

## Emerging Foreign Bases in the Horn of Africa: A Sign of Hope or a Dilemma in Regional Security

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### ABSTRACT

*The Horn of Africa has been a region of conflict and strife for the last six decades. The involvement of external powers and actors extremely impacted on the security and stability of the entire region. This study links the region's instability to the presence of foreign military bases both before the demise of the Soviet Union and post-9/11. While the region has been a victim of geopolitical problems from the known history, which has taken a negative toll on the security of the region, re-establishing foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa has implications for the security of the region in the long-term. Although re-establishing foreign military bases has benefited the region, for instance, in countering terrorism and combating piracy off the Somalian coast, the disadvantages loom large. This article argues that the political and economic engagements of the United Arab Emirates in this region affect the political and economic structures of the region, while disagreement between the Saudis, the Emirates, and the Egyptians on one side, Qatar and Turkey on the other, has exacerbated the region's already deteriorating situation and its political uncertainty which challenges the security of the region. The study relied both on primary and secondary data for analyzing the security of the region.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Horn of Africa, which has been a region of conflicts and strife for decades, straddles the Red Sea, bordering the oil-rich states of Arabia and the Bab-el-Mandab strait, which is one of the world's most important maritime routes<sup>1</sup> and which oil tankers constantly move through. According to Oğultürk (2017), around 12 percent of the world's petroleum passes through the Gulf of Aden.<sup>2</sup> This geopolitically crucial region is also endowed with abundant natural resources with the presence of multi-ethnic groups and religions.<sup>3</sup> However, the region experiences many socio-economic problems which turned the region into a potential crisis zone and a proxy playing ground for external powers and actors with multiple intrastate and interstate conflicts erupting in the region over the years.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that the establishment of foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa dates back to the Cold War<sup>5</sup> period and the competition for global leadership between the United States and the Soviet Union. The geographical location of the region became important for the competing

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<sup>1</sup> M. Makinda, Samuel (1982). Conflict and the Superpowers in the Horn of Africa, *Third World Quarterly*, no. 1. pp. 93 – 103.

<sup>2</sup> Oğultürk, Mehmet Cem (2017). Russia's Renewed Interests in the Horn of Africa as a Traditional and Rising Power, *Rising Powers Quarterly*, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 121–143.

<sup>3</sup> Nasir M. Ali (2011). Ethio-Somaliland Relations Post-1991: Challenges and Opportunities, *International Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp.1–10.

<sup>4</sup> Bereket Habte Selassie (1980). *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*. United States of America: Monthly Review Press.

<sup>5</sup> Schwab, Peter (1978). Cold War on the Horn of Africa, *African Affairs*, no. 306. pp. 6–20.

powers and advancement of their global ideological and military domination.<sup>6</sup> Given the emphasis on this point, the foreign military bases established during the Cold War in the region were based at Kagnew in Asmara, Eritrea; and Berbera, during the Somalia military government. Thus, such presence of foreign forces and competition between the major powers contributed and fueled regional and interstate conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

The United States' foreign policy-making towards the Horn of Africa combines several elements. The Horn itself has been a source of concern for decades and developed its specialists with their expertise and experience.<sup>8</sup> The early interest of the US in the region goes back to the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century following America's emergence as a Superpower and its interest to dominate the strategic gates of the world. Though the Americans were based in Eritrea during the olden days of the 1960s and early 1970s, America's involvement in the Somalia internal affairs intensified when the military government offered a military base at Berbera following the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1977.<sup>9</sup>

In the post-Cold War period, the Horn of Africa, by all means, lost its geostrategic significance until the late 1990s. The 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States, and the growing global terrorist threat to global peace and security, and the sudden piracy on the Somali coast off has changed much about the situation of the region and as a result, its geostrategic importance had re-emerged. The counter-terrorism operations and the security of the Gulf of Aden waterways have brought together the West and the emerging powers<sup>10</sup> to secure the Gulf of Aden against the growing insecurity issues in the region which became a threat to this waterway.

