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**THE NEW GLOBAL SUPERPOWER GEO-STRATEGIC AND GEO-ECONOMICS  
RIVALRY IN THE RED SEA AND ITS IMPLICATION ON PEACE AND SECURITY  
IN THE HORN OF AFRICA**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyses the recent year's port and military base competitions and rivalries between international, regional, and local powers in the Red Sea and its implication for the peace and security of the Horn of Africa region. The superpower's global ambitions, military capability, and political and economic influence made the Horn of Africa a pivotal role in geopolitics in shaping the security and economic trajectory. In this context, Security developments in the Horn are being integrated into geopolitical and geo-economics agendas that stretch far beyond the immediate region. On the other hand, the uptick in engagement by external actors, and their attendant interests, alliances, and agendas offers opportunities for development and integration, but it also poses considerable risks since the Horn of Africa region is vulnerable to intra- and interstate conflict. Further, it raises the prospect of proxy struggles and growing geopolitical interest and tensions which is an obstacle to conflict resolutions and lasting peace in the region. Thus the articles argue Rather than seeking to undermine one another, the regimes of the Horn have increasingly tended to support one another. In addition, this paper recommends regional institutions such as IGAD need to reconsider dynamics within the Red Sea in line to build confidence among actors to advance common economic and security interests and ensure the future development of the shared interest.

**INTRODUCTION**

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century and long after the end of the cold war, brief international disengagements and indifference and the changing shift from the global “war on terror”, geopolitical, strategic, and economic realities are increasingly leading to a new global superpower competition in Africa. The Red Sea and Horn of Africa region is one of the most geo-strategically important regions of the world. One U.S. defense officer referred to the Red Sea as the "Interstate-95 of the planet," since it has long been a vital link in a network of international waterways that stretches from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean to the Pacific (Juneau, 2021). The Red Sea, prized by conquerors from Alexander to Napoleon, has long been a focus of intense geopolitical interest due to its importance to marine trade and its chokepoints. The Red Sea arena's geopolitical environment has seen a significant transformation during the past five years (Yusuf et al., 2022).

The current activity of superpower interactions in the area demonstrates how the Red Sea has quickly developed into a scene of fresh geopolitical intrigue as engagement between Gulf and African governments defies preconceived notions and dissolves borders (Juneau, 2021). The Middle

Eastern nations of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Turkey are competing for supremacy, power, and influence in the Horn of Africa based on state actors. Additionally, there are international players like the United States, China, Russia, and maybe the European Union competing in the new race for Africa in the twenty-first century. What might be considered "the new geopolitics" also has the significant feature of being multidimensional in its basic qualities. The recent superpower competition includes wide-ranging activities including geo-economic, diplomatic, military, ideological, and geopolitical dynamics that shape foreign policy and political developments in the region (Erku et al., 2021).

Due to the strategic significance of the Red Sea and the rivalry for influence over the states that border it and depend on it for trade and transit, the Horn of Africa is now an essential component of and the link between the security systems of the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific, and the Mediterranean (Erku et al., 2021); (Mabera, 2020). The Red Sea geopolitical map is beginning to include strategic regions of the western coast and the Horn of Africa, and Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, and Eritrea have changed into battlegrounds for a fresh scramble in the Horn of Africa (Erku et al., 2021). As several military forces compete for influence, the Horn is now connected to several Strings of Pearls, which are networks of military bases and dual-use ports (Melvin, 2019). The rising expansion of and competition among global and regional power in port development in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor have raised several issues about its implications for the already fragile and conflict-ridden Horn of Africa region (Vertin, 2020).

The emerging competition among middle eastern powers and the global superpower rivalry in the Horn of Africa is intensive in its engagement, multi-dimensional and complicated in its nature, often unpredictable in its futurity and far-reaching in its implications for the peace, security, and international relations of the region. This article analyses the geostrategic relevance and security issues of the Horn Region, the geo-economics relevance of the Red Sea; new security, economic and strategic developments in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, and their implication on peace and security in the Horn of Africa. It then moves to propose approaches to regional security and economic development in the region to minimize the risk of conflict and increase opportunities for cooperation. Finally, it forward recommendations for the states in the region in light of changing geo-strategic dynamics in the Red Sea region.

### **An Overview of Geostrategic Relevance and Security Issues of the Horn Region**

The Horn of Africa is the northeastern region of the African continent that faces the Red Sea to the east, the Indian Ocean to the southeast, and the Nile Basin to the west (Mesfin, 2015). The geostrategic relevance of the HoA is primarily structural, rather than a new or recent phenomenon. Yet, since the turn of the millennium both international and African developments greatly raised external interest in the region (Carbone, 2020). First, the region has been lying on the coastlines of the Gulf of Aden, Bab el- Mandeb, and the Red Sea, a route that is one of the most important passages for world naval trade. Second, the region is also considered as the most important entry point to the African market by the leading countries of Asia and the Middle East. Third, the substantial population of the region which consists of over 200 million people contributes to the potential power base in securing their interests in global politics (Erku et al., 2021). The region's geostrategic location also links Muslim and Christian Africa (Tank, 2017). Today, an expanding number of global, emerging, and regional powers have become increasingly engaged in the region.

