

# THE NEW EXTERNAL SECURITY POLITICS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA REGION

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## I. Introduction

The countries of the Horn of Africa are experiencing far-reaching changes in their external security relations.<sup>1</sup> The region is simultaneously experiencing an increase in the number of foreign security actors operating there, a build-up of external military forces—on land and at sea—and a broadening of the security agendas pursued by external actors to include local, regional and international issues.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of Middle Eastern and Gulf states as key security powers in the Horn has attracted particular attention in recent years. However, major Asian powers have also established significant security engagements in and around the region, including as part of Indo-Pacific security strategies. Furthermore, the established non-traditional security roles of the United States and Europe in the region are now shifting to encompass traditional military competition.

The rising number of countries with security engagements in the Horn is promoting a militarization of the region (see figure 1). The build-up of military forces consists of various dimensions. On land, the Horn is becoming the site for a significant number of military bases, facilities and logistics hubs. These support military activities in the Horn countries, and in continental Africa and adjacent areas (the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf and the western Indian Ocean). At sea, they also support the substantial naval forces that operate in the Horn's maritime domain (the Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden), and that transit to deploy to the Indo-Pacific region and other naval theatres.

<sup>1</sup> Geographically, the Horn of Africa is normally understood to comprise Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. As foreign military forces operate in ways that link deployments on land, in the air and at sea, for the purposes of this paper the Horn of Africa region is defined as a security space comprised of the four core countries plus Kenya, the Seychelles, South Sudan and Sudan, as well as key adjacent maritime areas—the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Foreign forces are also deployed beyond the Horn of Africa region but work closely with external military forces in the Horn, notably in Africa (Sahel), the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

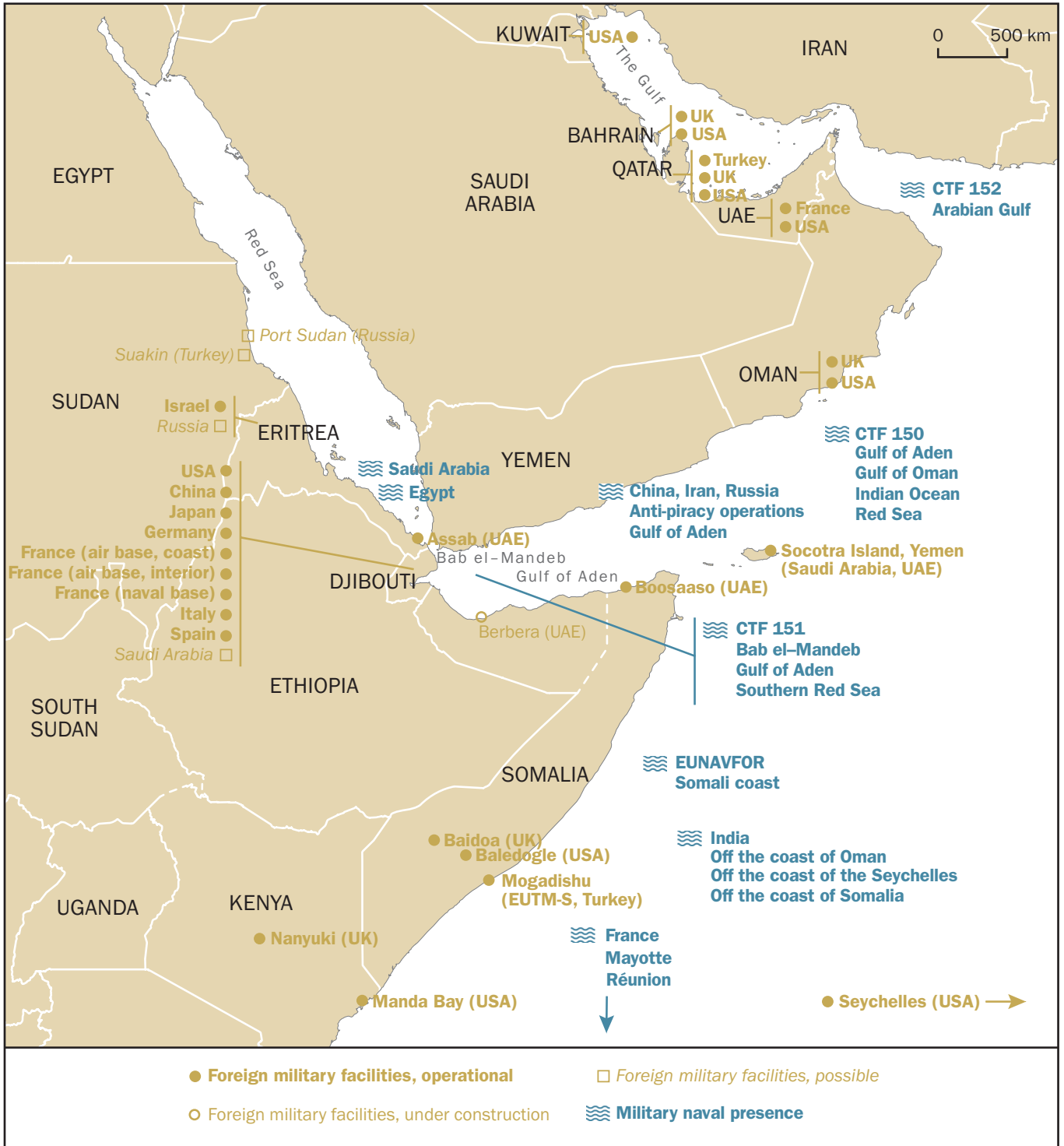
<sup>2</sup> See Melvin, N., 'The foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa region', SIPRI Background Paper, Apr. 2019.

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## SUMMARY

● The Horn of Africa is undergoing far-reaching changes in its external security environment. A wide variety of international security actors—from Europe, the United States, the Middle East, the Gulf, and Asia—are currently operating in the region. As a result, the Horn of Africa has experienced a proliferation of foreign military bases and a build-up of naval forces. The external militarization of the Horn poses major questions for the future security and stability of the region.

This SIPRI Insights paper is the second of three papers devoted to the new external security politics of the Horn of Africa. The paper highlights the increasing importance of geopolitical, commercial and military competition as the driver of foreign military deployments to the Horn region. The other two papers in this series are 'The foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa region' (SIPRI Background Paper, April 2019) and 'Managing the new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region' (SIPRI Policy Brief, April 2019).



**Figure 1.** Distribution of foreign military forces in the Horn of Africa region

CTF = Combined task force

Credit: Ahlenius, H., Nordpil, 2018.

Non-traditional security threats, such as counterterrorism, counter-piracy and local civil wars, initially provided the catalyst for external security actors to become involved in the Horn. Currently, however, a set of deep-seated and interrelated trade, commercial and security shifts external to the region are reshaping the engagement of foreign militaries. Security developments in



the Horn are being integrated into geopolitical and geoeconomic agendas that stretch far beyond the immediate region. In this context, the foreign military presence in the Horn increasingly operates as part of much wider military networks—across the Middle East and the Gulf, and the Indian and Pacific oceans.

This SIPRI Insights paper analyses the emergence of and drivers behind the new external security politics of the Horn of Africa. The new external security politics of the Horn region are defined by the military engagement of a diversity of external actors (from Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the USA), the increased significance of an East–West security axis (the simultaneous integration of the Horn into the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East and Gulf strategic spaces), and the interdependency of maritime (protection of choke points, sea lines of communication and naval competition) and continental (counterterrorism, support for peace operations and the competition to establish military bases) security agendas.

The paper, in particular, highlights four distinct external security engagements that have built up in the region during the post-cold war period, and which now coexist and overlap: (a) support for African regional and international multilateral actions; (b) efforts to combat non-traditional security threats; (c) the expansion of the Gulf and Middle Eastern security space into the Horn region; and (d) the integration of the Horn region into Indo-Pacific security dynamics. The paper begins with an outline of key security legacies from earlier external military engagements in the Horn. It then analyses the four contemporary external security engagements in the region and concludes by considering the impact of the new external security politics of the Horn on the regional security agenda.

## II. Cold war external security engagement in the Horn of Africa

While decolonization of Africa marked the formal end of Europe's dominant security role in the affairs of the Horn of Africa, the former colonial powers maintained important security relations in the region and even a military presence, notably the French forces in Djibouti and the British military in Kenya. However, from the 1950s it was increasingly the USA and then the Soviet Union that emerged as the preeminent external security actors in the Horn.

During the cold war, a fierce rivalry with a focus on the Horn developed between the USA and the Soviet Union, making the region a flashpoint for international confrontation in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>3</sup> The USA and the Soviet Union became involved in the Horn for a mixture of ideological and realpolitik reasons, but also because countries in the region sought out

<sup>3</sup> While proxy competition between the USA and the Soviet Union provided the focal point for external security engagement during the cold war, European powers also sought to use their military presence to support Western interests, while Gulf powers, notably Saudi Arabia, were engaged in the region to contain communism, although primarily through financial assistance and diplomacy rather than direct military means. Percox, D., *Britain, Kenya and the Cold War: Imperial Defence, Colonial Security and Decolonisation* (I. B. Tauris: London, 2004), pp. 185–226; and Lefebvre, J. A., 'Middle East conflicts and middle level power intervention in the Horn of Africa', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3 (summer 1996), pp. 387–404.



their support.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it was most often the drive to militarize by regional states, in order to challenge contested borders, compete with neighbours and suppress unstable domestic politics, which pulled superpower competition into the region.<sup>5</sup>

The origins of violent instability in the Horn thus lie primarily in the region's unique experience during the colonial era, notably the demarcation of borders, and the poor management of political transitions to self-rule.<sup>6</sup> The extension of US–Soviet superpower rivalry into the region through proxy relations then had a further devastating impact on regional conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

During the cold war, substantial amounts of weaponry, military advisers, assistance and training, and even foreign combat forces were funnelled into the region, driving a dramatic escalation in the scale of fighting and the casualties.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the Horn became synonymous with warfare, notably the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977–78 over the disputed region of Ogaden. The chronic violent instability and ethnonationalism promoted during the conflicts of the era largely defined the immediate post-cold war regional security agenda of interstate wars, border and resource disputes, and failed states.

While the cold war involved external proxy contests in the Horn of Africa, a key security legacy from the colonial era that was not significantly contested was the near monopoly of maritime security in the region by a single global power—first the United Kingdom and then the USA. At the beginning of the 19th century, the British Navy achieved maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean, including in the Horn, and established itself as the protector of the global maritime commons in the region.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to a new geopolitical focus on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as the key link between Europe and Asian and Middle Eastern imperial territories. The British military presence in southern Yemen, notably at the port of Aden, together with British Somaliland and on the island of Socotra provided the means of securing the southern Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

After the withdrawal of British naval forces 'East of Suez' (i.e. from major military bases in South East Asia and the Indian Ocean) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the withdrawal from the Aden Protectorate in 1967, and notably the strategically important Aden port, the USA took on the mantle of the dominant regional naval power, continuing the security role first established by the UK over one hundred and fifty years earlier. This Anglo-American naval dominance in the Horn ensured that, except for during the two world wars when navy rivalries emerged in the region, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the southern Red Sea were not subject to significant geopolitical contest. Instead, the cold war external

<sup>4</sup> Yordanov, R., *The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa during the Cold War: Between Ideology and Pragmatism* (Lexington Books, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Schmidt, E., 'Conflict in the Horn, 1952–1993', *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2013), pp. 143–63.

