to unconstitutional changes in government. The OAU changed to the AU, incorporating these and other norms and principles in its foundational document.

The AU then began to construct an African peace and security architecture, with the AU Peace and Security Council, preventative diplomacy, mediation initiatives, and peace support operations, as well as support to democratization efforts.

These have had mixed success but there has been an overall trend towards reducing civil wars and coups d'état, and of active African peacemaking efforts.

This was possible because of an alignment of several factors. Principal among them was the mixed blessing of international neglect. In the 1990s, Africa dropped off the strategic map, which both contributed to crises, and thrust responsibility onto African leaders to address those crises. Progress was possible in part because a number of African leaders—notably from South Africa, Nigeria and Ethiopia—were ready to invest substantially in building new continental mechanisms, and supporting the principles behind them.

Ethiopia's Foreign Policy and National Security Doctrine

Specific to the Horn, Ethiopia was the leading actor. By the early 2000s, Ethiopia was emerging as the hegemon in the Horn. It won the 1998-2000 war with Eritrea; it was defining the parameters of the political settlements in Sudan (with the Declaration of Principles for the resolution of the Sudanese conflict) and Somalia (the federal system); it was becoming the largest contributor of troops to UN and AU peacekeeping operations; and it was developing fast with ambitious projects integrating its transport and power infrastructure with its neighbors. Ethiopia is the world's most populous land-locked country and for the last fifteen years its economy has grown at between 8 and 10 percent per year. Ethiopia needs access to the sea, and it has built a new railway to Djibouti and roads linking it to ports in Sudan, Somaliland and Kenya.

The national project of accelerated economic development, under the direction of the central state, is also a security project. This can be seen most clearly in the 2002 Foreign Affairs and National Security white paper. It is more an analysis of Ethiopia's predicament and a statement of doctrine, than a policy paper as such. It was written by Meles Zenawi in the immediate aftermath of the war with Eritrea, partly as a rebuff to internal critics who argued that Ethio-

pia should have pursued its war with Eritrea to the point of total victory, regardless of cost.

Instead, Meles made a number of points. He reiterated the long-standing Ethiopian commitment to multiple balancing alliances and multilateral institutions—a practice honed by Emperor Haile Selassie. More importantly, he stated that Ethiopia's national objective was poverty reduction, and that national survival depended upon it. The country's biggest threat wasn't Eritrea. Nor was it the traditional Ethiopian fear of being surrounded by hostile powers. Its biggest threat was poverty, which was the foundation of all its other weaknesses.

Meles's policy had several key implications.

First was political investment in the African Union. This was a principled position but also a strategic one, consistent with Haile Selassie's historic roles at the League of Nations and in founding the OAU. Ethiopia was instrumental in a number of initiatives, beginning with the International Panel of Eminent Personalities that studied the genocide in Rwanda, and proposed that the OAU should adopt the duty of non-indifference in the case of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Ethiopia was instrumental in drawing up mechanisms for African peace support operations, and providing troops for several of them. But Ethiopia was also keen to share both the burdens and the credit.

Thus Ethiopia was active in a discreet manner to promote the Nile Basin Initiative, in part as a means of building an African coalition that could isolate Egypt on the continent.

Ethiopia supported the norms, principles and institutions of the African peace and security architecture.

On Somalia, Ethiopia acted unilaterally, invading Somalia in 2006 with the intention of eliminating a security threat, consisting of Eritrean military advisors embedded within the security structures of the Islamic Courts. This was probably the biggest foreign policy blunder of Meles's tenure. Recognizing that Ethiopian domination would be resented, Meles sought to establish an African cover for its military intervention, bringing in East African countries to supply troops for a peace enforcement mission. The Ugandan and Burundian troops were never sufficient, however, and Ethiopia and Kenya both intervened again with their own national armies.

The second element of the Ethiopian foreign policy was autonomy, or proactive non-alignment. While Ethiopia's model of a developmental state drew heavily from China, Meles saw the rise of China primarily as a means of opening up the opportunities for an independent foreign policy, liberated from what he considered the straitjacket of the Washington consensus. Ethiopia obtained enormous investment and support from China, but also maintained strong links with Europe (notably technical cooperation) and the USA (notably on counter-terrorism).