From Somalia to Southeast Asia, it has been a hotbed of unrest which had a global implication for years<sup>11</sup>, as Sea pirates and *Al-Shabab* posed serious threats to the region, while on the other side, Yemen, which is currently in conflict, is also facing the region on the side, next to Bab-el- Mandab strait.<sup>12</sup> With the significance of the region, Horn became a center ground for foreign military forces, such as the United States, France, Japan, China, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey. Also, other nations such as Belgium, Spain, Italy, and Germany have military personnel within the region, particularly in Djibouti. Furthermore and very important, China is the latecomer of the region and established its first-ever military base in a foreign country in Djibouti. It seems obvious that the arrival of the Chinese in Djibouti after the Americans may complicate the situation than expected. The reason is that the two countries: America and China, are at loggerheads fighting over global domination.

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<sup>6</sup> Nasir M. Ali (2014). Somaliland Security at the Crossroads: Pitfalls and Potentials, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 4, No. 7, (July, 2014), pp. 98–108.

<sup>7</sup> Woodrooffe, Louise (2013). *Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden: The United States, the Horn of Africa, and the Demise of Détente*. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Woodward, Peter (2006). *US Foreign Policy and the Horn of Africa*. England: Ashgate Publishing Company.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Gortzak, Yoav & M. Farley, Robert (2009). Fighting Piracy Experiences in Southeast Asia and off the Horn of Africa, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (February 2009), pp. 1–24.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Therefore, the geographic location of the Horn is the major driver of the global competition, and the interest to secure and dominate the strategic gates of world states by establishing military bases. This can be attributed to geopolitical and geostrategic factors. Therefore, this study examines how the increasing foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa might impact the security of the region. The article further examines the role of the Emirates in the affairs of the region and how it affected regional politics.

## THE MILITARY BASE: A SECURITY GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

During the cold war, geopolitics was not more than the US-Soviet struggle for global primacy and domination. But what do geopolitics mean today for our “*unipolar world*”? The importance of territory has been disputed under globalization due to various factors, including growing transnational and multinational corporations, regional cooperation and mutual dependence, and others,<sup>13</sup> and consequently, today’s global politics demands a new look at the concept of territory and geopolitics together. Furthermore, geopolitics remains a vanguard factor that sustains the connection between the states with the territory.<sup>14</sup>

In the more recent past, traditional geopolitical analysis is transformed into a critical device for interrogating hegemonic geopolitics after the Cold War and is employed in the service of reconsidering discourses of danger that include: ‘*failed states*’, communal violence, small arms smuggling and proliferation, transnational crimes, such as terrorist networks, piracy, and drug trafficking.<sup>15</sup> As a point of illustration, these factors indicated earlier should be linked to a more peaceful and just international order which has not emerged following the demise of the USSR. Therefore, the development and application of a new paradigm of US foreign policy<sup>16</sup>; the construction and demonization of the ‘*rogue states*’, Arab uprising events in the Middle Eastern countries, the lingering conflict in Somalia, unilateral invasion of Iraq, the drone attacks in Pakistan; and the war continuing in Afghanistan as part of America’s “*war on terror*” should be attributed to geopolitics and geostrategic factors.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, “*territory*” demonstrates how a critical geographical analysis, informed by political theory and history, can offer an urgently needed perspective on regional and global politics together.

The importance of geopolitics is related to global security. Although the concept of security is controversial, the end of the Cold War neither eliminated the international security threats nor regional vulnerabilities. Thus, the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States were another insecurity catastrophe that deeply exposed the traditional differences among the mainstream theories of international relations that mainly focuses on security and peace. For instance, the differences between the camps of traditional realism and critical theories have demonstrated an extreme debate and disagreement over the concept; therefore, the realism mainly

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<sup>13</sup> Stiglitz, Joseph (2002). *Globalization and its Discontents*. New Delhi: the Penguin Group.

<sup>14</sup> Hobsbawm, E. (2007) *Globalization, Democracy and Terrorism*. London: Little, Brown Book Group.