<sup>6</sup> Clapham, C., 'Why is the Horn different?', *Rift Valley Review*, 28 Oct. 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Luckham R. and Dawit Bekele, D., 'Foreign powers and militarism in the Horn of Africa: Part I', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 11, no. 30 (Sep. 1984), pp. 8–20.

<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre, J., *Arms for the Horn: US Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia 1953–1991* (University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 1992); and Luckham, R. and Bekele, D., 'Foreign powers and militarism in the horn of Africa: part II', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 11, no. 31, pp. 7–28.



security engagement in the region was essentially focused on a continental security agenda—it took place on the Horn of Africa rather than for it.

### III. Post-cold war international security relations in the Horn of Africa

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the regional rivalry with the USA that had helped to drive a series of devastating conflicts in the Horn of Africa came to an end. In place of the proxy conflicts fought in developing countries in the 1970s and 1980s, including in the Horn, a new focus on internationally sanctioned humanitarian interventions emerged.

#### **The Somalia intervention**

When Somalia's long-term leader, Siad Barre, was overthrown in 1991, the country faced increasing violence and famine. In response, in the summer of 1992 the international community launched a humanitarian and peacekeeping effort in the form of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) to provide humanitarian assistance. However, intense fighting between Somali warlord factions impeded the delivery of aid, leading to calls for stronger international action.

The Somalia intervention came on the heels of the multilateral Gulf War effort, widely viewed as a success, and in the context of a wider discussion of a 'new world order' built on international cooperation and humanitarian intervention to manage and end conflicts.<sup>9</sup> Against this background, the USA mounted a military operation in support of the wider international mission, Operation Restore Hope. On 4 December 1992, President George Bush agreed to send almost 30 000 US military forces to Somalia. The US intervention culminated in the so-called Battle of Mogadishu on 3–4 October 1993, in which 18 US soldiers and hundreds of Somali militia fighters and civilians were killed. Within six months, the USA had withdrawn its forces from Somalia. By 1995, the international mission had withdrawn, paving the way for the international abandonment of Somalia until 2007. The perceived failure of the mission led to what came to be known as the Somalia syndrome in US foreign and security policy over the next decade, whereby the USA was wary of intervening militarily in conflicts, and especially of putting US forces at risk.<sup>10</sup>

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#### **External security support for the African Peace and Security Architecture**

If Somalia highlighted the dangers of intervention, the Rwandan genocide of 1994 underlined the costs of non-intervention. Thus, from the late 1990s,

<sup>9</sup> New York Times 'After the War: The President; Transcript of President Bush's address on end of the Gulf War', 7 Mar. 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Patman, R. G., *Strategic Shortfall: The Somalia Syndrome and the March to 9/11* (Praeger Security International: Santa Barbara, CA, 2010), pp. 79–100.



the USA sought to strike a balance between non-intervention and providing support for local, regional and continental responses. In order to achieve this, the USA tried to support the development of Africa's own abilities to manage security issues, and in 1997 the administration of President Bill Clinton adopted the rhetoric of 'African solutions to African problems'.<sup>11</sup>

The emergence of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) from the late 1990s, in response to the severe crisis in Somalia and the Rwandan genocide, brought a focus for external security support. Increasingly, assistance from the USA, the European Union (EU) and other leading members of the international community was channelled into the development of security activities by African multilateral organizations, notably the African Union (AU) and regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in the Horn.

Peace operations mandated by the UN, although largely without the direct involvement of US and European troops, provided a key tool for supporting the development of APSA, alongside peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation initiatives, and international development assistance.<sup>12</sup> Within this framework, considerable political and financial resources have been devoted to peace operations in Somalia (the AU Mission in Somalia, AMISOM), Sudan (the UN Mission in Sudan, UNMIS, and the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur, UNAMID) and South Sudan (the UN Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS), ending the wars between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Eritrea and Djibouti, and managing regional tensions over unresolved borders and the water resources of the Nile.<sup>13</sup>

External political and financial assistance for multilateral security approaches to the conflicts in the Horn has become a central pillar of regional security. The EU, in particular, has supported multilateral approaches to its security engagement in the region.<sup>14</sup> From the 1990s, the former European colonial powers also tried to move away from historical bilateral military approaches and towards multilateralizing and Europeanizing their security engagements instead.<sup>15</sup> While the progress in resolving conflicts has generally been slow, nearly three decades after the end of the cold war the overall level of violence across the Horn has declined significantly compared to the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Albright, M. K., US Secretary of State, 'Remarks at the Organization of African Unity, Economic Commission for Africa', Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 9 Dec. 1997', US Department of State Archive.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, P., *War and Conflict in Africa* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2016, 2nd edn), pp. 189–278.

<sup>13</sup> In recent years, China and Japan have provided contingents of troops to UNMISS, together with the UK.

<sup>14</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on the Horn of Africa', 14 Nov. 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Hansen, A., 'Backgrounder: The French military in Africa', *New York Times*, 9 Feb. 2007. Reflecting the key security relationship with Djibouti, notably the presence of a French military base, French forces did intervene in the Djibouti civil war in 1992, when a peacekeeping force was deployed as part of a diplomatic effort. French troops were reported to have provided logistical, medical and intelligence support to Djibouti in the country's confrontation with Eritrea in 2008. See also Minorities at Risk Project, 'Chronology for Afars in Djibouti', 2004, accessed 25 Feb. 2019; and 'France backing Djibouti in "war"', BBC News, 13 June 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Burbuck, D. and Fettweis, C., 'The coming stability? The decline of warfare in Africa and implications for international security', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2014), pp. 424–31.



#### IV. Renewed US military engagement in the Horn of Africa

During the first decade of the 21st century the Horn of Africa's security agenda began to evolve, because the issues of counterterrorism and counter-piracy emerged as priorities for external security actors. Crucially, the USA renewed its direct security engagement in the region, together with its major allies, through bilateral and US-led multilateral frameworks.

Subsequently, the Horn of Africa has become a key theatre for US counterterrorism operations, notably in Somalia (where recent years have seen a build-up of military forces), and a base for operations across Africa and the Middle East. The USA has also taken the lead in countering piracy and maritime crime in the Horn. The build-up of US forces has been supported by military deployments from allied states, as well as missions from other countries.

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##### Counterterrorism

In 1998, violent Islamist groups targeted the US diplomatic presence in East Africa, carrying out near simultaneous attacks on the embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, which left over 200 people dead. The USA responded militarily with cruise missile attacks in Sudan and Afghanistan, but maintained the post-Somalia intervention policy of keeping US troops away from direct military intervention. In October 2000, the *USS Cole* was attacked by al-Qaeda in the port of Aden, leading to the deaths of 17 people. There was no military response from the USA to the bombing.<sup>17</sup>

The terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001 led to an immediate shift in US regional security policy, as the USA re-engaged its military directly in the Horn of Africa as part of the 'global war on terrorism'. Operation Enduring Freedom-Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA) was launched in October 2002 as a military mission to counter violent Islamist groups and piracy in the region. The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was established at the same time to deliver the aims of OEF-HOA. The Government of Djibouti leased Camp Lemonnier to the USA in 2001, and the CJTF-HOA moved there on 13 May 2003.<sup>18</sup>

Camp Lemonnier has subsequently become the centrepiece of a network of US drone and surveillance bases stretching across Africa and has also served as a hub for aerial operations as far as the Gulf. In the pursuit of counterterrorism operations, following the creation of the CJTF-HOA, the USA established an extensive network of military installations in the Horn of Africa region, notably in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and the Seychelles. In recent years, the USA has significantly increased its military presence in Somalia in order to conduct drone strikes and special forces operations, and

<sup>17</sup> Isikoff, M., 'US failure to retaliate to USS Cole attack rankled then—and now', *NBC News*, 10 Dec. 2010.

<sup>18</sup> In Feb. 2007, US President George W. Bush announced the establishment of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) with headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. On 1 Oct. 2008 responsibility for the CJTF-HOA was transferred from the US Central Command to the AFRICOM, when the latter assumed authority over US forces in the region.



for the training of the Somali National Army (SNA), notably at its Baledogle base.<sup>19</sup>

Alongside the USA's bilateral security actions, other countries have also supported efforts to counter Islamist groups in Somalia. For example, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and European countries have deployed military officials to Somalia to conduct training for the Somali armed forces. Turkey opened a military training base in Mogadishu in 2017 and the UAE maintained a military training centre in the Somali capital until 2018, when a dispute with the Somali authorities led to its closure. The UK has operated a bilateral Security Training Centre in Somalia since January 2017, which provides training for the SNA and the UN-mandated AMISOM.<sup>20</sup> Since 2010, the EU has supported a military training mission (the EU Training Mission, EUTM) to provide training to the SNA.<sup>21</sup> Qatar has provided the SNA with armoured vehicles.<sup>22</sup> The USA, the EU and other members of the international community have also made significant efforts to fund and support AMISOM, the rebuilding of the SNA, and countering the violent Islamist group al-Shabab.

### **Counter-piracy operations**

In 2002, a US-led multilateral naval task force based in Bahrain, Combined Task Force 150 (CTF 150), was established to monitor, interdict, board and inspect suspect shipping as part of the 'global war on terrorism', including around the Horn of Africa. By the end of the decade, increased piracy attacks off Somalia were causing concern and broader international operations were launched in the region. As a result, counter-piracy became a multilateral issue.

Currently, three international naval task forces are operating in the Horn: (a) CTF 150, focused on maritime security; (b) the EU Naval Force Atalanta (EUNAVFOR, Operation Atalanta), established in 2008 to counter Somali piracy); and (c) CTF 151, established in 2009 and dedicated to counter-piracy operations. At the same time, CTF 152, which was established in 2004, is focused on maritime security in the Gulf. Although set up to address piracy, the mandates of Operation Atalanta and CTF 151 have since expanded to cover broader maritime security issues. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operated a counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden from 2009–16, Operation Ocean Shield.<sup>23</sup>

In order to support counter-piracy missions, Italy, Germany and Spain established military operations in the region, joining France that has operated from Djibouti since the late 1970s and the UK with its personnel at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. Other navies from outside the Horn, such as China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Iran and Australia, have regularly deployed naval forces to the Gulf of Aden on counter-piracy operations.

<sup>19</sup> See Melvin (note 2).

<sup>20</sup> British Ministry of Defence, 'UK military train 500 Somalis', 29 Aug. 2018.

<sup>21</sup> EUTM-Somalia, 'Fact Sheet: European Union Training Mission—Somalia', July 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Reuters, 'Qatar gives Somalia armoured vehicles', 17 Jan. 2019.

<sup>23</sup> NATO Allied Maritime Command, 'Operation Ocean Shield', [n.d.], accessed 21 Feb. 2019.