By these stratagems, Meles aimed to avoid over-dependence on any one external patron, and especially to avoid becoming dependent on any particular actors in the Middle East. He was fearful that Egypt would in due course have an active foreign policy and resume its historic pattern of isolating Ethiopia, and that Saudi Arabia—particularly if it were to fall under the sway of an assertive Islamism—would simply overwhelm the Horn of Africa with its financial resources. His greatest fear was an alliance between Egypt and the Gulf monarchies, with Egypt guiding the policy and the oil states providing the money.

The MESA Modus Operandi

In some respects, Meles's fear has come to pass. The putative Middle East Security Alliance consists of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, along with like-minded second-rank powers such as Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait. It is discreetly backed by Israel and openly promoted by the U.S., provided that the issue of Qatar can be resolved. The Alliance has been described as an 'Arab NATO' but it is not, in fact, a treaty organization intended for the defence of democracy, but an old-style military pact against a common adversary—Iran. The MESA is controversial within the region, and among American security and foreign policy analysts who fear that it will become a trap that drags the U.S. into a coalition for war (Miller and Sokolsky 2018).

The potential power of this new alignment must be seen against two crucial background shifts: one regional and economic, the other in global security.

Economic Transformations

Over the last fifty years, the economic balance in the Red Sea arena has been transformed. In the 1960s, as for the previous century, the northern tier of the Red Sea was substantially richer than the southern tier. It remains so today. Between them, Egypt, Israel and Jordan are about 20 times richer in GDP than Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and Yemen, with only a slightly larger population.

Far more dramatic has been the transformation of the Gulf monarchies. In the 1960s they were at a comparable level of economic development to the countries of the Horn. Oil of course changed that. Today, the GCC countries are five times richer than the IGAD ones, with just a sixth of the population. I.e., GDP per capita in the GCC is 30 times that in IGAD.

This isn't just a transformation of economic power relations, but social and cultural ones too. Millions of labour migrants have gone from Egypt and the Horn to the Gulf countries, and have adopted the religious, social and cultural mores of their hosts. They have also influenced their hosts—Sudanese professionals have been particularly significant in the development of public institutions in Qatar and the UAE, and in the growth of the Islamic humanitarian sector.

Within the Arab world, the economic center of power shifted from Egypt and the Levant to the petro-states. In the millennium this was followed by a shift in the center of political power, away from the secular, authoritarian countries such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria, towards the Gulf monarchies. The events of 2011 highlighted this.
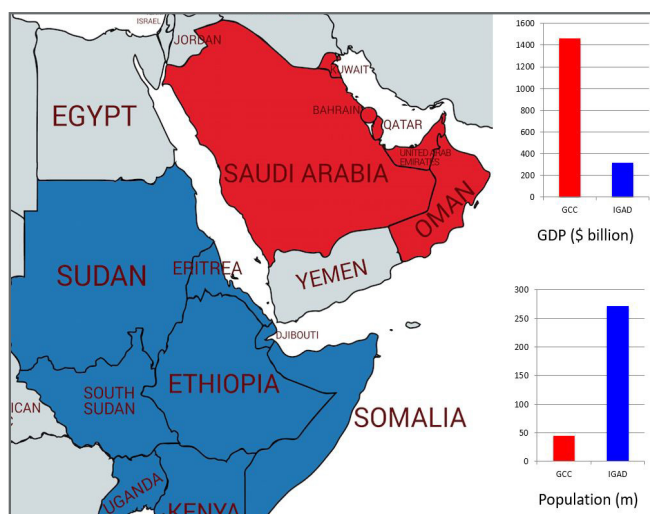
The ascendancy of the Gulf monarchies represents not only a geographical shift but also the hegemony of a different set of interests and a radically different style of conducting politics. The secular authoritarians promoted their interests through institutionalized alliances. The Gulf monarchs do it by dispensing cash in return for loyalty. Both used their militaries and intervene in civil wars afflicting their neighbors, but while the secular authoritarians mostly used their own troops, the oil sheikhs hire mercenaries and proxies for the ground war. Theirs is the politics of a transactional political marketplace.