The overarching concern is the protection of key, strategic sea trade routes in a historically turbulent area straddling distinct world regions (Carbone, 2020).

In history due to its geostrategic importance, the Horn of Africa has always been given security attention (De Waal, 2019). In terms of security, the Horn is a conflict-stricken region that poses enormous constraints (Makonnen & Lulie, 2014). A regional security complex, which is described as "a group of states whose major security preoccupations and concerns are so interconnected that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another" (Buzan, 2008), can be seen of as being in the Horn of Africa. The region's conflicts occur at several levels, including direct inter-state wars and intra-state armed conflicts, and civil wars as well as inter-communal conflicts. For instance, in the course of the cold war era, the Horn of Africa was constantly affected by conflicts, ideological confrontations, territorial disputes, cross-border destabilization, and continued militarization which was mainly a battleground between the United States and the former Soviet Union (Mesfin, 2015). As a result, the countries of the Horn have fought many proxy wars against each other by engaging in support for each other's insurgency movements.

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 nontraditional 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 (Melvin, 2019). The Horn of Africa has recently once again becomes a contested region between international as well as regional actors. As a result, the region attract the attention of the US, Europe, China, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Israel, South Africa, and Egypt. These new relationships will potentially present new security challenges and opportunities to the region (Tank, 2017). The historical patterns of amity and enmity among the countries of the region, coupled with multifaceted layers of security interdependence have constantly animated the foreign policies of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia, particularly about state formation, regime security and visions of regional order. over the past decades: a civil war in Somalia and continued attacks by Al-Shabaab; piracy off the coast of Somalia; civil war in Darfur and South Sudan; proximity to the civil war in Yemen; political instability and ethnic unrest in Ethiopia; and, not least, the securitization of the Red Sea, as exemplified by Djibouti, which now hosts more foreign military bases than any other country in the world. There are currently about 10 foreign military bases in the region (Dahir, 2022).

### **The Geo-Economics Relevance of the Red Sea**

Around 10% of worldwide trade flows via the waters of the Red Sea, which is sandwiched between two continents and borders six African and four Middle Eastern nations. Currently, more than 12% of the world's seaborne cargo and 40% of commerce between Asia and Europe pass via the Red Sea (Martin, 2021). Around 80% of all worldwide trade is transported by marine routes (Martin, 2021). Three maritime chokepoints—the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Strait of Bab al-Mandab—that decide which nations in the area have access to this important trade route add to the high degree of susceptibility to chokepoints. Many global actors are deeply concerned about these chokepoints. Free and unrestricted access and freedom of passage are important for the economies of Southeast Asia, China, Japan, South Korea, India, and the European Union (Narbone & Widdershoven, 2021). The Red Sea's strategic location near several leading energy producers explains the region's current prosperity and foresees continued economic progress. Egypt and Sudan

alone generate more than 500,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd) in Africa. Saudi Arabia and Oman generate more than 12 million bpd of oil on the Middle Eastern side. Total oil production from countries including the United States, Russia, China, Libya, and Iran exceeds 50 million barrels per day (bpd) combined with around 3.5 billion cubic feet per day of liquid natural gas daily. In addition to the \$700 billion in seaborne trade that currently travels along the route annually, power players in the area and beyond have been talking about Beijing's new maritime Silk Road, Africa's growing middle class, and oil discoveries in the Horn. The deep-water ports, highways, and railroads required to operate such a network are also essential.

The red sea also serves as a strategic zone a core node in the global energy market and is inextricably linked both in political terms and concerning its significance as a transit route to the competition over hydrocarbon resource extraction in the eastern Mediterranean and in the African interior. This competition encompasses both US-China competition, whereby the United States should seek to preempt a Chinese monopoly on the extractive resource sector, and competition among regional actors such as Egypt, Israel, the UAE, and Turkey. The A cargo ship docked at the port in Hodeida, Yemen, on September 29, 2018 (Erku et al., 2021). Additionally, since 2010, Middle Eastern and Asian nations have spent billions of dollars acquiring ports and land to set up military outposts to get better access to the Red Sea. Suakin Island, a historic Ottoman outpost in the Sudan, is being developed by Turkey. To build a port from which a ferry may go from the Sudanese mainland to the Saudi port of Jeddah, Qatar is investing \$4 billion in the area (Meester et al., 2018). Similarly, in 2018, the United Arab Emirates put down \$450 million to develop Berbera's port, as part of an effort to counter Qatari, Turkish and Russian influence in the region. Generally, Gulf Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have increasingly embraced an aggressive growth, investment, and development model for the broader Middle East and an expanding sphere of influence north to Jordan and Egypt, south to Yemen, and southwest to the vital trade corridor around the Arabian Sea toward the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea (Luigi and Cyril, 2021).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a method that involves an in-depth qualitative analysis of the role of global and regional actors related to rivalry in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. This analysis will include case studies, interviews, and document analysis to understand the dynamics, objectives, and strategies used by these actors in achieving their interests. Through interviews with key stakeholders, such as government officials, diplomats, security experts, and regional academics, the research will gain first-hand insights into geo-strategic and geo-economic rivalries in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. These interviews will help in understanding their views and perceptions on security and peace issues in the region. Secondary Data Analysis: This study will collect and analyze secondary data from sources such as government reports, intelligence reports, and other publications related to rivalries in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. This data will provide the context needed to understand the peace and security implications of the rivalry.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **New Security, Economic, and strategic developments in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea**