<sup>15</sup> S. Gray, C. (2007), *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History*. New York: Routledge Ltd.

<sup>16</sup> Barry, T. & Honey, M. (2000) *Global Focus: U.S. Foreign Policy at the turn of the Millennium*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

<sup>17</sup> Charles-Philippe, D. & Grondin, D. (2006) *Hegemony or Empire: The Redefinition of US Power under George W. Bush*. London: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

advocated the strengthening of conventional security instruments and the borders of states, or building and establishing strong institutions responsible for governance to strengthen domestic control to prevent both people or governments from experiencing further intensified fears and threats. According to this argument, to ensure security at the national level, governments should be recommended to trust their ability to deter attacks or to defend against them. In this regard, such capacity has centered on the uses of military power among nation-states.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the emergence of security threats, particularly for the terror groups and piracy has brought the emergence of new military bases in many parts of the world. In Africa, for instance, the arrival of Americans was to secure and dominate the strategic gates of the African states and should be attributed to geopolitics and geostrategic factors. The Africom was established to fight the radical groups across the African continent, but this strategy has never helped the African states, but rather precipitated the emergence of waves of radical groups spreading across sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, the *Al-Shabab* in East Africa, Boko Haram and Taureg fighters in Nigeria and Mali respectively, and the *Al Qaeda* operatives in North Africa known as *Al Qaeda* in the Islamic Maghreb. This war transferred from Afghanistan was described as one of the most serious and aimless wars that the African states have ever involved in, which led many people to perish and displaced others.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE HORN AND THE FOREIGN MILITARY BASES: PROS AND CONS

Overseas military facilities are an established instrument of power projection that addresses a wide spectrum of the political, military, economic, and other interests of states.<sup>20</sup> According to the United Nations disarmament and international security committees, military bases serve many functions, including launching platforms for military maneuvers, weaponry storage facilities, test-ranges for new weaponry, intelligence operations, and extra-judiciary transport for sending countries while also being used to promote states' economic and political objectives.<sup>21</sup>

Although overseas military bases dating back to ancient Greek, the modern military facilities in overseas territories are linked to the period of the Cold War.<sup>22</sup> The power projection of the two spheres of the Cold War and their allies created a rapid emergence of interests to gain worldwide strategic gates for their global power projection and the containment of their rival. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, main states that display overseas military bases have taken a new direction due to the deepening struggle against terrorism, which became the ultimate goal behind the re-emergence of global overseas military bases, especially after the September 2001 attacks in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Nasir M. Ali (2014). Somaliland Security at the Crossroads: Pitfalls and Potentials, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 4, No. 7, (July, 2014), pp. 98–108.

<sup>19</sup> Nasir M. Ali (2014a). Why the African States Fall Apart and Who is to be Blamed?, *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 03 (June, 2014), pp.417–427.

<sup>20</sup> Lachowski, Zdzislaw (2007). *Foreign Military Bases in Eurasia*, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 18. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

<sup>21</sup> Santos Lersch, Bruna dos & Simão Sarti, Josiane (2014). The Establishment of Foreign Military Bases and the International Distribution of Power, *UFRGS Model United Nations Journal*, Vol.2, p. 83–135.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

The geopolitical interests and the geostrategic location of the Horn of Africa should be considered as one of the leading factors that made countries in the region to become the playground of the Superpowers and serve as Cold War proxies which devastated the environment and led its citizens to remain in destitute and abject living conditions. As a result, the massive maneuvers and the huge military equipment and installations supplied to the arc-foe regimes of the Horn from the Superpowers of the day had escalated the situation and led states in the region to the verge to collapse, and caused others to fall apart, like Somalia, which became a victim and an orphan of that War and submerged into a state of war, while its state institutions ceased to function as a state.<sup>24</sup>