Global Security Shifts

The second background factor is that, as in the years immediately following the 1956 Suez crisis, the security hegemon is departing. The 1990 Gulf War ushered in a Pax Americana to supplement the late Cold War consensus on freedom of navigation. During the Obama Administration, the American security umbrella was folded and stashed away. Meanwhile, China's astonishing economic growth meant that it had a new strategic interest in what it called 'the far seas'. Prominent among these was the Red Sea. The 'One Belt One Road' initiative includes a maritime corridor from China, through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, to Europe. China's first overseas military base has been constructed in Djibouti.

The stakes have been raised, and the ports of the western Indian Ocean have become strategic assets, both commercial and military. The UAE's Dubai Ports World is seeking to have a controlling influence in ports along the coasts of Yemen and East Africa. The UAE has de facto annexed the island of Socotra, Yemeni territory at the eastern gateway to the Gulf of Aden.

The immediate strategic priority of the MESA members is countering Iran. The main theatres for competition are the Persian/Arabian Gulf, Iraq and the Levant. Anticipating that Iran's first step in a military confrontation would be to close the Straits of Hormuz, through which most of the region's oil exports sail, Saudi Arabia has invested in infrastructure that opens up new export routes. It has built a pipeline to the Red Sea with port infrastructure at Yanbu and has advanced planning for another pipeline to Mukallah in Yemen.

The Horn of Africa is a third tier priority for the Gulf

GDP ($ billion)

Population (m)
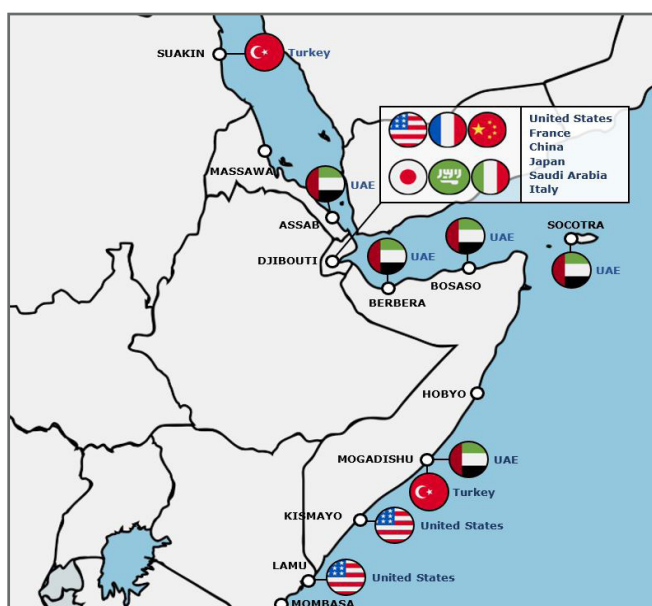
Flag Icons from www.flaticon.com

monarchs. Their overstretched foreign policy staffs and security advisors have little time and less expertise on the area. The fact that delegations from African countries and from the AU tend to arrive primarily to ask for financial aid does not help. Saudi Arabia and the UAE tend to see Africans as supplicants, not as political partners. The proposition that the African Union has painstakingly developed a peace and security architecture that is suitable for Africa—and in advance of anything that exists in the Arabian peninsular—is unlikely to cross their minds.

In the early 2000s, Saudi and Emirati policy towards the Horn was chiefly focused on diminishing Iranian influence, especially in Sudan. Subsequently it has become much more complex. There are four additional elements and complications.

Gulf Economic Interests in the Horn

First is economic interest. The Arab countries have considerable and increasing commercial investments in Africa. With climate change, they see their food security partly vested in agricultural land in Africa. Dubai Ports World has been buying controlling interests in numerous ports, profiting from the fast-growing economies of East Africa, while also consolidating its extended maritime security strategy.