#### **A. The Geopolitics of Ports in the Horn of Africa**

Broadly speaking, the main activity of ports in history has been transferring goods from ships to other means of transport and vice versa. Due to lower transaction and transportation costs, ports also serve as nodes for production and manufacturing. For these reasons, ports often form the centerpiece of a country's overall economic plan, especially in developing nations. For over 35 years, maritime strategy and port development in the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea corridor, and the Gulf of Aden showed no significant change. Eritrea looked inward, neglecting its coast, Djibouti flourished, and lucratively embraced Ethiopia's trade, overseas investors, and foreign military bases and broadly Somalia's shores became synonymous with piracy (Erku et al., 2021).

However, in the last five years, Given the strategic position of the Horn, this competition has led to a securitization of the race for ports. For instance, in 2016 and 2017, the UAE negotiated agreements to spend \$442 million to develop the Berbera port in Somaliland and \$336 million to develop the Bosaso port in Puntland, respectively (Steviss & Fitch, 2016). 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 (Melvin, 2019). In the race for port developments in the Horn of Africa, China as a global superpower is the predominant actor in this region with its heavy investments in the Horn of African ports linking with its global flagship infrastructure project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The ports in the Horn of Africa play a key role in China's expanding network of infrastructure projects linking China with Europe, East Africa, and the broader Middle Eastern region. Forming the backbone of China's "Maritime Silk Road," investments in African ports provide a gateway to the region's trade and economic development, empower China with political leverage and clout on the continent, and provide a foothold for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) activities (Henry, 2016).

China is the key actor in the development and financing of mega infrastructure projects in the Horn of Africa. Djibouti's major port development initiatives are being financed and led by Chinese transnational companies. Its half a billion dollar Multi-Purpose Port (MPP) with new container and cargo facilities at Doraleh is managed and partly owned by the Chinese Merchants Group (CMG). Given the rise of China as an economic superpower and the largest trading partner for Africa, port investments are part and parcel of the broader Chinese commercial supremacy in the Horn (Erku et al., 2021).

The other important actor in the new geopolitics of competition and rivalry for ports, bases, and resources in the Horn of Africa is the UAE. The UAE's regional infrastructure conglomerate Dubai Ports World (DP World), of which the government is the largest shareholder, signed its first agreement in the region in 2006 to develop Djibouti's Doraleh port. The company is one of the world's largest logistics and maritime firms with the capacity in directing operations to countries cementing the UAE's place in this strategically significant region.

In the new geopolitical competition involving infrastructure development including logistics and transportation, the UAE government plays a huge role. In its July 19, 2018, Middle East and Africa edition the Economist magazine described the development in the region as the UAE's foreign policy as the scramble to control ports in the Horn of Africa in the broader Red Sea Scramble. Despite DP World's loss of the concession to operate Djibouti's Doraleh container terminal in 2018, the company maintains a strong presence in the Horn. DP World operates the port of Berbera in Somaliland and the port of Bosaso in semi-autonomous Puntland. Here it is

important to note that there is a necessary link between DP World's private and commercial interests and the Emirati foreign policy despite the former's insistence that it acts independently. The interlocking relationship between state and private capital, the growing authority of Abu Dhabi over political decision-making, and an increasingly expansionist foreign policy have all served to ensure that the activities of the DP World continue to move in lockstep with the "strategic interests of the Emiratis.

Dubai Ports World has been buying controlling interests in numerous ports, profiting from the fast-growing economies of East Africa, while also consolidating its extended maritime security strategy (De Waal, 2019). A key driver of the engagement in the Horn by Turkey, Qatar, Iran, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia has, however, been regional and international geo-economic and geopolitical competition with each other (Melvin, 2019). Another driving interest is the Blue Economy, including the development of trade corridors, which is important for the Gulf States, in this regard Dubai World is a relevant player in the Horn of Africa. Dubai World is the Holding of Dubai, founded by Emir Muhammad bin Rashid al Maktoum in 2006. Furthermore, the Arab Gulf states are pursuing ambitious plans to diversify their economies and see the Horn of Africa as an ideal region for future investment. Already the GCC states have invested in more than 430 projects in the Horn of Africa since 2000. Their total aid to and direct investment in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Djibouti has amounted to just under \$18 billion since 2003 (Meester et al., 2018).