## V. Middle Eastern and Gulf powers in the Horn of Africa

The security engagement of Middle Eastern and Gulf states in the Horn of Africa has undergone a steady evolution over the past decade. Initially, the Gulf states' security interests in the Horn were focused on frustrating Iranian ambitions in the region. Later, the Horn became important for hosting military facilities to enable operations in the Yemeni civil war.<sup>24</sup> As Turkey increased its presence in the region and splits developed within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Horn became an important venue for proxy contests among Middle Eastern and Gulf powers.

Increasingly, however, the Horn has taken on a strategic significance for Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Middle Eastern and Gulf states have developed integrated commercial and security strategies for the region, designed to ensure a leading role at the point where the East–West trade route enters the Red Sea. The security engagement in the Horn is also part of broader ambitions among Gulf powers to play a more active role in the western and northern Indian Ocean, and in their relations with leading Asian powers, notably in the context of a perceived decline of US interest in the region.<sup>25</sup>

### Countering Iran and the western flank

From the early 2000s, the principal security focus of Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies in the Horn of Africa was countering Iranian efforts to project force into the region.<sup>26</sup> Iran sought to gain access to ports in Eritrea and Sudan in order to support the deployment of naval forces to the region. From 2011, Iran began to regularly send ships to the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, and even through the Suez Canal, marking the first time that Iranian vessels transited the Red Sea to the Mediterranean since the 1979 Iranian Revolution.<sup>27</sup>

Iranian naval activity in the Horn was a part of a policy designed to outflank the USA and its Gulf allies to the west.<sup>28</sup> However, the Red Sea has also offered Iran a conduit to supply weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas in their armed struggle with Israel, and it has been reportedly smuggling weapons to Houthi rebels in Yemen and to Somalia.<sup>29</sup>

The Iranian naval presence has also raised concerns that Iran could use its warships to disrupt energy supplies and international trade passing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.<sup>30</sup> However, the GCC states successfully used their

<sup>24</sup> Lawson, F. H., 'GCC policies toward the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa and Yemen: Ally–Adversary dilemmas', *Gulf Affairs*, 2017, p. 6–7.

<sup>25</sup> The Washington Institute, 'Red Sea trade and security with Elana DeLozier', 22 Mar. 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Shazly, A., 'Eritrea: Another venue for the Iran–Israel rivalry', *Stratfor*, 11 Dec. 2012; and Paraszczuk, J., 'Khartoum allowing Iran to establish Red Sea base', *Jerusalem Post*, 11 Dec. 2012.

<sup>27</sup> BBC News, 'Israel anger at Iran Suez Canal warship move', 16 Feb. 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Lefebvre, J. A., 'Iran in the Horn of Africa: Outflanking US allies', *Middle East Policy Council*, vol. 19, no. 2 (summer 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Fargher, J., 'Iranian naval capabilities in the Red Sea', *CIMSEC*, 6 Apr. 2017; Schmitt, E., 'Iran is smuggling increasingly potent weapons into Yemen, US Admiral says', *New York Times*, 18 Sep. 2018; and Conflict Armament Research, 'Maritime interdiction of weapon supplies to Somalia and Yemen', Nov. 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Fargher, J., "'This presence will continue forever": An assessment of Iranian naval capabilities in the Red Sea', *Center for International Maritime Security*, 5 Apr. 2017.



### ***Somalia has been a particular focus of Turkish commercial, diplomatic and security policies***

tools of influence, principally via economic incentives, to convince African states to limit their ties to Iran. At the same time, the GCC states increased their security cooperation with African countries and played a more prominent role in international counterterrorism operations in the region, notably in Somalia.<sup>31</sup> As the war in Yemen developed from 2015, the Saudi Arabian-led coalition concluded security agreements with Eritrea and Sudan that blocked Iranian access to their Red Sea ports.<sup>32</sup>

Although Iran lost much of its former access to the Red Sea and influence in the Horn countries as a result of the GCC initiatives, it has sought to maintain a naval presence in the Gulf of Aden, including to protect oil shipments, under the rubric of a counter-piracy mission that has operated since 2014.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, Iran and the Gulf states have engaged in proxy military competition in the region focused on Yemen.

Alongside their security ties with the Horn, the GCC states also sought to develop commercial engagements. Food security, labour migration, and the need to pursue economic diversification and reduce their reliance on income from hydrocarbons by investing in African markets have emerged as key drivers for the GCC states to forge a new economic relationship with the region.<sup>34</sup>

### **Turkey enters the Horn**

Turkey's growing presence in the Horn of Africa forms part of its wider Africa strategy.<sup>35</sup> Its initiatives to establish bases and port access arrangements in the Horn are seen as part of an effort to expand Turkey's regional military and intelligence infrastructure and thereby to strengthen its role in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and along the East African coast.<sup>36</sup>

Somalia has been a particular focus of Turkish commercial, diplomatic and security policies. As a part of this engagement, Turkey opened its largest overseas military base in Mogadishu on 30 September 2017, which is officially intended to provide training to the SNA.<sup>37</sup>

In late 2017, the Sudanese Foreign Minister announced that Turkey would establish a naval facility on the island of Sawakin (Suakin) in Sudan as part of a multimillion-dollar commercial project.<sup>38</sup> The announcement was greeted with concern in Saudi Arabia and among its allies, as it raised the prospect of a Turkish naval base on the Red Sea and near to Saudi Arabia's western coast.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Sheikh, A., 'Somalia disbands UAE programme to pay and train hundreds of soldiers', Reuters, 11 Apr. 2018.

<sup>32</sup> *The Guardian*, 'Why has Sudan ditched Iran in favour of Saudi Arabia?', 12 Jan. 2016; and Mello, A. and Knights, M., 'How Eritrea became a major UAE military base', *TesfaNews*, 2 Sep. 2016.

<sup>33</sup> *Tehran Times*, 'Iran sends warships to Bab-el-Mandeb Strait', 17 Mar. 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Todman, W., 'The Gulf scramble for Africa: GCC states' foreign policy laboratory', CSIS Briefs, 20 Nov. 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Kenyon, P., 'Turkey is quietly building its presence in Africa', National Public Radio, 8 Mar. 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Ashkar, N., 'Turkish eyes on Africa', *Ahramonline*, 5 Jan. 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Middle East Monitor, 'Turkey opens largest overseas military base in Somalia', 5 Oct. 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Mazel, Z., 'Is Turkey setting up a naval base on the Red Sea?', *Jerusalem Post*, 6 Jan. 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Amin, M., 'Suakin: "Forgotten" Sudanese island becomes focus for Red Sea rivalries', Middle East Eye, 18 Mar. 2018.



The tensions generated by the announcement of the Sawakin (Suakin) naval facility also triggered a crisis in relations between Sudan and Egypt, due to a long running territorial dispute over the so-called Hala'ib Triangle and Egypt's opposition to Ethiopian plans to dam the Nile.<sup>40</sup> Egypt has not established military bases in the Horn but is a leading Red Sea power by virtue of its control of the Suez Canal. In 2013, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi stated that 'all options' were open in regard to the Ethiopian dam, reportedly including military actions to destroy it.<sup>41</sup>

In recent years, Egypt has sought to increase its military spending in order to project military force into the Horn region.<sup>42</sup> Notably, it has strengthened its navy. On 5 January 2017, Egypt inaugurated a new headquarters for its southern naval fleet command. The southern fleet is responsible for the Red Sea including the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which is considered a strategic interest.<sup>43</sup> The fleet has recently been equipped with modern ships, including a new amphibious assault ship.<sup>44</sup> As part of the Saudi Arabian-led coalition, Egypt has been supporting military actions in the Yemen conflict. The main contribution has been the deployment of naval ships to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait as part of the blockade of Yemen, in particular to counter Iranian vessels.<sup>45</sup>

***Egypt and Turkey have developed a regional rivalry across the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean***

Egyptian-Turkish relations have been poor following the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood government (which Turkey publicly supported) by the Egyptian military in 2013. The two countries have developed a regional rivalry across the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Turkey's increasing role in the Red Sea and the Horn has caused a particularly negative reaction in Egypt.<sup>47</sup>

Turkey's growing security presence in the Horn is taking place alongside a build-up of its military forces in the Gulf. In 2016 Turkey opened its first overseas military base in the Middle East, in Qatar.<sup>48</sup> Its overseas military ambitions have often been presented to a domestic audience as a reassertion of a historical regional presence in parts of the former Ottoman Empire. Turkey's moves to open military bases have reinforced the view in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt that it is seeking, together with its Qatari ally (and to some degree in coordination with Iran), to weaken their position in the Red Sea, the Horn, North Africa and the Gulf itself. Turkey's military

<sup>40</sup> Amin (note 39); and Dahir, A. L., 'A major geopolitical crisis is set to erupt over who controls the world's longest river', *Quartz Africa*, 17 Jan. 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Pflanz, M., 'Egypt: "all options open" in Nile dam row with Ethiopia', *The Telegraph*, 12 June 2013; and Maher, A., 'Egyptian politicians caught in on-air Ethiopia dam gaffe', *BBC News*, 4 June 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Megahid, A., 'How regional challenges pushed Egypt to shift its military doctrine to "prevention"', *Arab Weekly*, 28 Oct. 2018; and Wuite, C., 'The rationale for Egypt's military spending spree', *The Interpreter*, 4 Apr. 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Shay, S., 'The Egyptian Navy in the Red Sea', *Institute of Policy and Strategy*, Jan. 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Vey, J., and Irish, J., 'France, Egypt agree 950 million euro Mistral warship deal', *Reuters*, 23 Sep. 2015.

<sup>45</sup> *Reuters*, 'Egypt voices concern over Red Sea security after Houthi attack', 13 Aug. 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Cagaptay, S., and Sievers, M., 'Turkey and Egypt's Great Game in the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, 8 Mar. 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Karasik, T. and Cafiero, G., 'Turkey's move into the Red Sea unsettles Egypt', *Middle East Institute*, 17 Jan. 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Murdock, H., 'Turkey opens first Mideast military base in Qatar', *Voice of America*, 10 May 2016.

presence in the Horn has therefore taken on strategic significance as part of a wider struggle for influence in the Middle East, extending into the Horn and the western Indian Ocean.<sup>49</sup>

### **Competition within the Middle East and the Gulf**

From 2011, the political dislocations of the Arab Spring promoted a growing split in the Middle East, between Turkey and Qatar, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, on the other. The fragmentation was also exacerbated by differences over Iran. For Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in particular, a combination of the unrest in the Middle East, the rise of countries supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran's perceived growing regional strength promoted a new focus on the Horn of Africa. The region became a core strategic interest that promoted an interventionist foreign policy.<sup>50</sup>

The onset of the civil war in Yemen functioned as a catalyst for a strategic reorientation in GCC security policy to protect the Gulf states' western security flank. Crucially, the conflict in Yemen coincided with a strategic repositioning of the USA in the region. In the autumn of 2011 and early 2012, the administration of US President Barack Obama signalled a security 'pivot to East Asia', which was designed to balance China's rising military strength.<sup>51</sup> In order to facilitate this shift, the USA reached out to allies in the region to address local security issues in their neighbourhood.

As the Yemeni civil war developed from 2015, the USA backed the Saudi Arabian-led coalition of African and Middle Eastern countries to intervene in Yemen, including providing the coalition with military support and intelligence.<sup>52</sup> As concern grew in the coalition that advances by Houthi rebels, allied with Iran, threatened the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, control of Yemen's western and southern coastal areas became a priority.