Egypt and the Nile Waters

Second is the question of the Nile Waters. This is of course a longstanding Egyptian issue, defined as not just national security but national survival. Egypt has

long seen the Nile Waters issue as a zero sum game and hence sought to limit Ethiopia's capacity to develop its economy and utilize the Nile. Having identified accelerated economic growth as the core of its national security strategy, Ethiopia now has a matching rationale. An alliance between Egypt and the UAE would therefore seem to pose an obvious threat to Ethiopia.

However, the Gulf countries don't necessarily share the same interests as Egypt. In building the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Ethiopia took advantage of Egypt's neglect of Africa and its political turmoil. It sought to bring Sudan round to its side, and one means of doing this was designing the dam in such a way that Sudan could make use of the additional year-round water to expand irrigated agriculture. This is a more tangible threat to the level of Nile waters flowing to Egypt than Ethiopia's regulation of the water level behind the dam, because Ethiopia needs the waters to flow for the purposes of generating electricity. The Sudanese sold the land leases to, among others, Gulf investors. Along with the substantial commercial investment in Ethiopia, this means that Ethiopia has a stronger hand to play.

Nonetheless, the African Union overplayed its hand when it suspended Egypt after the 2013 military takeover that brought Abdel Fatah al-Sisi to power. It was a principled action in conformity with the non-recognition of unconstitutional takeovers of power. It was reversed when al-Sisi was elected president. But it also stung Egypt into engaging—in partnership with Morocco—in a determined pursuit of its interests within the AU.

The War in Yemen

Third is the war in Yemen. This is generating its own logic as the hostilities drag on. Having miscalculated in their assumption of a rapid victory, the Saudis and Emiratis are now in the all-too-common situation of a foreign power aligned with an incapable local proxy fighting an unwinnable war, without a strategy for face-saving exit. The Saudis and Emiratis need frontline fighters, and are unable to commit their own forces. Consequently they have paid for and deployed 7,000 Sudanese troops, through a shadowy scheme whereby a senior official in the Sudanese presidency was paid off and provided with the protection of Saudi citizenship (Perry 2018). At one point, Eritrean combat troops were also en-

gaged. The UAE's principal air base for its operations in Yemen is Assab in Eritrea. Short-term tactical military calculus means that the Gulf powers are locked more closely into their military partners, Sudan and Eritrea.

The GCC Dispute

Fourth is the dispute within the GCC, between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on one side, and Qatar on the other, along with the associated rivalry with Turkey.

The dispute originated in the contentious relations between the ruling families of Qatar and the UAE, going back several generations, and in Qatar's support for the Muslim Brothers across the Arab world, and its accommodation with Iran. The dispute contributed to a bidding war in the Horn, with Qatar and Turkey (on one side) and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt (on the other) seeking to secure the alignment of Sudan, Djibouti, Somaliland and numerous actors in Somalia.

Within the Horn, this rivalry was overlaid with longer histories of involvement by the various actors. Qatar was the first of the Gulf Arab states to become involved in the current round of Middle Eastern engagement in the Horn. It did so through its sponsorship of the Muslim Brothers. This was a two-way process, insofar as Sudanese scholars, professionals and activists were instrumental in building the infrastructure of the Muslim Brothers in the Gulf states. For example they were among the professional classes, including lecturers and journalists, who built the Islamist presence in universities and the media. They also started the first international Islamic humanitarian NGOs in the Arabian peninsular. And some of them had positions in the foreign service and even the intelligence services of Gulf states.

A decade ago, Qatar sought to position itself as the mediator of choice for conflicts across the region. It hosted a long series of peace talks for Darfur and was the mediator in the boundary dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti.

Turkey was the first mover into Somalia, opening the first foreign embassy in Mogadishu, providing humanitarian relief in the 2011 famine, and undertaking a number of morale-boosting steps such as starting a municipal waste collection service in Mogadishu. Turkey built and finances the new Somali military academy.

The Saudis and Emiratis moved later, but with more money, and a style of political engagement focused on direct patronage, along with some strategic commercial investments (ports and private security companies). For them, the Horn is primarily part of their security hinterland. It is not only a rivalry for allegiance, but a different style of politics. The Emiratis in particular have become known for taking a hard for-us-or-against-us line. Neither country has a strong reputation for following up on its financial pledges, which means that their influence may be less than it appears from news coverage. Their clients in the Horn—especially in Somalia—will tend to play along in order to get the first cash payment, but keep open their cooperation with the Qataris and Turks, whose investments are more institutional and reliable.