The other two key regional actors shaping the new geopolitical dynamics of ports are Qatar and Turkey. The Qatar-Turkey alliance in the Horn of Africa is most visible in Somalia where the UAE faced several challenges with the Mogadishu-based Federal Government. The UAE's regional rival has indicated via Qatar Ports Management Company that it will build a new port in the Northern Somali town of Hobyo (Fakude, 2018). The Somali port is important due to its proximity to the Babel-Mandab Strait, which is one of the most important sea crossing points in the world with the potential for access to international markets. Turkey is the other key actor in the region. It has also rapidly enlarged its footprint in the Horn of Africa since 2011 – most notably in Somalia. Turkey's increasingly ambitious foreign policy and growing presence in the Horn of Africa is considered a factor of both its own domestic drivers and strategic interests in the region. Qatar's regional partner, Turkey, with its strong ties to the Federal Government of Somalia, already manages the port of Mogadishu and the country's airport via Turkish companies.

In the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is the other key actor interested in the business of ports given its external trade heavily relies on seaports. In post-1991, with the independence of Eritrea, Ethiopia was forced to pay the painful price of the geopolitical reality of being one of the few landlocked countries in the world with economic and political implications. With its evergrowing population, rising demand, fast-expanding economy, and landlocked geography, Ethiopia has short-term and long-term interest strategic interest to access all of these ports on the Horn and the Indian Ocean to conduct its international trade. For the Government of Ethiopia, diversification of ports and reducing the overreliance on Djibouti has become a new foreign policy and national security priority for its fast-growing economic development projects and population. After the Ethio-Eritrea war of 1998, Ethiopia became over-dependent on neighboring Djibouti for its international trade creating strategic and national security vulnerability for the country.

Recent Ethiopia's interest in other neighboring countries' ports including Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, and Somalia's Somaliland certainly makes sense from a geostrategic perspective and foreign policy perspective. The 2018 Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement has created a new geo-political opportunity for both countries for port investments in rehabilitating the Eritrean ports of Assab and Massawa. The Abiy administration has also signed deals with Sudan for access to Port Sudan, in a bid to diversify its port outlets and reduce port fees and create new options for Ethiopian shipping interests. The country has also agreed on a deal with the self-declared Somali state of Somaliland for a 19% stake in the port of Berbera which includes a plan to build a road from its border to the port involving the 51% stake in the UAE.

### **B. The Geopolitics of Military Bases in the Horn Foreign**

Military base (FMB) refers to an area on land or on the sea beyond a sovereign state's jurisdiction, which is stationed with a certain number of armed forces having military activities, organized institutions, and military facilities. Strategically speaking, it's an important aspect of military power projection in international relations, a springboard to make military operations, and military interventions, safeguard overseas interests, showcase soft power, and enhance political influence abroad. A primary observation of the Horn of Africa's security landscape after the beginning of the 21st century indicates, the ever-increasing involvement of foreign powers in the regional security complex of the Horn of Africa involving different means, mechanisms, and methods including but not limited to the establishment of military installations, bases, training, and funding (Erku et al., 2021).

#### **The Foreign Military Bases in the Horn of Africa**

Ten foreign military bases are already established in the Horn of Africa by various powers based on their hierarchical levels, though many of them are in Djibouti. Accordingly, the powers are arranged as follows based on the (Buzan, 2008) classification. They are military base by regional powers, military base by superpowers, and military base by great powers. Below each of them are discussed separately.

#### **Military Bases by Regional Powers**

Regional powers look like great with high competence in their regions but do not register much in a wide-ranging way on the world stage (Buzan, 2008). In line with this, the security engagement of Middle Eastern and Gulf States in the Horn of Africa has undergone a steady evolution over the past decade (Melvin, 2019). The Horn Africa and the Middle East are two regions but highly interconnected. The central part of these two regions, the Red Sea, is the main connector of the sub-regions. The Gulf States increased their presence in the Horn of Africa Initially; the main driver of the expansion was the security contest between Iran and the GCC states (Ghorzang et al., 2021). 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 (Erku et al., 2021).

In the Horn of Africa not only the Gulf States but Egypt, Turkey and also and Iran – compete in building military bases. Similar to the eastern Mediterranean, Middle Eastern rivalries have been exported to the Horn of Africa, where Turkey, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are vying for control (Erku et al., 2021) The UAE staged operations in Yemen out of a base in Eritrea and reportedly pursued building another in Somaliland, the largely autonomous northern region of Somalia (Gardner, 2020). Saudi Arabia has reportedly sought a base in Djibouti and has been active diplomatically, going so far as to convene the Red Sea Forum in

2018 to position itself as the center of gravity in a region that includes the volatile Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, the diplomatic split within the Gulf Cooperation Council was exported to the Horn, as Turkey and Qatar bolstered their presence in Somalia, which hosts Turkey's largest overseas military facility (Gavin, 2021). Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the UAE, and Qatar have increased their engagement in the Horn of Africa significantly in recent years for a host of economic, political, and geostrategic reasons (USIP, 2020). The Middle Eastern and Gulf states have pursued „economic statecraft“, using strategic economic investments to achieve their political, military, and economic aims in the region (Melvin, 2019).