In order to enable military operations in Yemen, the GCC established a military base in Assab in Eritrea, having been forced to leave Djibouti following a dispute with the government.<sup>53</sup> The UAE has since begun construction of a military facility at the port of Berbera in Somaliland.<sup>54</sup> Saudi Arabia has been negotiating for military facilities in Djibouti and, together with the UAE, it has deployed naval forces to support operations in Yemen.<sup>55</sup> The UAE and Saudi Arabia have also sent military forces to the Yemeni island of Socotra.

<sup>49</sup> Ardemagni, E., 'Gulf powers: Maritime rivalry in the western Indian Ocean', ISPI, Analysis no. 321, Apr. 2018.

<sup>50</sup> International Crisis Group, 'The United Arab Emirates in the Horn of Africa', Briefing no. 65, 6 Nov. 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Manyin, M. et al., *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's 'Rebalancing' Toward Asia*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress R42448 (US Congress, CRS: Washington, DC, Mar. 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Northam, J., 'US Confirms It Is Supporting Saudi Military Operations In Yemen', National Public Radio, 25 Mar. 2015.

<sup>53</sup> See Melvin (note 2).

<sup>54</sup> Manek, N., 'UAE military base in breakaway Somaliland to open by June', Bloomberg, 6 Nov. 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Middle East Monitor, 'Djibouti welcomes Saudi Arabia plan to build a military base', 28 Nov. 2017.



## Security in the context of commercial and diplomatic strategies

Although security concerns provided the key impulse in the deployment of Gulf military forces to the Horn of Africa, this trend has been reinforced by the emergence of new commercial opportunities connected to the region. Most significantly, China's economic rise has dramatically increased the importance for global commerce of the East–West trade corridor that transits the Red Sea. The significance of this route has been further magnified by China's Belt and Road Initiative and the economic potential of the developing economies of the Horn.

As a result, access to port facilities in the Horn, particularly in close proximity to the entrance to the Red Sea, has become a source of increasing international competition.<sup>56</sup> Given the strategic position of the Horn, this competition has led to a securitization of the race for ports.<sup>57</sup> In this context, countries from the Middle East and the Gulf have sought to reposition themselves commercially.<sup>58</sup> Developing ports and infrastructure that will connect the Horn and East Africa to Asian markets via hubs in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and elsewhere in the Gulf has become a priority for the Gulf States, while the major investments they have made in this area have reinforced their new status as key regional powers.<sup>59</sup>

In general, Middle Eastern and Gulf states have pursued 'economic statecraft', using strategic economic investments to achieve their political, military and economic aims in the region.<sup>60</sup> The UAE, in particular, has leveraged its superior shipping and port infrastructure to become the largest GCC trader with Africa. It now manages commercial ports at Berbera and Boosaaso (Bosaso), close to its new military base, while Turkey operates the Port of Mogadishu near to its military base.<sup>61</sup> Qatar is looking to develop Port Sudan.<sup>62</sup> The combined military-commercial port infrastructure offers countries of the Gulf and the Middle East the potential to dominate maritime trade in the Red Sea and the western Indian Ocean.<sup>63</sup>

## The GCC crisis and proxy competition

The GCC crisis began in 2017 when a group of countries led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE severed diplomatic relations with Qatar. Reflecting the growing ties between the Horn of Africa and countries in the Middle East and the Gulf, the GCC crisis has further increased external competition in parts of the region.<sup>64</sup> Its divisions have raised concerns that proxy politics driven

<sup>56</sup> Pilling, D., 'Everyone wants a piece of the Horn of Africa's ports', OZY, 11 Nov. 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Life and Peace Institute, 'Ports & power: The securitisation of port politics', 14 May 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Van den Berg, W. and Meester, J., 'Ports & power: The securitisation of port politics', *Maritime Insecurity Dilemmas amidst a New Scramble for the Horn? Life & Peace Institute, Horn of Africa Bulletin*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Mar.–Apr. 2018), pp. 13–19.

<sup>59</sup> Khan, T., *Gulf Strategic Interests Reshaping the Horn of Africa* (Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington: Washington, DC, 27 Nov. 2018); and International Crisis Group (note 50).

<sup>60</sup> Young, K. E., *The Interventionist Turn in Gulf States' Foreign Policies* (Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington: Washington, DC, 1 June 2016).

<sup>61</sup> Gulf Business, 'Gulf rivals battle for ports access in Somalia', 11 May 2018.

<sup>62</sup> *Hurriyet Daily News*, 'Sudan, Qatar to sign \$4 bln deal to manage Red Sea port', 28 Mar. 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Vertin, Z., 'Red Sea rivalries', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 Jan. 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Todman (note 34).



by Middle Eastern and Gulf rivalries have emerged in the Horn, promoting greater militarization and destabilization.<sup>65</sup>

Somalia has been particularly negatively affected by the GCC split.<sup>66</sup> Qatari–Turkish and Saudi Arabian–UAE tensions have undercut the state-building project in Somalia through exacerbating existing domestic divisions as part of competitive proxy politics.<sup>67</sup> In 2018, the situation became so harmful that the AU and the EU both publicly called on external actors to cease meddling in the country.<sup>68</sup>

The construction of a military base in the non-recognized state of Somaliland by the UAE, alongside its major investments in the Berbera commercial port, has become a significant source of tension between the Government of Somalia and the authorities in Somaliland.<sup>69</sup> Already in 2017, the UN Monitoring Group for Somalia and Eritrea assessed that the establishment of a military base in Berbera would constitute a violation of the UN arms embargo on Somalia.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Middle East and the Gulf as sources of fragmentation or stability**

The increased security presence of Middle Eastern and Gulf states in the Horn of Africa has taken place for a number of reasons, including food security, commerce and trade, and foreign and security policy. The growing role of these states in the region has nevertheless brought some economic and security benefits.

There have also been significant initiatives to promote stability and peace in the Horn. Qatar, for example, took a prominent role in deploying peacekeepers to the border between Eritrea and Djibouti from 2010–17, and in mediating the Darfur conflict.<sup>71</sup> In 2018, Saudi Arabia and the UAE pledged large aid and investment packages to Ethiopia and Eritrea while helping to mediate an end to their 20-year conflict.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, in 2019, Qatar is reported to have attempted to mediate a dispute between Kenya and Somalia over maritime territory.<sup>73</sup>

A key driver of the engagement in the Horn by Turkey, Qatar, Iran, the UAE and Saudi Arabia has, however, been regional and international geoeconomic and geopolitical competition with each other. This has promoted division and fragmentation in the region. The initial contest between Iran and the Arab states has today been supplanted by a division in the GCC, meanwhile Turkey has emerged as a regional security actor to rival the Gulf states in the Horn.

<sup>65</sup> Frantzman, S., 'Is Middle Eastern rivalry good for Africa?', *National Interest*, 28 Nov. 2018.

<sup>66</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Somalia and the Gulf crisis', Report no. 260, 5 June 2018.

<sup>67</sup> International Crisis Group (note 66).

<sup>68</sup> Reuters, 'External actors urged to stop meddling in Somalia's affairs', 30 May 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Somalia calls for UN action against UAE base in Berbera', 27 Mar. 2018.

<sup>70</sup> United Nations, Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, 'Report on Somalia and Eritrea', 2 Nov. 2017, S/2017/924, paras 146–150.

<sup>71</sup> Barakat, S., 'Qatari mediation: Between ambition and achievement', Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper no. 14 (Nov. 2014).

<sup>72</sup> Mitchell, C., 'The UAE's active role in Horn of Africa peace-making', *The National*, 27 Dec. 2018; and Manek, N., 'Saudi Arabia brokers a new Ethiopia–Eritrea peace deal', Bloomberg, 17 Sep. 2018.

<sup>73</sup> Africa Intelligence, 'Qatar seeks to defuse tensions between Farmajo and Kenyatta', 22 Mar. 2019.



There are also indications that the Saudi Arabian–UAE alliance actually masks different strategic goals. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia’s priority is to counter Iran in the region, notably the Houthis in Yemen. On the other hand, the UAE has developed a wider strategic aim of projecting its geopolitical influence into the Horn, including through the war in Yemen.<sup>74</sup> The UAE has therefore established military bases and commercial ports in the region, and built alliances along the coast of Yemen, which points to a long-term strategy.<sup>75</sup> In the summer of 2018, the UAE even sought to assert its authority on the Yemeni island of Socotra.<sup>76</sup>

***Saudi Arabia is currently seeking a leading role as the driver of new multilateral security arrangements that span both sides of the Red Sea***

Patterns of investment in the Horn from the Middle East and the Gulf are strongly influencing bilateral ties and strategic focus, and they risk becoming the basis for competitive clientelist foreign and security ties. Thus, while the UAE is the largest foreign investor in Somaliland (and has drawn back from its previous relations with the Federal Government of Somalia), and together with Saudi Arabia has made substantial loans to Ethiopia, the states of Qatar and Turkey have focused on Sudan and Somalia for their investments.<sup>77</sup>

Saudi Arabia is currently seeking a leading role as the driver of new multilateral security arrangements that span both sides of the Red Sea. In December 2018, it convened a meeting to bring together the states of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Yemen, Djibouti and Somalia, but notably not including Eritrea and Ethiopia—in order to improve trade and maritime navigation.<sup>78</sup> Saudi Arabia subsequently sought to cement the new security alliance through naval exercises in the Red Sea.<sup>79</sup> This approach has raised the prospect of a Middle Eastern security alliance developing in the Horn, challenging the efforts to develop African regional security frameworks.<sup>80</sup>

## VI. The Horn of Africa and Indo-Pacific security

Over the past decade, one of the most significant shifts in the security of the Horn of Africa has been the arrival and consolidation of foreign military forces from Asia. The principal driver of the initial deployment of Asian military forces to the region was concern about threats to maritime trade,

<sup>74</sup> Kantack, J. M., ‘The Gulf contest for the Horn of Africa’, *Critical Threats*, 26 Sep. 2017.

<sup>75</sup> Ardemagni, E., ‘The UAE’s security-economic nexus in Yemen’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 19 July 2018.

<sup>76</sup> McKernan, B. and Towers, L., ‘As Saudi Arabia and the UAE struggle for control of Socotra, Yemen’s island paradise may just swap one occupation for another’, *The Independent*, 21 May 2018; and *Middle East Monitor*, ‘Saudi Arabia, UAE dispute over Yemen island of Socotra’, 26 Mar. 2019.

<sup>77</sup> Maasho, A., ‘UAE to give Ethiopia \$3 billion in aid and investments’, *Reuters*, June 2018; *Busiweek*, ‘Somaliland Leads In Foreign Direct Investment To UAE’, 21 Feb. 2019; *Hurriyet Daily News*, ‘Sudan, Qatar to sign \$4 bln deal to manage Red Sea port’, 28 Mar. 2018; and *The Conversation*, ‘Turkey’s foray into Somalia is a huge success, but there are risks’, 4 Feb. 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Al Lawati, A., ‘Saudi Arabia vies for influence in Africa with new club’, *Bloomberg*, 12 Dec. 2018; and Kahlin, S., ‘Saudi Arabia seeks new political bloc in strategic Red Sea region’, *Reuters*, 12 Dec. 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Bulos, N., ‘Saudi Arabia hopes naval exercises in the Red Sea lead to greater clout in East Africa’, *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Jan. 2019.