In the post-Cold War period, Somaliland, which was a British Protectorate before it merged with the Italian colony in Somalia, declared its sovereign state claiming the boundaries it inherited from the British Government on 26 June 1960.<sup>25</sup> In many regards, Somaliland by its strategic location at the intersection of Africa and Asia, notably facing Yemen, plays a pivotal role in the post-Cold War system of states in the Horn region.<sup>26</sup> It lies, one could say, at the epicenter of a series of conflicts, real and potential, in both continents. On the contrary, it also has enjoyed noticeable growth in both economic prosperity and democracy since the 2000s. This is telling us that things in many areas are improving and Somaliland has been and remains a faithful Western ally. Therefore, some scholars argue that Washington should take the lead in not only recognizing, but also actively supporting Somaliland, a brave small state in size whose people's commitment to peace and democracy-building mirrors America's values as well as her strategic interests.<sup>27</sup>

On an economic front, the prominence of the geopolitics of the region has brought different powers to form bilateral relationships with the countries in the region. Djibouti's geopolitical leverage has flourished into multimillion-dollar investments from different foreign powers both in military facilities as well as economic infrastructures such as ports and railways. Similarly, Somaliland has gained remarkable investments for the development of Berbera Port by Dubai Port Management Company, the DP World as well as the UAE military base in Berbera Airport. Apart from the USA which established this military base for security and strategic objectives, the rest of the nations which established military bases in the region mainly did so for economic and trade interests.

It is important to note that the roles of the regional states are mixed and disregard any single explanation and logical point of analysis. The foreign power sponsored, fledging, and weak Federal Government of Somalia, for instance, have gained substantial development support from Turkey, including the military base which the Turkish government established in the outskirts of

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<sup>24</sup> Nasir M. Ali (2015). "Overcoming Diplomatic Isolation: Forging a New Somaliland Approach". In *Somaliland Statehood, Recognition and the Ongoing Dialogue with Somalia*. Hargeisa: Social Research and Development Institute.

<sup>25</sup> Schoiswohl, Michael (2004). *Status and (Human Rights) Obligations of Non-Recognized De Facto Regimes in International Law: The Case of 'Somaliland'*. Lieden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

<sup>26</sup> Robert, J. (2005). "U.S. Public Diplomacy: A Cold War Success Story?". A 2005-06 Cold War Studies Centre Seminar Series (2 November 2005) London, UK.

<sup>27</sup> Menkhaus, K. (2005). "Somalia and Somaliland: Terrorism, Political Islam, and State Collapse". In *Battling Terrorism in the Horn of Africa* (eds). Virginia: R. R. Donnelley, Harrisonburg.

Mogadishu. This is the first overseas military base established by Turkey in a foreign country.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Eritrea which has been under sanctions for almost two decades is to embrace gains from its geostrategic location as it hosts the first UAE military base outside the Arab peninsula.<sup>29</sup> Besides, Ethiopia is taking its role as a regional hegemonic power where it involves much of the current dynamics both in security and economic development endeavors.<sup>30</sup> Without a doubt, the establishment of foreign military bases throughout the region has been described as a source of hard currency by regional states.

In terms of security, foreign military presence benefits to the security of the hosting state; the first instance lies in the creation of a security umbrella for the hosting country. This may be either overt or over-the-horizon. For instance, joint exercises such as the bright star in the Gulf, and the US Horn of Africa Combined Joint Task Force, provide tangible evidence of the security umbrella, which demonstrate the commitment of the foreign power to the hosting state by providing additional training and exercise for local forces.<sup>31</sup> On a larger plan, the reliance on a common foreign military presence might increase cooperation between regional states much like how the presence of the United States military forces in the Horn of Africa is likely to increase cooperation between regional states. The reason being that certain regional states' such as Ethiopia, which is a long-term ally of the United States and have an influence on the regional states such as Djibouti, Somalia, and Somaliland could increase their collaboration.