### **Military Bases by Super Powers**

Those countries which are categorized as superpowers, according (Buzan, 2008) possess, first-class military-political proficiencies as well as economic strengths to back such capabilities. In the post-WWII, two countries, the US and Soviet Russia remained superpowers whereas the U.S. becomes the only superpower following the end of the Cold War (Buzan, 2008). On the other hand, the United States has maintained a significant military footprint in the Red Sea region for several decades. In the Horn of Africa, its military presence has grown markedly since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, largely out of a concern for violent extremist groups based in Somalia. Its footprint in the Arab Red Sea littoral states of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen as well as in the adjacent Persian Gulf has fluctuated in this period based on the intensity of US engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan (USIP, 2020).

### **Military Bases by Great Powers**

Great powers are in between super and regional power mostly which are in the order of global power and with some degree of military capability task. During the Cold War, it was held by China, Germany, and Japan, with Britain and France coming increasingly into doubt. After the Cold War, it was held by Britain, France, Germany-EU, Japan, China, and Russia. India is knocking loudly on the door.

Several EU member states also have security interests related to counterterrorism and migration. France has maintained a long-standing military presence in the Indian Ocean, notably at its military bases in Djibouti and on Réunion and Mayotte (Melvin, 2019). Germany and Spain also maintain small contingents of forces, each numbering a few dozen, at the French base in Djibouti. Italy also maintains a small contingent at a base it opened in Djibouti in 2013. All three countries are participants in EU NAVFOR. The United Kingdom participates in counter-piracy task forces in the Red Sea region. It also has a permanent military base and training center in central Kenya and has expanded its footprint in Somalia, opening a small training center for Somali soldiers in June 2019 (Erku et al., 2021).

Japan's main interest in the Red Sea is free passage for commercial vessels (USIP, 2020). Japanese assets first arrived in Djibouti in 2009 as part of global anti-piracy efforts, operating as a sub-tenant at Camp Lemonnier before establishing their base, their first overseas, in 2011. Planned improvements signal a more permanent presence, possibly in response to expanding Chinese footprint in Djibouti.

About China's military base in the Horn region, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) base is established in Djibouti, in August 2017 (Melvin, 2019) for the first time mainly for the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project (Dahir, 2022). Another major development in the military base race



is the establishment of the military base of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 2017 at the mouth of the Red Sea, breaking a long-established policy against basing Chinese troops abroad. The new PLA Navy base looks out over not just a significant strategic chokepoint and one of the busiest shipping routes in the world, but also a significant U.S. (Vertin, 2020). However, Beijing has not indicated an interest in becoming the region's primary security provider and has no prospect of equaling the US military commitment in the region in the foreseeable future (Ibid). The Chinese government justifies its military presence in Djibouti by pointing to its participation in antipiracy operations and UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, as well as the need to have a standby force for evacuations of Chinese citizens from regional hot spots (Erku et al., 2021).

Russia has shown renewed interest in the Red Sea region in recent years, primarily for security purposes. Even though Russia has no major trading partners in the Red Sea region, Russia signed an agreement with Egypt to build a nuclear power plant on the Mediterranean coast (USIP,2020). Russia maintains a regular but non-permanent naval presence in the Horn of Africa (Melvin, 2019). Russia launched an independent anti-piracy operation off the Horn of Africa in September 2008 by deploying a frigate, and it has maintained a regular but non-permanent regional presence since then. Russia holds regular military exercises with Egypt and reportedly has an agreement to use Egypt's bases and airspace. another development for Russia's engagement in the region is the Russian foreign ministers and Eritea an agreement for what they referred to as a Russian logistics center, but no further reports on the arrangement have been released. In addition, Russia and Sudan also signed a draft military agreement in March 2019 that may have involved a fleet logistics center that Sudan had reportedly offered the previous year (Erku et al., 2021).

### **The Implication of The Recent Super Power Rivalry on Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa**

Super and regional powers' race for port and militarization of the Red Sea and the proliferation of foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa hold seeds of confrontation and conflict that could eventually impact the peace, and security of the region including economic development. Such repercussions might be both positive and negative, and a clear assessment of the opportunities and dangers for countries in the Horn is necessary to devise policies that could maximize the former and minimize the latter.

#### **Positive effects: more investments, Economic Development, Regional Integration**

Geopolitical developments including but not limited to maritime security, energy security, economic development, and global and regional contestations have increased the geo-strategic significance of the region. In line with the establishment of the various oversea military bases in the Horn of Africa sub-region, different literatures revealed that having an economic security implication. On one side writers like (Melvin, 2019) argues that foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa sub-region have economic security advantages. In addition, (Melvin, 2019) contends the augmented presence of the Middle Eastern and the Gulf countries in the Horn region has also brought some economic security benefits due to the emergence of new commercial opportunities connected to the Horn region. As a result, access to port facilities in the Horn, particularly near the entrance to the Red Sea, has become a source of increasing international competition.