<sup>80</sup> De Waal, A., ‘Beyond the Red Sea: A new driving force in the politics of the Horn’, *African Arguments*, 11 July 2018; and de Waal, A., ‘Pax Africana or Middle East security alliance in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea?’, *World Peace Foundation, Occasional Paper no. 17*, Jan. 2019.



notably in the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the southern Red Sea. Subsequently, these counter-piracy missions became the basis for the creation of military bases in the Horn and for a broadening of the mandates of Asian regional security forces to support peace operations, the evacuation of citizens and humanitarian assistance, as well as military diplomacy and the provision of capacity building and training for African militaries.

However, this original, non-traditional security driver is currently being supplemented by a broadening of major power competition from Asia-Pacific into the Indian Ocean. Crucially, China's growing military presence in the Horn, coupled with its moves to expand its military in the Indian Ocean and to launch the Belt and Road Initiative, has confirmed to other leading Asian security actors that China has a strategy to project military power into the Indian Ocean. As a result, Japan and India have increasingly sought to balance China's military presence in the Indian Ocean region, including through a strengthened focus on the Horn.

The rise of the Indo-Pacific security space is also leading European countries to develop enhanced power projection capacities through the Red Sea, notably via reinforced naval deployments, increasing military forces and new bases. At the same time, the USA has begun to pivot from its focus on non-traditional security threats in Africa to competition with China and Russia. With China increasingly seen as a military competitor across the Indo-Pacific region, the Chinese military presence in the Horn is viewed as part of a potential threat to US access to the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and thus its ability to move forces between different military theatres.

### **Counter-piracy and the consolidation of an Asian military presence**

The onset of the Somali piracy crisis in 2008 led to a transformation of the naval presence of leading Asian military powers in the Horn region. Concerned that piracy constituted a threat to key sea lanes, the major trading states of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) sent naval deployments to the Gulf of Aden. A decade after the onset of the Somali piracy crisis, the Asian military presence in the Horn region had been consolidated into a permanent military presence via onshore bases and adjacent naval forces.

In 2008, China sent its first military force to the Horn in the form of a counter-piracy mission. It has subsequently maintained a continuous naval presence in the Gulf of Aden, sending 32 missions to the region.<sup>81</sup> In 2009, Japan committed military forces to the multinational counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia.<sup>82</sup> Supported by a series of UN Security Council resolutions, Japan adopted an anti-piracy law that marked a fundamental reinterpretation of the 'maritime police actions' clause of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces Act, enabling Japan, for the first time, to escort foreign ships

***For Japan, the initiation of counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden was the first step in the creation of a permanent and expanded security presence in the Horn of Africa***

<sup>81</sup> *Global Times*, 'China sends new naval destroyer fleet to Somali waters for escort mission', 4 Apr. 2019.

<sup>82</sup> See Melvin (note 2).





and to fire on boats engaged in piracy.<sup>83</sup> South Korea began its anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden in 2009, which was the first time that naval ships had been deployed away from the Korean peninsula.

Following the deployment of counter-piracy missions, the three Asian states began to broaden their regional security engagements. For example, China, Japan and South Korea have all sent troop contributions to UNMISS, with China committing peacekeeping troops to the mission from its onset in 2011. In 2014, China tripled its troop contribution, despatching a battalion of 700 infantry troops.<sup>84</sup> China is also a major investor in the South Sudan oil industry.<sup>85</sup> Japan maintained a troop contribution to UNMISS between 2012–17, and South Korea has deployed peacekeepers in South Sudan since 2013.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, the civil wars in Libya, Yemen and South Sudan confronted Asian countries with the challenge of evacuating their citizens. In 2011, China withdrew about 36 000 citizens from Libya as the country descended into civil war; and in 2015, hundreds of Chinese and other foreign nationals were evacuated by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) from Yemen. Japan also evacuated diplomats from South Sudan in 2016, as fighting intensified in the civil war.<sup>87</sup>

The growing security engagement of Asian countries in the Horn region led to the establishment of military bases. In 2011, Japan established a military base in Djibouti, its first overseas base since the end of World War II. The base was initially intended to support Japan's participation in counter-piracy operations in the region. The mission of the base was subsequently broadened to include facilitating peace operations, conducting evacuations of Japanese citizens, and providing support for multilateral non-combat exercises in Africa and the Middle East. Japan enlarged its Djibouti military base in 2017 and again in 2018.<sup>88</sup>

In August 2017, China established a military base in Djibouti, operated by the PLAN, which was officially established to provide military logistics to counter-piracy missions, support Chinese peacekeeping forces in the region, facilitate the evacuation of nationals in crisis situations, and support Chinese humanitarian operations. While South Korea has not established a permanent military base in the Horn, relying instead on naval logistics support from Djibouti and ports in the Gulf, it has established a special forces presence in the UAE as part of a broadening regional military profile.<sup>89</sup>

### **The Horn and rising Asian powers**

For Japan, the initiation of counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden was the first step in the creation of a permanent and expanded security presence

<sup>83</sup> CNN, 'Japan destroyers set sail on anti-piracy mission', 20 Apr. 2009 and *Japan Times*, 'Anti-piracy law', 23 June 2009.

<sup>84</sup> Tiezzi, S., 'China triples peacekeeping presence in South Sudan', *The Diplomat*, 26 Sep. 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Lynch, C., 'UN peacekeepers to protect China's oil interests in South Sudan', *Foreign Policy*, 16 June 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Yonhap News Agency, 'S. Korea to send rotational troops to South Sudan', 5 Mar. 2018.

<sup>87</sup> Reuters, 'Japan sends military planes for evacuation of citizens in South Sudan', 11 July 2016.

<sup>88</sup> See Melvin (note 2).

<sup>89</sup> Park, J. and Ahmad, A., 'Risky business: South Korea's secret military deal with UAE', *The Diplomat*, 1 Mar. 2018.



in the Horn of Africa. Its security commitment to the region has reflected a growing domestic political consensus that Japan should be recognized as a major player on the world stage and that this requires a new form of external policy. Thus, the evolution of Japan's military presence in the Horn is part of a long-term shift in the country's international security posture.<sup>90</sup>

Efforts to strengthen Japan's international security engagement, particularly in its immediate neighbourhood, have been historically constrained by its post-World War II 'pacifist' constitution.<sup>91</sup> The 1947 Japanese Constitution, especially Article 9, has limited naval policy to the direct defence of the home islands, while Japan has been restricted in the types of military and security activities it can conduct and relations it can establish. Internationally endorsed operations in East Africa have, therefore, provided the Japanese Government with a distinct political advantage in pushing forward military normalization measures.

As a maritime trading state, Japan has been able to undertake a legitimate military mission, sanctioned by the UN, to ensure the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and choke points in the Indian Ocean (notably the Bab el-Mandeb Strait), as a variety of non-traditional threats have emerged (e.g. piracy, armed non-state actors and terrorism). Support for military engagement in the Horn has commanded strong domestic consensus in Japan. Thus, over the course of five successive administrations, the boundaries of Japanese security policy have been expanded through counter-piracy operations in the western Indian Ocean, African peacekeeping missions, emergency evacuation operations from African and Middle Eastern countries, and multilateral exercises—all supported from the Japanese military base in Djibouti.

The opening of the Chinese base in Djibouti took place at a time when piracy in the region had significantly declined, yet further work is underway to expand the base and to allow the docking of larger warships.<sup>92</sup> In fact, the base increasingly appears to be a permanent military presence in the Horn at a key geostrategic point at the entrance to the Red Sea and in the close vicinity of the Middle East. Its establishment has taken place at the same time as China is seeking to advance its commercial interests in Djibouti's Doraleh Container Terminal, together with a number of other major infrastructure projects. Thus, China's engagement in Djibouti rests on a mixing of commercial and military interests.<sup>93</sup> However, the port has become the subject of a dispute, with the UAE company Dubai Ports World contesting the decision by Djibouti authorities to terminate the contract to manage Doraleh and seize control of the port in February 2018.<sup>94</sup> In the

<sup>90</sup> Liff, A. P., 'Japan's security policy in the "Abe Era": Radical transformation or evolutionary shift?', *Texas National Security Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, May 2018.

<sup>91</sup> *Japan Times*, 'Japanese sharply divided over revising Article 9 amid regional security threats, poll finds', 30 Apr. 2017.

<sup>92</sup> iSi, 'Expansion of the pier and new observation post in China's overseas military base in Djibouti', 15 Aug. 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Wang, M., 'China's strategy in Djibouti: Mixing commercial and military interests', Council on Foreign Relations, 13 Apr. 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Dahir, A. L., 'A legal tussle over a strategic African port sets up a challenge for China's Belt and Road plan', *Quartz Africa*, 28 Feb. 2019.



background, Chinese companies have gradually extended their role in the port's operation.<sup>95</sup>

The catalyst of the South Korean military engagement in the Horn region was concern about non-traditional threats to maritime trade routes, but an important driver of Korea's policy has also been the desire to take on a larger security role for the country commensurate to its economic strength and in protection of its international interests.<sup>96</sup> In order to support its international security ambitions, since the early 2000s South Korea has been building up the military capacities to project force beyond its immediate neighbourhood.<sup>97</sup> The deployment of a counter-piracy mission was possible as South Korea had recently created the naval capacities for operations far from home ports.<sup>98</sup>

### **China, the Horn and the String of Pearls strategy**

China's counter-piracy mission was initially viewed as a discrete military operation. The growing regional presence of the PLAN, notably the opening and expansion of the military base in Djibouti and Chinese involvement in the Doraleh commercial port, suggests a wider strategy by China today. This involves extending security capabilities and economic interests along key SLOCs in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>99</sup> The construction of the Djibouti military base is therefore part of a broader Chinese regional project to establish mixed commercial-military ports across the Indian Ocean region—the so-called String of Pearls.<sup>100</sup>

Within this project, the Chinese-built port facilities at Pakistan, together with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), provide a key link from western China to Djibouti and to other Chinese-controlled ports in the Indian Ocean, notably in Sri Lanka. Several reports indicate that China is planning to develop Gwadar as a mixed military-commercial facility.<sup>101</sup> The development of Gwadar is being undertaken within the context of a broadening Sino-Pakistan security partnership. This involves the sale and leasing of advanced naval ships, submarines and fighter jets capable of projecting maritime power at key Gulf and Red Sea choke points, and access to the Beidou military satellite system.<sup>102</sup>

Alongside the deployment of, increasingly advanced, naval ships to the Gulf of Aden for counter-piracy operations, the PLAN has undertaken a

***The construction of the Djibouti military base is therefore part of a broader Chinese regional project to establish mixed commercial-military ports across the Indian Ocean region—the so-called String of Pearls***

<sup>95</sup> Paris, C., 'China tightens grip on East African port', *Wall Street Journal*, 21 Feb. 2019.