On the contrary theoretical point of view, foreign military bases pose a security dilemma to the neighboring states, which is a condition in which efforts to improve national security have the effect of appearing to threaten other states, thereby provoking military countermoves which can lead to a net decrease in security for all states. Any military build-up or an additional layer of security arrangements made by one state provokes the rest of the states in the region.<sup>32</sup> By fact, during the Cold War, although the intention of the Superpower rivals was not to create a state of insecurity in the region, which may hinder their interest, provision of a large sum of military aid to their respective alliance states incited arms race in the region which later resulted in a full-scale military confrontation between states.<sup>33</sup>

It seems obvious that foreign military bases are a double-edged sword. Thus, disadvantages and liabilities are just great, in terms of the arms race and increase of political rivals within the region. Therefore, permitting the foreign military presence creates an association with the foreign power's

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<sup>28</sup> Umer Karim, (2017). *Turkish and UAE Engagement in Horn of Africa and changing Geopolitics of the region*, Horn of Africa Bulletin. Available at <http://life-peace.org/hab/turkish-and-uae-engagement-in-horn-of-africa-and-changing-geo-politics-of-the-region/>. Accessed on October 17, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>31</sup> Peterson, J.E (2009). "Foreign Military Presence and Its Role in Reinforcing Regional Security: A Double-Edged Sword". In *Arabian Gulf Security: Internal and External Challenges*. Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research.

<sup>32</sup> Najah M. Adam (2017). Berbera Basing Politics: Understanding Actors, Interests, and Animosities, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol, 11(7). Pp. 182–192.

<sup>33</sup> A. Lefebvre, Jeffrey (1998). The United States, Ethiopia and the 1963 Somali-Soviet Arms Deal: Containment and the Balance of Power Dilemma in the Horn of Africa, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Dec., 1998), pp. 611–643.

foreign policy, which may create or increase domestic and regional opposition to the hosting country. One may argue that the reliance on common foreign military presence may strengthen more powerful regional states at the expense of weaker ones, thus, in turn, may lead to foreign policy initiatives by weaker states aimed at gaining a more significant international profile or enhanced relations with the foreign power at the expense of the stronger state.<sup>34</sup> Although this may not be the case in the Horn of Africa, one may inspect that there is regime survival under the umbrella of foreign forces, such as the case of Djibouti, where the president and his family rule the country for almost two decades.

It is necessary and important to note that the presence of different foreign military forces throughout the region provided security opportunities for the regional states, for instance, in combating piracy and terrorist activities in the region. Without doubt, the United States, which has a longstanding security interest in Djibouti due to its location and the presence of different foreign military bases in the region, promotes the region's security and stability and strengthens the capacity of the state, in terms of security forces and their capacity to counter threats of pirates and terrorist networks.<sup>35</sup> However, the ultimate goal of any foreign force that has a foothold in the region is to realize their national interest that is linked to the region, whether it is security-related, commercial, or realization of regional and/or global hegemony. Thus, the role of foreign military bases in the security of the region intertwines with foreign policy and strategy of outside powers and undermines the role of the regional states.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Middle Eastern countries' involvement in the Horn and the presence of multiple foreign military bases in the region could have security implications for the region. It is vital to note that Iran's threat to the region will increase if the Houthis fully control Yemen, an ally and Shia militia fighting against Yemen's Saudi supported the government. Therefore, it is under the impression of this article that the likelihood of the threat associated with these bases is higher than their positive impact to the regional security, considering the position taken by the regional states in the Yemeni conflict will have a direct impact to the security of the region if the Houthis win this War.

## RESOLUTIONS AND NEW HOSTILITIES

As a result of the Soviet demise, the directions of the US foreign policy were far from clear and in the subsequent years, there was an expression of reviews of possible directions that it could and should take. There was also much reflection on the US role historically and the approaches of the past with possible relevance for the future. Given the emphasis on this point, foreign military interests in the Horn of Africa have changed in the post-Cold War period.<sup>37</sup> During the Cold War, the primary foreign actors that actively undermined the security of the region were the United States and the Soviet Union, whose primary motivation was to deter any political influence of the other side. In the post-Cold War, the term foreign military bases have disappeared from scholarly studies of the region, as the majority of the regional states faced widespread conflicts and civil

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 8.

wars that have devastated most of the states within the region. As a result, foreign military interests from major foreign powers shifted from the Horn of Africa as the region lost its geostrategic credibility.