Given the strategic position of the Horn, this competition has led to a securitization of the race for ports. Melvin also added that Saudi Arabia has the most agricultural investment, close to 70 %, in Sub-Sahara Africa among Arab states, primarily in Ethiopia and Sudan and it has reportedly

invested in Ethiopia's agriculture more than any other country (Melvin, 2019). The new superpower rivalry's simultaneous involvement in the Horn of Africa has the potential to bring markedly positive outcomes for the region.

First of all, the infrastructure projects yield positive-sum outcomes for Horn countries, which have generally welcomed the growing inflow of investments. New investment in infrastructure has also contributed to economic integration, for instance, the construction of a railway by a Chinese company hastened the regional economic integration of Ethiopia and Djibouti. In addition to that, the presence of multiple investors could increase competition, potentially triggering a 'race to investments' and increasing the aggregate inflows of finance into the Horn's underdeveloped infrastructure sector (Steinberg, 2020). The sprawling number of projects launched and developed over the last few years lends credence to this hypothesis. In terms of ports, for instance, besides the sites developed by the UAE (in Berbera, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland) and China (in Djibouti), additional infrastructure projects have already been recently completed in the region (e.g. rehabilitation of Somalia's Mogadishu port by Turkey), and more are in the pipeline (e.g. Turkish and Qatari efforts to revive the old Sudanese port of Suakin; development of a port at Hobyo, in Somalia's Galmudug region, by an Anglo-Turkish consortium) (Steinberg, 2020).

Given the underdevelopment of the Horn's infrastructure sector and its growing market potential, such an investment race could bring substantial economic benefits to the region. In addition to bringing higher investment levels and consequent economic advantages, the presence of multiple investors could have a positive political impact in Horn countries. Faced with a wider array of would-be investors, local governments might be able to play them off against each other, thus having one more tool in their hands to have their voices heard. For instance, as the government of Djibouti grew increasingly skeptical about DPW's commitment to the development of Doraleh's ports, the presence of alternative sources of investment, most notably China's CMP, may have allowed government officials to take a harder line in its dealings with DPW. Similarly, the fact that DPW, China Harbour Engineering and a Qatari company are all vying for a role in Sudan's ports is likely to improve the Sudanese government's bargaining power vis-à-vis all three actors (Steinberg, 2020).

In peace and conflict, resolution as well as Gulf States have played a positive role in tamping down regional conflicts; Qatar playing a mediating role in the Darfur conflict or helping to negotiate a deal between Eritrea and Djibouti. Likewise, Saudi Arabia facilitated the peace accord between Ethiopia and Eritrea, signed in Jeddah in September 2018. The reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea provides the UAE an opportunity to minimize opposition to its existing military facility in Assab, Eritrea by reducing disapproval from Horn actors like Ethiopia and because the lifting of U.N. sanctions on Eritrea removes obstacles to financial and military support. It also provides potential economic opportunities to connect Eritrean ports to the world's most populous landlocked country in Ethiopia though little concrete activity has materialized to date (Ibid). Generally, the international political and economic shifts that are driving the new external security dynamics of the Horn region are, at the same time, also a major opportunity, bringing new investments, infrastructure, and connections to world markets. Taking advantage of the opportunities and managing the challenges will, however, require a significant shift in the approach of the Horn countries to their relations with external security actors.

**Negative effects: Instability, Proxy Struggle, and Patrimonial**

The Horn of Africa is located on a fault line between two distinctly different strategies and philosophies for peace and security: the multilateral norms, principles, and institutions, and the transactional politics of money and force of the Gulf monarchies (De Waal, 2019). The proliferation of military bases and facilities and the growth of naval forces mean that a variety of countries are now operating in the region through a complex set of bilateral security agreements, and with diverse national and international mandates linking the Horn to an array of geopolitical and geo-economics agendas. The external security politics of the Horn has several implications for the regional security order.

The immediate effect notably, the growth of foreign security interests in the Horn region, and the increasing significance of mixed military-commercial relations, has led to the rise of proxy competition (Melvin, 2019). The recent jostling for dominance in the Horn among the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Turkey and Qatar on the other are fueling instability and insecurity in an already fractious environment (Melvin, 2019). In a commentary titled, “A Dangerous Gulf in the Horn: How the Inter-Arab Crisis is Fueling Regional Tensions” Rashid Abdi, Crisis Group’s Horn of Africa Project Director clearly articulated that the ever-growing scramble for military bases in the Horn of Africa is exacerbating regional tensions that risk triggering a conflict. Some practical examples can be the situation where the already tense situation between Djibouti and Eritrea was exacerbated following the withdrawal of Qatari forces maintaining an armistice on the Red Sea island of Doumeira after the two countries sided with the Saudi-led alliance in June 2017 (Meester et al., 2018).