There have, however, been some notable shifts. Eritrea abandoned the Houthis and Iran in 2015 and moved decisively into the Saudi-Emirati camp. Sudan embraced the Saudi war in Yemen as a route to international respectability, including military cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Saudi and Emirati advocacy in Washington for the lifting of U.S. financial sanctions.

The biggest shift is in the style of politics. It is a shift of degree, but a possibly decisive one.

Several of the countries of the Horn—Somalia, Sudan—are already functioning as political markets in which power is a tradable commodity, and loyalties are bought and sold, often in auctions to the highest bidder. The involvement of the Gulf states reinforced any tendency towards the marketization of politics. Those states that haven't functioned as political markets—notably Ethiopia—appear to be moving sharply in that direction. There are internal and external reasons for this. Among them is the readiness of the new leadership to turn to Gulf sponsors for financial bailouts.

Politicians in the Horn play the Middle Eastern rivalries to the best of their abilities. Some are astute—Sudan's Omar al Bashir is particularly accomplished. Isseyas Afewerki has played a weak hand well. Djibouti's Ismail Omer Guelleh has positioned itself as a friend to all, but has made some apparent tactical miscalculations with the UAE. Some are novices, such

as Abiy Ahmed, and have probably sold themselves short. Somali politicians have relished the rivalries between the Middle Eastern countries and the ways in which this increases their room for maneuver, and increases the market price of their political alignment.

Towards a Red Sea Forum?

An enduring theme of this paper has been the absence of any multilateral framework for managing peace and security in the Red Sea arena. The obvious step towards this would be the convening of a forum of Red Sea states. This idea has been raised several times but never pursued.

In 1977, leaders of conservative Arab countries met in Sana'a to form a Red Sea council as an anti-Communist coalition. In the 1980s, Egypt proposed such a forum.

We can surmise three reasons why no forum has been established. The first is that the most pressing immediate concern, maritime security, has been successfully managed by ad hoc operational coalitions.

A second reason is that there are deep divisions over who should be represented in such a forum. The most divisive issue would be whether Israel could be a member, but the involvement of other countries with a strong political, commercial or security stake in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden—such as Ethiopia, Oman and the UAE—would also be controversial.

A third reason is that in international organizations (such as the United Nations and the World Bank) and foreign ministries (such as the U.S. Department of State and the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office), there is an enduring problem of bureaucratic and academic organization which is that the Red Sea is divided between Africa and the Middle East/Asia. The AU and the GCC have not, until now, had external affairs departments and strategies. The League of Arab States, whose members include all the Red Sea littoral states excepting Eritrea and Israel, is inactive. A similar divide exists in academia: a Red Sea studies program would fall afoul of the Africa-Middle East area studies divide.

The idea of a Red Sea forum is resurgent today. In Washington DC, the combination of this institutional divide and the emerging strategic importance of the Red Sea has provided the rationale for an important effort by the U.S. Institute of Peace to focus on the region, including advocating for a U.S. Special Envoy for the Red Sea (Knopf 2018). Most active to date has been Alex Rondos, European Union special envoy for the Horn of Africa (Rondos 2016), and the region is a prime candidate for applying the EU's holistic approach to traditional security and human security (de Waal and Ibreck 2018).

There has been discussion at the African Union about developing an 'external action policy' for peace and security in the 'shared space' of the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden, including establishing political and security partnership with the GCC (World Peace Foundation 2016). Meeting in Khartoum in October 2017, under the auspices of the African Union, representatives of north-east African states and international partners (principally the European Union) developed an agenda for expanding its peace and security agenda for the Horn of Africa to the Red Sea arena.

The AU has struggled with moving this agenda. The Red Sea issue has not been championed by a member state. Egypt and Sudan pursue their relations with Arab states bilaterally; Ethiopia has been deeply suspicious of any engagement; Eritrea has not wanted to bring the AU into its own dealings across the Red Sea; and Somalia has not had a coherent government. Djibouti, the African Red Sea state with the deepest interests, introduced the subject at the AU Peace and Security Council in November 2018.