As a result of the rise of the threat of terrorism to global peace and security at the dawn of the 2000s, the United States, which is the global superpower, sought the importance of the Horn of Africa's to wage war on terror. Although the US motives behind its strong presence in the Horn of Africa are controversial, on the other hand, it's part of its global leadership on counter-terrorism. But, several other foreign militaries established long term facilities within the region. It is important to note that the current increasing foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa might be a revival of global multi-polar rivalry. Hence, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Horn of Africa may once again experience the bitterness of competitive geostrategic interest driven by intervention from outside.

Conversely, the Emirates engagement in the region is highly controversial, rotating from one state to another. In the most recent years, the UAE deeply involved in the politics of the region; for instance, the UAE has involved in solving the piracy crisis in Somalia and provided humanitarian aid to the Government of Somalia. On the other hand, the UAE signed an agreement with the Djibouti Government to operate Doraleh Port which is one of the most important ports in the region. While establishing a military base at the port of Assab in Eritrea, the UAE government has also sought to develop good relations with Ethiopia. Without a doubt, the Emirates end goal has both political and economic dimensions.

It is crucial to note that the DP World and the Djibouti Government are at loggerheads fighting over the ownership of the Doraleh Port. This container terminal invested by DP World was confiscated by the Djiboutian Government which put the relationship between the two countries in danger.

In the wake of Gulf standoff between Saudis, the Emirates, and the Egyptians on one side, and the Qatari on the other, the Emirates and its allies sought the support of the Horn states for the political blockade of Qatar. The majority of the regional states sided with the former, with the exception of Somalia's fledgling government, which declined the request and announced its fake neutral position. The position of Somalia's foreign-sponsored Government towards the Gulf political crises soured relationship with the Emirates. While the increasing rift between Somaliland and Somalia over the Berbera military base and port management agreement with Emirates can be described as a spillover of Gulf crises.<sup>38</sup>

Equally important, the emergence of a new government in Ethiopia has changed the dynamics of the region, where the prolonged conflict over the border has finally ended by this government. This move led the two states to sign agreements to restore and normalize relations, resume flight services between the two countries, and Ethiopia to use port facilities in Eritrea. Thus, Djibouti's prominent position in the Horn of Africa region and its prime territory on the Red Sea, which it has successfully exploited, to offer both access to port and military bases by foreign countries may

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 21.



not sustain long enough or at least will reduce the revenue available to President Ismail Omer Guelleh. Though the two leaders of Djibouti and Eritrea met in Saudi Arabia, in the eyes of Djibouti, Eritrea is a growing threat both to the security and development of Djibouti, as the two countries have fought over Ras Doumeira. President Guelleh which perceived Ethiopia as a close ally and a friend may need to re-evaluate where his country stands. However, the Horn of Africa has been a complex region where alliance rarely remains for long.

On the other side of the coin, critics claim that the UAE hasn't planned to minimize the unexpected adverse effects of deploying its military power in the region. These effects include worsening the complicated political and military rivalries between neighbors such as Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Djibouti and Eritrea, Somalia and Somaliland and increasing the likelihood of a head-on collision. The latter two are in a standoff position, where the two are not willing to talk and discuss. In connection to this, the Emirates policy towards the Horn of Africa is short-term and fragmented; however, the UAE did not view the Horn as a strategically integrated entity and cherry-picked partners which happened to be the region's smallest and most vulnerable states. In other words, the UAE had adopted a high-risk approach from the start. In the post-Arab spring, the Emirates activism may unsurprisingly contribute to the militarization of the Horn of Africa and even more dangerously, alter the existing balance of power in this conflict-prone region. Indeed, the UAE has rapidly managed to establish a sphere of influence in the Horn. This influence may expand and help stabilize the region, but it should take into account the geopolitical interest of regional states and not undermine them.<sup>39</sup>