Similarly, the rival Gulf countries have exported their political conflicts to the countries located around the Red Sea, which are generally already reeling under their internal problems (Yusuf et al., 2022). Even more than Sudan, the fallout from the intra-GCC dispute and the competition between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, on the one hand, and Turkey and Qatar, on the other hand, has hurt the situation in Somalia and has contributed to its centrifugal pressures (Feierstein, 2020). While Saudi interest in Somalia was mostly in the context of its competition with, and concern about, Iranian interventions, the UAE presence there historically was mostly focused on business and commercial interests. However, the decision of the DP World to sign the first large international contract with the Somaliland government led to political tensions and diplomatic disputes with the Federal Government of Somalia which does not recognize the latter sovereignty over Berbera (Styan, 2018). Furthermore, the central government in Mogadishu has supported Turkey and Qatar, and five of Somalia’s six 6 federal states (Somaliland, Puntland, Hirshabelle, Galmudug, and Southwest) have challenged the government’s position and advocated for a pro-Saudi stance. These conflicting views have generated tensions within Somalia’s political classes. The link between ports beyond commerce to the broader regional security dynamics is a clear manifestation of how complex the emerging geopolitical dynamics can be consequential to the region. Gulf states and Turkey each claim to have an interest in the “peace and security” of the Horn, but their definitions differ dramatically and conflicting interests bear seeds of confrontation.

The overseas military bases in the Horn region would pose the potential of the augmentation of fundamentalism. This is mainly due to the religious lining up among the Middle Eastern countries. On one side Saudi Arabia-led groups and the other hand Iran and Qatar camp by containing the expansion of one another. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt generally seek to limit the

Brotherhood's influence at home and abroad, whereas Turkey and Qatar are more supportive of the movement and similarly aligned groups. The Saudi and Emirati concern over the Brotherhood is largely rooted in the movement's transnational nature, which Riyadh and Abu Dhabi view as potentially undermining their respective monarchies (Steinberg, 2020). This competition has also undermined efforts to stabilize the most conflict-afflicted parts of the region. In Somalia, both Qatar and Turkey have backed the central government in Mogadishu against the federal states supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, undermining cohesion in a country that is a byword for state collapse (Erku et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Gulf power politics in the Horn have revived an intense cross-border water conflict on the Nile River conflict particularly the rivalry of Gulf rivals would contribute to the Potential of conflict over GERD (Grand Ethiopia Renaissance Dam) (Kabandula & Shaw, 2018). Egypt has been using the Arab League as a foreign vehicle to advance its hydro-hegemony in the Horn region. At the end of its 153 sessions, the Arab League Council issued a resolution in which it rejected any form of "infringement of Egypt's historical rights to the waters of the river Nile". In addition, Egypt takes advantage of the Sudanese-Turkish-Qatari partnership to renew its interest to fight over the Nile River, mainly the GERD project and to fight against Sudan, since they have a border problem. With Egypt and Ethiopia at loggerheads over the development of the GERD, the Saudis, and Emiratis are unable to keep both allies happy. For the moment, this appears to be preventing engagement with Ethiopia on a multilateral initiative for security in the wider Red Sea region. Therefore the quarrel between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt over GERD and divergent the geopolitical and geo-economics race in the Horn of Africa have wider security implications. The influx of foreign actors, mixing commercial incentives with military deals, has led to the securitization of the Horn's ports, and the importing of foreign political cleavages, and has influenced intra-Horn politics (Meester et al., 2018).

Middle Eastern participation in the Horn has worsened already-existing conflicts or stoked fresh tensions in other actions that were less blatantly focused on conflict settlement. An illustration of the latter is the UAE's breakup with both Djibouti and Somalia. Furthermore, the GCC conflict put the Horn's smaller nations under a lot of pressure to choose a side. Despite these extensive initiatives, results have been inconsistent. The majority of treatments have not yielded groundbreaking outcomes. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, which started in 2017 when Saudi Arabia and the UAE put an embargo on Qatar, has recently been accompanied by a sense of competitiveness. For instance, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates' involvement in the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace agreement might be interpreted as a geopolitical move to isolate Ethiopia. In advance of the altering regional dynamics are Qatar and Turkey (Mahmood, 2020).

Despite years of discussions and several agreements, violence has continued in Darfur, implementation has been difficult, and the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed. After a new administration was sworn in in Khartoum in August 2019, it looks that Qatar's procedure has also been surpassed. This is because South Sudan is now the scene of continuing negotiations with armed players. While Somaliland criticized Turkey for alleged biases in favor of Mogadishu, Turkey's efforts to facilitate relations between Somalia and Somaliland halted in 2015 without yielding meaningful outcomes (Mahmood, 2020).

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The ever-militarization of the Horn of Africa region and the increasing presence of Asian powers in the Horn of Africa also represents another major geo-political risk (Melvin, 2019). Against the backdrop of China's expanding presence in Djibouti, the coming Asian strategic rivalry in the Horn has developed in which there is increasing fear of Japanese and Indian presence in the Indian Ocean. Further, as China draws closer to both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, heightened tensions and perhaps even proxy confrontations could develop between U.S.-aligned actors and those supported by former Gulf partners if naval supremacy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is at stake, but this is an outside possibility, not a probability (Gavin, 2021).