<sup>96</sup> Alexander, D., 'South Korea: National Involvement in the Indian Ocean Region', *Future Directions International*, 3 Feb. 2012.

<sup>97</sup> Roehrig, T., 'South Korea's counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden', *Global Korea: South Korea's Contributions to International Security* (Council on Foreign Relations Press: New York, Oct. 2012), pp. 31–33.

<sup>98</sup> Roehrig (note 97).

<sup>99</sup> US Department of Defense, 'Assessment on US defense implication of China's expanding global access', Dec. 2018, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> Cooper, Z., 'Security implications of China's military presence in the Indian Ocean', CSIS Briefs, Mar. 2018.

<sup>101</sup> BBC Monitoring, 'Analysis: China's growing military ambition in Pakistan', 4 Mar. 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Abi-Habib, M., 'China's "Belt and Road" plan in Pakistan takes a military turn', *New York Times*, 19 Dec. 2018.

wider build-up of naval forces in the Indian Ocean.<sup>103</sup> On average, China is believed to have 6–8 warships in the Indian Ocean at any given time, while in the summer of 2018 the Indian Navy recorded the presence of 14 vessels.<sup>104</sup> Chinese submarine deployments, in particular, signal the country's ambitions, undercutting India's claim to be a regional net security provider.<sup>105</sup> China deployed its first submarine mission to the Indian Ocean in 2013. Indian military sources suggest that since then it has conducted two deployments annually, alternating between conventional and nuclear submarines.<sup>106</sup> China's developing military partnership with Pakistan, which now includes an offer to provide 8 Yuan-class Chinese submarines and 4 advanced frigates, is also seen by India to be part of a wider regional strategic ambition.<sup>107</sup>

The US Department of Defense predicts that the PLAN will have up to 351 vessels by 2020, providing the capability to sustain maritime operations across the deep-water areas of open oceans (blue-water capability). With more ships to follow, a further strengthening of the Chinese military in the Indian Ocean region seems likely.<sup>108</sup> This assessment is compounded by estimates from Chinese experts that by 2030 the enlarged PLAN will have 5 or 6 aircraft carriers, possibly including nuclear-powered ships, some of which would be likely to undertake deployments in the Indian Ocean.<sup>109</sup>

### **Japan, South Korea and Indo-Pacific security**

While counter-piracy operations initially offered a way to contribute to international security and expand the scope for Japanese overseas military activities, China's rise and growing military power have begun to shift the strategic equation for Japan's presence in the Horn. Japan has responded to China's growing international reach and military strength by emphasizing its own diplomatic, economic and security role in the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has been a leading supporter of a stronger and broader profile for Japanese security policy, including through his advocacy of the Indo-Pacific strategic concept. In 2007, Abe gave a speech to the Indian Parliament entitled 'Confluence of the Two Seas', which highlighted the coupling of the Pacific and Indian oceans in Japanese strategic thought for the first time.<sup>110</sup> Subsequently, Abe continued to advocate for an interlinking of Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean security.<sup>111</sup> In 2016, he presented the strategic concept of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific

<sup>103</sup> *Global Times* (note 81).

<sup>104</sup> Gurung, S. K., '14 Chinese navy ships spotted in Indian Ocean: Indian Navy monitoring locations', *Economic Times*, 12 July 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Singh, A., 'Decoding Chinese submarine "sightings" in South Asia', *Economic Times*, 15 Nov. 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Gurung (note 104).

<sup>107</sup> Singh (note 105); and Romaniuk, S. N., and Burgers, T., 'Pakistan's new generation of Chinese warships', *The Diplomat*, 26 Jan. 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Osborn, K., 'Aircraft carriers, stealth fighters and lots of missiles: China's military has arrived', *National Interest*, 27 Aug. 2018.

<sup>109</sup> Axe, D., 'China's naval future: 6 aircraft carriers?', *National Interest*, 7 Dec. 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Confluence of the two seas', Speech by HE Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, at the Parliament of the Republic of India, 22 Aug. 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Abe, S., 'Asia's democratic security diamond', Project Syndicate, 27 Dec. 2012.



Strategy’ in his opening speech at the 6th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD).<sup>112</sup>

The focus on the Indo-Pacific region reflects Japan’s foreign and security policy shift to maritime issues, including securing critical sea lanes and addressing traditional threats, notably China’s military rise, as well as non-traditional security in that connection. Within the context of efforts to reduce the constitutional restrictions on Japan’s security policy, security relations with the countries of the Indian Ocean and Africa have taken on increased significance.<sup>113</sup> As a part of this strategy, Japan has sought to enhance its military ties with India and has also deployed its navy, including its largest warships, to the Indian Ocean.<sup>114</sup> In 2018, Japan and India were reportedly in negotiation about a military logistics agreement that would potentially grant the Indian military access to Japan’s Djibouti facilities.<sup>115</sup>

While Horn security considerations remain a key motivation for the Japanese military presence in the region, increasingly Japan sees its base in Djibouti as a counterbalance to China’s regional military forces.<sup>116</sup> Thus, consolidation of Japan’s military presence in the Horn is integral to Japan’s wider strategic efforts to enable a greater regional and global role for the Japanese Self Defence Forces in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>117</sup> As Japan moves away from seven decades of state pacifism that have limited the country’s involvement in military interventions, the Indian Ocean is increasingly seen as an important military theatre—particularly as China pushes into the region. Japan is set to strengthen its military further with new capabilities that will provide stronger power projection capabilities across the Indian Ocean, notably in cooperation with India.<sup>118</sup>

Like Japan and China, South Korea has maintained a naval presence in the Gulf of Aden even though Somali piracy has declined significantly.<sup>119</sup> Its ships appear to be designed primarily to ensure a security presence along a key SLOC and to shadow the regional build-up of military forces by other Asian powers, notably China and Japan. In this way, the South Korean military forces in the Gulf of Aden form a further element in the expansion of the Indo-Pacific security space into the Horn of Africa region, even if South Korea maintains a distance from the geopolitical competition between China, the USA, Japan, India and Australia.<sup>120</sup> The rise of China as a major military force, notably its naval power, and the launch of the Belt and Road

<sup>112</sup> Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), 27 Aug. 2016.

<sup>113</sup> Nikkei Asian Review, ‘Japan makes its move in Indian Ocean power game’, 22 Aug. 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Lintner, B., ‘India, Japan joining forces to keep Indian Ocean calm’, *Asia Times*, 26 Oct. 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Woody, C., ‘2 of Asia’s biggest militaries are working on a deal that could give them an edge over China’, *Business Insider*, 22 Oct. 2018; and *Business Standard*, ‘India, Japan to begin talks on logistics agreement soon’, 27 Dec. 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Fujiwara, S., ‘Japan to expand SDF base in Djibouti in part to counter China’, *Asahi Shimbun*, 15 Nov. 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Rossiter, A., ‘The “free and open Indo-Pacific” strategy and Japan’s emerging security posture’, *Rising Powers Project*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Aug. 2018), p. 114.

<sup>118</sup> Withnall, A., ‘Japan to acquire aircraft carrier and cruise missiles as it moves away from “image of pacifism”’, *The Independent*, 18 Dec. 2018.

<sup>119</sup> Yonhap News Agency, ‘Gov’t to carry out counter-piracy drill’, 14 Mar. 2019.

<sup>120</sup> Yoon, S., ‘A free and open Indo-Pacific: The South Korean perspective’, *The Diplomat*, 21 Mar. 2019.



Initiative have further accelerated South Korea's plans to build a blue-water navy capable of operating in 'far seas'.<sup>121</sup>

### India and security in the Indian Ocean

In response to China's military build-up in the region and reflecting India's own increased focus on maritime security, as it develops external trade links as part of its economic rise, the Indian Ocean has become a new focus for Indian security. In 2015, India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, asserted the country's leading security role in the region in the form of the strategic concept of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).<sup>122</sup>

*In order to help balance China's growing regional military reach, India is seeking to fashion a web of plurilateral security partnerships in the Indian Ocean region*

In order to help balance China's growing regional military reach, India is seeking to fashion a web of plurilateral security partnerships in the Indian Ocean region, involving shared logistics agreements, exercises and interoperability with the USA, Japan, Australia, France, the UK and Indonesia. It has already concluded military logistics pacts with the USA and France that allow Indian warships access to US and French Indo-Pacific bases. India is reportedly in discussions with Japan to conclude an agreement that would potentially provide it with access to Japan's military facilities in Djibouti.<sup>123</sup>

The growth of security partnerships has been accompanied by efforts to improve political coordination, such as through the re-establishment of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between India, Japan, Australia and the USA.<sup>124</sup> In the eastern Indian Ocean, India is developing naval support facilities at Changi in Singapore and Sabang in Indonesia. As part of its expanding role in the Indian Ocean, India is aiming to increase its engagement in Africa, including through increased diplomatic outreach.<sup>125</sup> Japan and India have agreed to cooperate in the development of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.<sup>126</sup> India is also looking to bolster its defence ties with Africa, including in the Horn region.<sup>127</sup>

Furthermore, India is taking steps to strengthen its armed forces. Initial approval has been given for the construction of 56 new warships and 6 submarines over the next decade, as part of its goal to become a 212-vessel navy by 2027.<sup>128</sup> The Indian Navy is also undertaking 'recalibrated mission-based deployments' across the Indian Ocean, with regular patrols of choke points, which include the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.<sup>129</sup> India has not established military bases in the Horn, although its navy maintains a permanent presence. However, the western Indian Ocean has emerged

<sup>121</sup> Harris, B., 'South Korea plans blue-water naval fleet', *Financial Times*, 19 Oct. 2018.

<sup>122</sup> Modi, N., 'Text of the PM's remarks on the commissioning of coast ship Barracuda', 12 Mar. 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Woody (note 115).

<sup>124</sup> Smith, J., 'The return of the Indo-Pacific Quad', *National Interest*, 26 July 2018.

<sup>125</sup> Roche, E., 'Narendra Modi's 10 guiding principles for India Africa ties', *Livemint*, 25 July 2018.

<sup>126</sup> Prakash, A., 'The Asia-Africa growth corridor: Bringing together old partnerships and new initiatives', ORF Issue Brief, 25 Apr. 2018.

<sup>127</sup> Mora, E., 'India to host "first ever" military exercises with several African countries', *Breitbart*, 17 Jan. 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Pandit, R., 'China-wary India OKs 56 new warships, 6 new subs in 10 years', *Times of India*, 4 Dec. 2018.

<sup>129</sup> Dutta, S., "'Alphabet soup" of navy missions dots Indian Ocean', *Times of India*, 1 Apr. 2018.



as priority for its armed forces, notably following the opening of a Chinese base in Djibouti in 2017, and as the Sino-Pakistan security relationship has developed.