It is much clearer that throughout the history of the region, conflicts and hostilities between regional states have been boiled up and contributed by foreign intervention. As a new prominent player of the current political order of the Horn region, the UAE has already damaged relationships with regional states such as Djibouti and Somalia were both states claim that the UAE is employing an expansionist strategy for the region. On the other hand, the Yemen conflict and the Gulf's internal crisis have projected Somaliland into a position of geopolitical prominence. Both developments enhanced its strategic importance to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which means that even as Mogadishu faces the prospect of potentially crippling cash crunch, Somaliland stands to reap a hefty financial windfall.<sup>40</sup>

For political and economic ends, both Djibouti and Somalia oppose Somaliland's new position for different reasons. The former feeling threat towards its geostrategic significance, and the later, concerned on political ties between Somaliland and the UAE are a violation of its sovereignty rights under the international law.<sup>41</sup> While Somaliland disagrees with those arguments and believes that it has the attributes of statehood enshrined in the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of the States in 1933. This Convention defines a state, as a person of international law and should possess a permanent population, a defined territory, government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.<sup>42</sup> However, the Horn of Africa being a fragile region in terms of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>42</sup> J. Carroll, Anthony & B. Rajagopal (1993). *The Case for the Independent Statehood of Somaliland*. American University Journal of International Law and Policy. pp. 653 –683.

security, the presence of weak governance institutions, and lack of negotiation capacity will lead to new hostility and competition between regional countries for political and economic reasons.

On the other hand, the ongoing peace agreements and normalization of Ethiopia's political relations with the other regional states such as Eritrea and Somalia deserve questioning. What is the reason behind the sudden need to resolve and the involvement of the Gulf States, particularly the United Arab Emirates to decades' old hostilities? Eritrea has obvious appeal to Gulf military strategists; it has well-developed military facilities, experienced military forces, and on the other hand, is close to Yemen's important southern tip. On the other hand, the strategy of the Djibouti regime towards the utilization of its important location, particularly its new ties with China are not something that is welcomed by the United States and its Gulf allies. Thus, the speedy conflict resolutions under the leadership of Ethiopia and with the support of the Emirates whom one can say is representative of the United States interest and its Gulf allies are much to do with the expansion of available options to their presence in the region. On the regional level, landlocked Ethiopia's strategic drive to reduce its dependency on Djibouti's port for imports and exports through the refurbishment, development, and use of other regional ports is the prime motive for its lead towards regional stabilization.

## SECURITIZATION OF REGIONAL PORTS

The term "securitization" has been popularized in the study of international relations by the writings of the Copenhagen School. It is meant as a critical term for how fields hitherto unrelated to security concerns become "securitized" by actors who attach a national security value to them. It is necessarily important to note that in the post-9/11 increased threat of terrorism, major foreign aid donors attached great elements of the security policy to aid, making aid means of achieving security.<sup>43</sup> It is not the position of this article to evaluate the securitization of foreign aid but to examine the level of securitization that has been attached to port development in the Horn of Africa. As the number of foreign military forces in the region as well as the commercial deals targeting specific regional ports increase, development in the wider Red Sea region has turned the Horn's coastline into a strategic location for foreign actors and has resulted in an international base race.

This has led to the securitization of the regional ports, with commercial port deals almost acting as antecedents of the construction of foreign military bases.<sup>44</sup> The increasing involvement of foreign countries in Horn's ports has a significant impact on the region, as the substantial flow of foreign funds from investments and rents from military bases gives foreign actors considerable influence over Horn politics. Examples can be found in Somaliland's support of the Saudi-UAE side in Qatar diplomatic crises; Djibouti, officially supported Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and its downgrading of diplomatic relations with Qatar; and Mogadishu's refusal to side against Qatar, in part, is due to its close relationship with Turkey, an ally of Qatar.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Brown, Stephen. Gravingholt, Jörn & Raddatz, Rosalind (2016). *The Securitization of Foreign Aid: Trends, Explanations and Prospects* (eds). Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 237–255.