### **Managing Complex Interactions: Way Forward**

This article has shown that the Horn of Africa cannot be understood as a standalone geopolitical space. Rather, the region should be seen as part of the broader Red Sea region, through which the crucial Europe, Asia maritime route transits, and also as part of the broader Indo-Pacific region, of which the Horn is the north-westernmost tip. The ongoing economic dynamism of littoral states in the Red Sea arena is coupled with political fragmentation, geopolitical polarization, and unchecked military expansionism by many actors. Furthermore, these Red Sea trends are linked to the development of other regional hotspots, such as the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean, and involve an evergrowing number of regional and international players pursuing diverging and often conflicting strategies (Narbone & Widdershoven, 2021). To manage the unchecked global and regional superpower rivalry in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, First, active diplomatic efforts are needed by regional players and the international community to prevent rivalry, unruly competition, and conflicts from prevailing over regional aspirations (Narbone & Widdershoven, 2021). The build-up of military forces in the Horn of Africa has taken place without regional consultation on the strategic implications for the Horn countries of being integrated into wider security agendas.

Second, regional multilateral organizations including IGAD and the AU should develop short

and long-term strategic plans to prevent a superpower scramble. Weak, vulnerable, and divided states in the region will not be capable of handling and managing the new global and regional geopolitics rivalry. Thus, there is a dire need to set the agenda for trans-regional cooperation through multilateral organizations like the IGAD and the AU to withstand the destabilizing effects of such rivalry in the region with plenty of its own. The two African institutions can play a critical role in advancing the mutual interests of their member states given the important international role they play. In this regard, AU should take urgent measures and push the agenda forward. Among other one of the areas of involvement of the AU is to make the Horn of Africa an integral part of the African Union's peace and security architecture. Recently, there has been a discussion at the African Union about developing an 'external action policy' for peace and security in the 'shared space' of the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden, including establishing political and security partnerships with the GCC (De Waal, 2019).

Further, apart from the risks associated with foreign military presence and the AU's call for member states to be circumspect in their dealings, there is also a need to establish continental consensus on the modalities for regulating bilateral initiatives that result in bases being established. For their part, the countries of the Horn have not been passive beneficiaries, opting to leverage their geostrategic significance and the renewed interest by foreign powers for their benefit. The Horn countries should take greater responsibility for tackling regional non-traditional security, notably in the maritime domain; this will reduce the need for outside powers to deploy forces to the region. Strengthening regional security capacities is, therefore, a means of reducing external militarization (Melvin, 2019).

Not least but last, the establishment of new multilateral cooperation and efforts to promote peace also the possibility to manage the security challenges of the Horn region. The absence of an organized and inclusive regional forum for dialogue and cooperation around the Red Sea impedes progress on a wide range of issues, including economic integration and regional peace and security (Narbone & Widdershoven, 2021). As the Horn/Red Sea region attracts a growing number of external players, coordination among these players is of paramount importance. Both regional and external players, therefore, would benefit from a more stable multilateral platform from which to discuss and coordinate their strategies. In recent years, countries in the region have created new structures for this purpose, most notably the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Red Sea Task Force and the Saudi-sponsored Red Sea Council. The Red Sea Council with its broader membership and its focus on the widely shared concern of maritime security provides a particularly interesting entry point for further multilateral cooperation. So far, the Council's membership has been restricted to littoral states. Yet, interest in ensuring the safe flow of trade through the region is shared by a much broader set of global players involved in, or dependent on, this trade. Thus, IGAD should intensify its engagement with all the countries in the Red Sea region and other relevant regional and international actors, to encourage dialogue and work to mitigate negative influences on regional stability.

## CONCLUSION

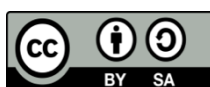
The Red Sea space is marked by a history of complex geopolitical relations, combined with increasing external interest in the area. over the past decade, the Red Sea region's strategic

environment has been experiencing a fast transformation, as a result of intensifying competition and military build-up by Middle Eastern countries and global powers. As unprecedented contact between the Gulf States and the Horn of Africa reframes politics, economics, and security atop one of the world's busiest waterways, the Red Sea has quickly emerged as the focus of fresh geopolitical interest. According to (De Waal, 2019), there is conflict on a national and regional level in the Horn of Africa. Influences on the region are risky because they open up additional avenues for ambitious players to acquire outside backing, making it harder for the region's leaders to keep control as money and influence flood the political market. The most destabilizing trend in the Red Sea region is the zero-sum competition for influence among Middle Eastern actors and the risks that competition poses to state integrity in the Horn of Africa. Where geopolitical interests are contested and help set the playing field for regional rivalries. This paper observes If the Horn is not able to manage the growing presence and regional interests of foreign military actors, it risks increased fragmentation and becoming a part of wider international security competition, over which it is likely to have little influence.

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