For India, the presence of Chinese forces in the Horn constitutes an extension of the Chinese military threat along Asian land borders into the maritime domain. The Djibouti–Gwadar naval axis, for example, is seen as a potential means of cutting off Indian energy supplies from the Gulf and East and West Africa. India has sought to respond to China's growing strength in the region by extending its own forces into the western Indian Ocean, establishing a port access agreement for its navy in Duqm, Oman, and making plans to establish a naval presence on Assumption Island in the Seychelles. It has also taken over the management of the Iranian port at Chabahar in order to establish a rival to Gwadar.<sup>130</sup> In 2007, India established a naval monitoring base in northern Madagascar.<sup>131</sup> Subsequently, it has announced plans to create a network of maritime radar facilities across the Indian Ocean, notably in the Seychelles, the Maldives, Mauritius and Sri Lanka, to protect the country's sea lanes of commerce from piracy, and to counter China's military presence in the region.<sup>132</sup>

In particular, India is seeking to strengthen its economic and security ties in the Indian Ocean, notably with key island states (the Maldives and the Seychelles), but also with other potential allies.<sup>133</sup> This will reinforce the strategic rivalry between India and China among third countries in the Indian Ocean. In 2018, the Maldives and Sri Lanka both endured political crises as the wider geopolitical competition between China and India helped to destabilize their domestic politics.<sup>134</sup> These developments highlight the growing risk of countries in the Indian Ocean region being caught between the strategic manoeuvring of larger regional powers.<sup>135</sup> If, as appears likely, the Sino-Indian rivalry continues and extends further into the western Indian Ocean in the coming years, the Horn of Africa also risks becoming part of the wider security competition developing in the region.

### Russia in the Horn

Russia maintains a regular but non-permanent naval presence in the Horn of Africa. In 2008, it committed a frigate to counter-piracy operations in the region but chose to operate independently of the international counter-piracy missions.<sup>136</sup> Sudan has emerged as a key Russian ally in the Horn

<sup>130</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'India takes over Iran's strategic Chabahar Port', 25 Dec. 2018.

<sup>131</sup> Pubby, M., 'India activates first listening post on foreign soil: radars in Madagascar', *Indian Express*, 18 July 2007.

<sup>132</sup> Panda, A., 'India unveils new coastal surveillance radar network', *The Diplomat*, 26 Mar. 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Burkett, N., 'New Delhi's foreign policy in the Indian Ocean', *Global Security Review*, 8 Mar. 2018.

<sup>134</sup> Pararajasingham, A., 'Sri Lanka's constitutional crisis: The geopolitical dimension', *The Diplomat*, 30 Oct. 2018; and Betigeri, A., 'Island diplomacy: A storm in the Maldives', Lowy Institute, 24 Oct. 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Brewster, D., *Between Giants: The Sino-Indian Cold War in the Indian Ocean*, Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI) Policy Paper (IFRI: Paris, Dec. 2018).

<sup>136</sup> Sputnik International, 'Russia sends warship to fight piracy near Somalia', 26 Sep. 2008.



region and is at the centre of a web of commercial, security and geopolitical interests that extends into other African countries.<sup>137</sup>

In June 2018, the Russian Ambassador to Sudan indicated that discussions were ongoing regarding the possible establishment of a logistics centre to support the Russian Navy operating in the region.<sup>138</sup> The Russian Prime

***Russia is not planning to project substantial naval force into the Indian Ocean through the Red Sea***

Minister approved a draft agreement between Russia and Sudan in December 2018 to simplify naval port visits.<sup>139</sup> Sudanese politicians have also spoken publicly about Sudan's support for the creation of a Russian Red Sea military base in the country.<sup>140</sup> It is likely that Russia is looking at additional port and logistics access in the region.<sup>141</sup> In August 2018, for example, Russia confirmed its intention to establish a naval logistics centre at an Eritrean port.<sup>142</sup>

Unlike the other European military powers France and the UK, Russia is not planning to project substantial naval force into the Indian Ocean through the Red Sea. Nevertheless, it aims to ensure that it can move its military into the region as part of ambitions to enhance its presence in key Horn countries, and to monitor the build-up of military force underway more broadly in the Indian Ocean, which is seen as a region of emerging great power competition.<sup>143</sup>

### **The European military pivot to the Indo-Pacific**

In response to the rising security competition in the Indo-Pacific region and ongoing instability in the Middle East, leading European military powers are devoting renewed attention to the Indian Ocean region, including the Gulf. With strong economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region, European powers are concerned to ensure their commercial interests and maritime trade routes. China's growing military power, its actions to assert control over the South China Sea, the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative as a strategic project, and moves by the USA and others to balance China are also pulling European countries into the region.<sup>144</sup>

France and the UK have made the biggest security commitment to the Indo-Pacific region. Naval deployments sent from Europe are being strengthened, including for freedom of navigation operations in the

<sup>137</sup> *East African*, 'More than just oil and gold informing Russia decision to back Bashir', 12 Mar. 2019.

<sup>138</sup> RIA Novosti, [The Russian Ambassador evaluates the prospect for the creation of a naval base in Sudan], 9 June 2018 (in Russian).

<sup>139</sup> Rulaws.ru, [Regulation dated 31 Dec. 2018 N 3051-r on the signing of the agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Sudan on a simplified procedure for visits by warships to the ports of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Sudan], 31 Dec. 2018 (in Russian).

<sup>140</sup> *Sudan Tribune*, 'Sudan says Russia could set up military base on Red Sea', 12 Jan. 2019.

<sup>141</sup> Tesfanews, 'Eritrea, Russia foreign ministers meet in Sochi', 31 Aug. 2018; and Latif Dahir, A., 'Russia is the latest world power eyeing the Horn of Africa', Quartz Africa, 3 Sep. 2018.

<sup>142</sup> Tesfanews (note 141); and Latif Dahir (note 141).

<sup>143</sup> Kuzmina, K., 'Russia and the Indian Ocean security and governance', *Modern Diplomacy*, 24 Mar. 2019.

<sup>144</sup> Hemmings, J, and Rogers, J., 'The South China Sea: Why it matters to "Global Britain"', Henry Jackson Society, Jan. 2019.





South China Sea.<sup>145</sup> These deployments are also the subject of increased cooperation among European powers.<sup>146</sup> In order to support these missions, existing overseas military bases are acquiring new roles and new bases are being established. The Gulf, in particular, is taking on increased geopolitical significance as European countries have built up their military presence there in recent years, primarily to combat the Islamic State. These foreign forces and facilities are now becoming part of the military infrastructure to project forces into the Indo-Pacific region.

The shift of European military powers to projecting military force into the Indian and Pacific oceans highlights the growing significance of the Red Sea and the choke point of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait for European navies. Ensuring secure access through the Red Sea for the transit of military forces from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean is critical for Europe to be able to project power into the Indo-Pacific region.

France has maintained a long-standing military presence in the Indian Ocean, notably at its military bases in Djibouti and on Réunion and Mayotte. Reflecting its extensive overseas territories, France has been at the forefront of strategic thinking about the Indo-Pacific region as security there has begun to evolve.<sup>147</sup> As a result, it has given increased importance to maritime security and defence in recent years. The French Navy conducts an annual extended naval deployment to the Indo-Pacific region (the Jeanne D'Arc naval task force), which includes naval participation by other European and Asian navies, as well as the USA.<sup>148</sup> In 2019, France will deploy its aircraft carrier to the region, accompanied by warships from the UK, Denmark and Portugal.<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, France strengthened its military forces East of Suez in 2009, when it inaugurated a permanent military presence in the UAE. In recent years, the French Government has sought to enhance its security ties with India, notably through naval cooperation and a logistics agreement.<sup>150</sup> This has allowed French warships to dock at Indian ports.<sup>151</sup>

In March 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron undertook a visit to the Horn of Africa, including to Djibouti, in order to reassert France's position in the face of rising Chinese regional influence.<sup>152</sup> He also sought to build a new security relationship with Ethiopia, including through support for the recreation of the Ethiopian Navy.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Naval Today, 'France, UK announce South China Sea freedom of navigation operations', 6 June 2018.

<sup>146</sup> Scimia, E., 'French and British navies draw closer in the Pacific. Should China worry?', *South China Morning Post*, 29 Sep. 2018.

<sup>147</sup> Scott, D., 'French maritime strategic thought on the Indo-Pacific', Center for International Maritime Security, 31 Mar. 2017.

<sup>148</sup> Naval Today, 'French Navy starts annual Jeanne D'Arc mission', 27 Feb. 2018; and Naval Today, 'Helicopter carrier, frigate kick off French Navy's annual Asia-Pacific mission', 27 Feb. 2019.

<sup>149</sup> Doornbos, C., 'French aircraft carrier set for lengthy patrol of Mediterranean, Indo-Pacific', *Stars and Stripes*, 25 Feb. 2019; and Naval News, 'Danish frigate *Niels Juel* to join French Navy carrier strike group', 20 Feb. 2019.

<sup>150</sup> *Straits Times*, 'France, India deepen defence ties with key security deal', 11 Mar. 2018.

<sup>151</sup> Chaudhury, D., R., 'French Navy displays commitment to balance China in Indian Ocean through port call in Mumbai', *Economic Times*, 25 Jan. 2019.

<sup>152</sup> Irish, J., 'Macron warns of Chinese risk to African sovereignty', Reuters, 12 Mar. 2019.

<sup>153</sup> Irish, J., 'Ethiopia, France sign military, navy deal, turn "new page" in ties', Reuters, 12 Mar. 2019.



***The USA's security priorities in the Horn of Africa are currently shifting in response to the growing role of global and regional powers in the region, and in Africa more broadly, notably the rising security profile of China***

While the UK has maintained a long-standing military presence in Kenya, its military footprint in the Indo-Pacific region was fundamentally reduced following the decision to withdraw its forces East of Suez in the early 1970s.

In recent years, however, the UK has started to rebuild a regional military presence. The Gulf has been a particular area of focus and, in 2018, the UK opened a naval base in Bahrain.<sup>154</sup> From 2019, the UK will have 'an enduring presence' in the form of a frigate permanently deployed to the Gulf, in addition to the existing commitment of naval units (minehunters) in the region.<sup>155</sup> The UK maintains an airbase at Al Udeid airbase in Qatar.<sup>156</sup>

In February 2019, the UK and Oman signed a joint defence agreement. The agreement was concluded following the opening in 2018 of the British Joint Logistics Support Base in Duqm, which will enable the supply of British naval vessels at the port. From October to November 2018, the UK conducted its largest military exercise in the Gulf region for 17 years, bringing 5500 troops plus naval ships and planes to Oman. A new Omani–British Joint Training Area is due to open during 2019.

Furthermore, the British Defence Minister has indicated that additional military bases are likely to open in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>157</sup> These bases are designed to strengthen the UK's security presence in key regions, but also to establish a string of bases that will allow it to support naval deployments from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, notably including the South China Sea. The UK has announced plans to deploy a carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific region in 2021, as part of a reassertion of power projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific regions.<sup>158</sup> The mission will consist of the new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier together with supporting ships, including from other European countries.<sup>159</sup>

### **The USA, the Horn region and strategic access**

The USA's security priorities in the Horn of Africa are currently shifting in response to the growing role of global and regional powers in the region, and in Africa more broadly, notably the rising security profile of China. In March 2018, the head of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), General Thomas D. Waldhauser, indicated that he expected more Chinese military bases to be established in Africa.<sup>160</sup>

In December 2018, the administration of US President Donald J. Trump announced a new strategy for Africa that focuses on great power competition with China and Russia, alongside advancing US economic interests and

<sup>154</sup> Aziz El Yakoubi and Dadouch, S., 'UK opens permanent military base in Bahrain', Reuters, 5 Apr. 2018.