<sup>44</sup> Willem van den Berg & Jos Meester, (2018). *Port and Power: the securitization of port politics*, Horn of Africa Bulletin. Available at <http://life-peace.org/hab/ports-and-power/>. Accessed on October 17, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

## THE SHIFTING BALANCE OF POWER

The view that regionalism should be treated as the critical unit of analysis in international politics gained greater prominence after the Cold War. Defining regionalism, as the level where states are linked together sufficiently tight and that their security cannot be considered separate from one another. Accordingly, Waever and De Wilde (1998), argued that much of the world could be divided into local security complexes.<sup>46</sup> Given the intense security interaction between Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia, the Horn of Africa form a region under this interpretation. The nature of the state in the Horn of Africa is a state security-centric, where the perception of the weakness of rival states is interpreted as leverage for the other side. Do states benefit from the insecurity and political crises of their opponents, particularly regions like the Horn of Africa? Scholarly focus on the regional level in the distribution of power suggests that firstly regional powers need to pose superiority in terms of basic power capabilities compared to their neighbors. These are measured in terms of demographic size, economic capacity, and military competence. There must be inequity in the distribution of power, allowing the regional power to exert influence on the region. They must have political aspirations to dominate neighbors or at least be the leader in regional matters if domination is not attainable.<sup>47</sup>

In a purely material term, but also relative to its neighbors, Ethiopia has a good claim to be a regional power. First, with a population somewhere close to 100 million, it is demographically much larger than its neighbors. The second point to note is that it is the Horn of Africa's largest and arguably best-equipped military. Additionally, Ethiopia remains by some distance to the region's biggest economy. Thus, the distribution of power capabilities within the Horn of Africa overwhelmingly favors Addis Ababa.<sup>48</sup> A major disadvantage in Ethiopia is its landlocked status where it depended on Djibouti for access to the sea for decades. Therefore, as we have discussed in the previous section, Ethiopia is seeking to diversify its access to regional ports. Thus, Ethiopia's intention to diversify its options is certainly creating a shift of power not only by the hegemonic level but on a lesser scale. Indeed, the regional ports have been transformed into political leverage in countries like Somaliland, Somalia, and Djibouti which are the center states for strategic Horn of Africa waterways.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of foreign military bases and the level of impact on the security of the region is multi-faceted and disregard any single description. What makes the situation in the region more complex is the existence of multiple actors and diversified interests surrounding to the geopolitics of the region. The current conflicts in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the rift between the Gulf States and the Yemeni War, and the involvement of certain Gulf States in the Horn of Africa region make the security of the region uncertain. On the other hand, the presence of both the Chinese and the United States and their interests in the region creates a vacuum of hostility and competition. It is important to keep in mind that the impact of the Cold War and the legacy of the race for global

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<sup>46</sup> Buzan, B., Weaver, O. & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security – A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rinner Publishers, Inc. pp. 9–17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

domination between the United States and the Soviet Union to the Horn of Africa region still remains apparent.

It is necessary to conclude that the presence of foreign forces throughout the region has a remarkable impact to the detriment of insecurity issues in the region such as the efforts against countering the presence of terrorist groups in the region and piracy; yet, many uncertainties surround the future of the security of the region. Based on those risks and security threats associated with the foreign interests, the regional states should: a) establish a strong state foreign policy which aids the interest of their national interest and that of the region at large, rather than assisting realization of foreign interest for currency and other futile advantages at the expenses their people; b) establish strong state institutions with experts on negotiation and diplomacy that would benefit regional states, particularly in the case of Somaliland; and, c) based on the security risks associated with the establishment of foreign military bases, regional states need to negotiate the terms of these conditions more carefully and inclusively. Military bases entail negotiation of two states in the realm of international law through the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) or Status of Force Agreements (SOFA). Thus, agreements entered with other states in terms of leasing a military base plot must be strictly guided by these laws, rather than a few dollars on the expenses of state delegates.