The AU will need to move quickly if it is to keep up with events. In December 2018, a few days after the annual gathering of the GCC member states in Riyadh, the King of Saudi Arabia hosted a summit of seven ministers of foreign affairs representing countries lining the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Those who attended were: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen and Jordan. Notably absent was Eritrea, with no explanation given or apparent. Also interesting were the failure to invite Ethiopia and the UAE, and the absence of the GCC itself as well as the League of Arab States and the AU (Al-Awati 2018; Al-Wasmi 2018). The ad hoc nature of the Saudi summit—in terms of participants, agenda and outcome—indicates the likely direction of future security policies, with or without the formal establishment of MESA.

Concluding Thoughts

The politics of the Red Sea arena today follows an age-old pattern, in which the security and commercial interests of world powers and regional powers dominate the interests of the people of the Horn.

There is a resurgent rivalry over who has control of the security of the maritime trade. This is eminently manageable, given that the interests of all of the players are aligned in favor of freedom of navigation, so that any differences are unlikely to erupt into a conflict that closes the sea routes. All actors are likely to cooperate in suppressing maritime piracy or terrorist threats to shipping, given that about US$750 billion worth of shipping passes this way.

This quiescence continues in parallel to, and unaffected by, onshore turmoil on both sides of the Red Sea.

Elements of the trans-regional politics of the Red Sea arena are unchanged: Middle Eastern countries using their greater power to influence the politics of African ones, driven by a mixture of economic and security interests, while superpower interests remain in the background. The U.S. is withdrawing, the European Union is deeply concerned but unable to exert any significant leverage, and China is becoming entangled but without evident strategy beyond maritime security.

In the last generation, Africa has developed a crucially important peace and security architecture, including norms, principles and institutions. The Arabian Peninsular lacks any such peace and security system, and suffers on account of it. The Gulf monarchies would do well to learn from the African experience, but it is unlikely that their leaders are minded to do so.

Some of the Middle Eastern players are familiar, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, with Israel keeping a low profile. Some are old players returning to the fray, such as Turkey. Some are new: Qatar and the UAE. But the overall trend is towards an extension of the dominant form of Gulf politics to the Horn, driven by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This is a politics based on narrowly-defined security interests and conducted through transactions in the political marketplace, with at best ad hoc multilateralism such as the MESA.

This is riding roughshod over the Pax Africana and the Pax Ethiopica. It is reducing the autonomy enjoyed by the African actors from having the strategic option (albeit limited) of building their own political orders (national and continental), to having only tactical options of maneuver within a political market.

Scholars and proponents of policies for peace and security need to span the pernicious divide of the Red Sea. In the long term, this can bring coherent narrative and analysis to a much neglected region, and promote understanding and cooperation. More immediately, this can help protect the African shore from the mercenarized political market of the Arab peninsular.
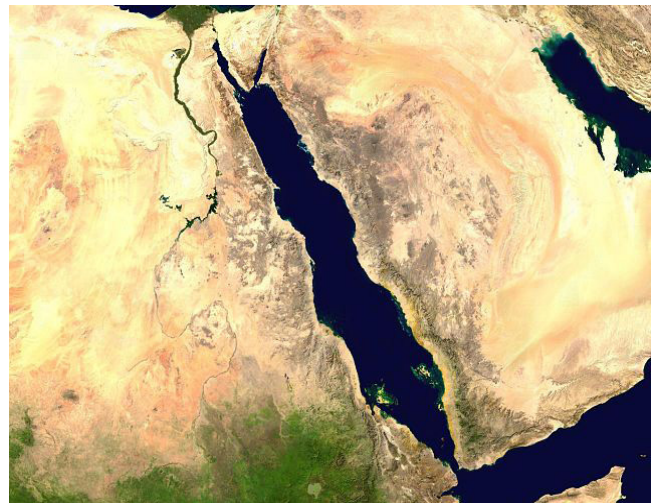
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