<sup>155</sup> Naval Today, 'HMS Montrose first Royal Navy frigate to forward-deploy to Middle East', 29 Oct. 2018.

<sup>156</sup> Al Jazeera, 'US, UK affirm long-haul stay in Qatar's military base', 23 Oct. 2017.

<sup>157</sup> Williamson, G., 'Defence in Global Britain', British Ministry of Defence, 11 Feb. 2019.

<sup>158</sup> Keck, Z., 'Britain is planning to send an aircraft carrier to the South China Sea', *National Interest*, 24 July 2018.

<sup>159</sup> Naval Today, 'Dutch warship to join HMS Queen Elizabeth on first operational deployment', 28 Oct. 2018.

<sup>160</sup> Vandiver, J., 'AFRICOM chief: Expect more Chinese bases in Africa', *Stars and Stripes*, 6 Mar. 2018.



countering violent extremist organizations. However, while the USA remains committed to combatting violent extremist organizations, it has signalled that it will reduce its military forces committed to counterterrorism in Africa.<sup>161</sup>

Speaking on 13 December at the launch of the new Africa policy, the US National Security Adviser, John Bolton, expressed concern about China's growing role in Djibouti, which he noted could affect the 'balance of power' in the Horn, especially given the country's position 'astride major arteries of maritime trade between Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia'.<sup>162</sup> Bolton also indicated that the USA would re-evaluate its support for UN peace operations and would 'seek to streamline, reconfigure, or terminate missions that are unable to meet their own mandate or facilitate lasting peace'.<sup>163</sup>

The 2019 AFRICOM posture statement echoed US concerns about China's economic and security approach to Africa, noting that 'China has most successfully employed this model in Djibouti, holding 80 percent of the Government of Djibouti's debt, where access through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal remains a US strategic imperative'.<sup>164</sup>

In comments to the Senate Armed Services Committee on the posture statement, Waldhauser highlighted US concerns about ensuring strategic access to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait with the growing presence of China, Russia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia on the western shore of the Red Sea.<sup>165</sup>

## VII. The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa

The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa have emerged gradually over the past three decades. Today, four distinct external security engagements overlap and interlink simultaneously in the region, creating a complex and increasingly unstable environment: support for African regional and international multilateral actions; efforts to combat non-traditional security threats; the expansion of the Gulf and Middle Eastern security space into the Horn; and the integration of the Horn region into Indo-Pacific security dynamics. The external security engagement is also continually evolving, reflecting the diversity of actors and shifting security interests.

After two decades where the main focus of external security engagement was on non-traditional security threats and the internal conflicts of the Horn, underpinned by internationally sanctioned and multinational mechanisms, the Horn is now becoming a venue for the spillover of external competition. Increasingly the region's internal security challenges are being overlain by

<sup>161</sup> Copp, T., 'Understaffed AFRICOM cutting hundreds more troops', *Stars and Stripes*, 21 Feb. 2019.

<sup>162</sup> White House, Remarks by National Security Advisor Ambassador John R. Bolton on the Trump Administration's New Africa Strategy, 13 Dec. 2018.

<sup>163</sup> White House (note 162).

<sup>164</sup> United States Africa Command, Statement of General Thomas D. Waldhauser, United States Marine Corps Commander United States Africa Command Before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, 7 Feb. 2019, p. 34.

<sup>165</sup> United States Africa Command, Transcript: Gen. Thomas Waldhauser and Adm. Craig Faller Remarks at Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on AFRICOM and SOUTHCOM, 7 Feb. 2019.

strategic competition between leading international security actors from the Middle East and the Gulf, and the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Contemporary external security dynamics of the Horn**

In the decade following the end of the cold war, the role of external security actors in the Horn was largely focused on supporting internationally mandated peace operations and the establishment of APSA. This involved financing, technical assistance, capacity building and diplomacy that supported the engagement of international and regional multilateral operations. This security paradigm continues today, notably in South Sudan and Somalia, but it no longer constitutes the main mechanism for external security actors in the region.<sup>166</sup>

The onset of the ‘global war on terrorism’ in 2001 and the international focus on piracy and maritime crime from 2008 onwards led to the direct re-engagement of external security forces in the region, particularly the USA. The US military base in Djibouti has acted as a hub for counterterrorism operations that have spread across the Horn, West and East Africa, and the Arabian peninsula, as well as into adjacent maritime domains. The USA has operated in the Horn for nearly two decades, relying on a network of military facilities, special forces, drone operations and bilateral cooperation with African militaries.

US counterterrorism operations in the Horn have often been conducted in coordination with multilateral security missions, notably AMISOM, but the USA has provided the core military capabilities and taken the lead on regional strategy. US allies have also engaged in support of the USA’s actions, deploying their own militaries in counterterrorism operations and carrying out training and capacity-building missions, as well as financing regional multilateral peace operations. European countries, Turkey and the Gulf states have concentrated, in particular, on Somalia and efforts to rebuild its army, as well as to improve the counterterrorism capabilities of its neighbours. This has led to the establishment of a variety of military bases and security relations in the region.

From 2008, the international community became involved in countering the rise of piracy in the Horn, led by the USA and its allies, including through NATO and EU operations, and within the framework of the Combined Maritime Forces. Counter-piracy operations also served as the basis for the deployment of other navies to the Horn, notably from Asia. Although piracy incidents have declined substantially, foreign navies have continued to deploy to the region.<sup>167</sup>

The missions have also functioned as a justification for the creation of military bases in the region, which have taken on wider security roles. Over time, the official mandates of the original counter-piracy operations have been broadened to include maritime crime and humanitarian operations. Unofficially, the naval missions are also intended to secure SLOCs, engage in naval diplomacy, and build and maintain the capacity to project naval force.

<sup>166</sup> AMISOM, ‘EU pledges continued support to AMISOM on the implementation of key programmes under the Somalia Transition Plan’, 5 Apr. 2019.

<sup>167</sup> EUNAVFOR, ‘Key facts and figures’, European Union External Action Service.



Over the last decade, Middle Eastern and Gulf security actors have extended their presence into the Horn. Initially, the main driver of this expansion was the security contest between Iran and the GCC states. The onset of the war in Yemen in 2015 then greatly accelerated the military engagement by GCC states, including the establishment of bases in the region. In general, political fragmentation within the Middle East and the GCC has resulted in increasing competition for influence in the Horn.

Furthermore, the Middle Eastern and Gulf military presence has become intertwined with an interest in establishing port infrastructure and creating business opportunities in the Horn, and beyond into continental Africa. Asian powers have followed a similar approach, leading to an intermixing of commercial and security competition in the Horn.

The rise of non-traditional security threats was the original catalyst for the arrival and consolidation of an Asian security engagement with the Horn. However, this presence is now acquiring an independent security significance. The opening of a Chinese military base in 2017 led to a reassessment of China's military presence in the region, which is now viewed more as part of a wider Indo-Pacific security competition than concerned with countering non-traditional security threats, notably by the USA, India and Japan. With military engagements in the Horn being linked to the emerging strategic competition involving China, Japan, the USA, India, South East Asian countries, Australia and European countries, the region is taking on international geopolitical significance as a distinct subregion of the larger Indo-Pacific security region.

Therefore, today the Horn finds itself linked to various Strings of Pearls, consisting of networks of military bases and dual-use ports, as a wide variety of military powers seek to build the necessary military infrastructure and security relationships to project power into key parts of the Indian Ocean. For the USA, the significance of the Horn is also shifting from counterterrorism to a strategic location within the emerging Indo-Pacific security agenda.

### **The shift to geopolitics in the Horn**

The increased engagement in the Horn of Africa by external security actors, both to pursue local and international security agendas, is driving structural changes in the nature of Horn regional security. International efforts to combat non-traditional security threats and civil wars in the region have led to an external militarization of the Horn, with new military bases and facilities, as well as naval and air forces deployed to the region. Military interests in the Horn have also become closely intertwined with commercial interests, notably ports and logistics infrastructure, leading to increased international competition along the coasts of the Red Sea and East Africa.

As a result, the Horn littoral has become a key interface between external security actors and the Horn countries. This is shifting the regional agenda beyond a traditional continental focus to having to take account of maritime security issues too. With increased interest in maritime trade, the build-up of naval forces to combat maritime crime, and military forces in the Horn being linked to security competition in the Middle East, the Gulf and the Indo-Pacific region, the issue of access to the Red Sea is becoming a strategic one for a wide variety of countries. In fact, this development is calling into

question the maritime security order that has existed as a result of two centuries of Anglo-American naval supremacy around the Horn.

### **Growing risks of proxy security relations and competition in the Horn**

*The growing role of external security actors in the Horn region also presents major challenges for existing African and Horn regional security structures, which are poorly adapted to the new external security politics of the region*

While the build-up of foreign military forces has been destabilizing for parts of the Horn of Africa, the forces deployed in the region are not currently openly hostile towards each other, which has permitted the establishment of several bases in Djibouti in close proximity.<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, with extra-regional competition in the Middle East, the Gulf and the Indo-Pacific region spilling over into the Horn, tensions are increasing between external security actors.

Over the next decade, the Horn's international security linkages are likely to strengthen further, notably in regard to the Indian Ocean region. Alongside the substantial existing US forces, Asian and European militaries are likely to enhance their presence in the Horn, as well as in adjacent areas in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Middle Eastern and Gulf states are also aiming to establish a permanent military-commercial presence in the Horn.

The emergence of crowded international security politics in the Horn of Africa raises the prospect of proxy struggles, growing geopolitical tensions and a further extension of externally driven security agendas in the region. Horn countries could increasingly face the challenge of being pressured to align with or join a particular security grouping. The destabilization that came in 2018 to islands in the Indian Ocean as a result of Chinese–Indian strategic competition, and to Somalia through the extension of Middle Eastern and Gulf tensions, risks becoming an established feature of the Horn. The growing role of external security actors in the Horn region also presents major challenges for existing African and Horn regional security structures, which are poorly adapted to the new external security politics of the region. Increasingly, APSA will have to find ways to manage maritime and naval issues, intracontinental and transcontinental security, and growing regional and great power competition, or risk being marginalized by alternative frameworks, ad hoc security coalitions and bilateral relations.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Lintner, B., 'Djibouti: The Casablanca of a new cold war', *Asia Times*, 28 Nov. 2018.

<sup>169</sup> See Melvin, N., 'Managing the new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region', SIPRI Policy Brief, Apr. 2019.



## Abbreviations

AFRICOM	Africa Command
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AU	African Union
CJTf-HOA	Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa
CTF	Combined Task Force
CPEC	China–Pakistan Economic Corridor
EU	European Union
EUNAVFOR	Operation Atalanta , EU Naval Force Atalanta
EUTM	EU Training Mission,
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEF-HOA	Operation Enduring Freedom-Horn of Africa
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army Navy (China)
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SLOCs	sea lines of communication
SNA	Somali National Army
UNAMID	UN–AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNMIS	UN Mission in Sudan
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia

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# THE NEW EXTERNAL SECURITY POLITICS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA REGION

NEIL MELVIN

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